

A winnable war

Show Tedashii video “Make War”

You probably are thinking that I've gone crazy and have spent too much time with the teens. And that may well be true. But today I want to talk about a topic I call the winnable war. We are in a battle, but it is a battle that can be won because we have superior fire power than our enemy. **It's a battle that can be fought with joy and peace.**

Intro

After the terrorist attacks on Sept 11, 2011 there was a commission to look into what allowed this to happen. One of the key factors that led to a successful attack was the fact the US failed to recognize that Al Qaeda was at war with us. Despite a previous attempt on the world trade center and the attack on the USS Cole we remained blissfully ignorant thinking we were safe in the world. But the reality was we have an enemy who was working with all he had to try and bring us down. After that we have been vigilant to prevent such an event from recurring and thank God we haven't had another tragedy.

In a very similar way, those of us who are in Christ are in a place of peace and have superior strength at our disposal compared to our enemies, the flesh, the world, and the devil. Its just like the US versus Al Qaeda. Yet we must recognize that these 3 do wage war against us and we must be vigilant against that threat and use the power that is ours when we rest in Christ to protect ourselves from whatever schemes and attacks that would try to bring us down.

Recognize you are free from sin

First we must recognize who we are in Christ. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). If you are saved or born again, you have been given a new heart. Col 1:27 says that Christ is in you, the hope of Glory. Christ became sin for us, that we might become His righteousness.

2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Now – that took care of the penalty of sin.

Rom 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ⁴ That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

So sin was condemned in Christ, so that if we are in Christ, our sin has been dealt with. Let's talk for a moment about our righteousness. Please turn to Romans 4:1.

Rom 4:1-10

4 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? **2** If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. **3** What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."^a

4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. **5** However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. **6** David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. **8** Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."^b

9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. **10** Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

Circumcision here speaks of the **actions of obedience** that Abraham made in response to what God commanded. But the point clearly made here is that righteousness was credited to Abraham (or imputed) do to him putting his trust in God, not because of his actions.

Likewise when we put our trust in Christ, when we surrender our lives to Christ, when we submit to the Lordship of Christ, we are credited with righteousness. Why? Because we are now in Christ, and Christ is perfectly righteous. With due credit to Reijo who was talking about this in Bible School on Monday night, it is like we have an account in heaven, and when we are saved our account is credited with righteousness. I'll come back to this point later...but keep that in your mind – If you are saved you have 100 gazillion righteousness points in your account...

Now that is amazing in itself and we should be shouting for joy even if the gospel ended there. But there is a second part to what happened when we were included in Christ. Not only was the penalty of our sin taken away, not only were you credited with Christ's righteousness, but the Holy Spirit moved into our hearts and this is brought us to life and made us a new creation.

Eph 1:13-14

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

Now **because we have the Holy Spirit living in us, we have freedom from the power of sin.**

Rom 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.^g And by him we cry, "Abba,^h Father."

Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Now before you were saved, you were in bondage to sin. Everything you did was out of your own self-willed heart and led to death. There was no life in you at all. But now – the penalty of sin was taken away, the Holy Spirit moved in, and the you can through the power of the Spirit walk in obedience to Christ!

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Now notice how this verse says - "teaches us to say No". This implies the idea that it is a process – and there are many other scriptures I could get into that show that we have an active role to play in this process of the process of working out on the outside what God has put into us on the inside. It involves us putting off the old and putting on the new. It involves growing in knowledge and in goodness and perseverance. But we only have a short time so I can't get into that now.

You can still sin if you are a believer

This may not be news to you, but you now have the choice, the ability to not sin, but you still have the choice, the ability to sin. There is a doctrine blowing through the American church which basically says that because Christ lives in you and you are a new creation you no longer have to worry about sin. That you cannot really sin because when Christ died you died with him (which is true) therefore whatever you choose to do is not sin because Christ in you would never sin. This simply reflects a twisting of the doctrines of justification and sanctification. **A half truth is a full error.**

Now the reason such a teaching is so dangerous is that it deceives us into thinking we cannot stumble or that we don't really have an enemy, or that we can just do whatever we feel to do in our hearts and that is OK. The reality is that even though we are a new creation, and we have a new heart which is formed in the union of our spirit with the spirit of Christ, we still have a will and we still make choices which are based upon our own perceptions and knowledge and discernment. Therefore we can be deceived and make choices that we know are wrong but yet we make them any way.

First we must ask the question – why do we still sin? We all should know better by now, and we have the Spirit of God in us and all that. We must first recognize that we have fleshly desires that scream at us to be satisfied.

1 Peter 2:11 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

Gal 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

Desires of the flesh are **not only the obvious things** like sexual immorality. It includes our pride, our self-centeredness, hunger for gossip or “drama” which we find so exciting, even grumbling and complaining. So we have our flesh still calling to our soul, trying to entice us to sin. In addition we have the world cheering us on to follow the old way, and we have the devil trying to entice us to turn away from God's way and back to his way. So these three, the flesh, the world, and the devil are at war with your soul for the purpose of leading you away from the things of the spirit of Christ which bring life and back to the ways of death. Now you are not bound to sin. You choose to sin – and the lusts of the flesh along with deception are trying to convince us to sin.

When we choose to sin it might be because we don't know or we forget who we are, or because we succumb to the flesh, or we are deceived. **Of course deception is at the root of all sin.** Regardless, there are times when we fall short because we are all works in progress and God is changing us from the inside out. We all have thought patterns and ideas which may be deep rooted and wrong that God has to work out. It should always be our desire to leave sin behind.

So what happens when we sin?

Now it is important to grasp this next part. Do you need to get saved again after every sin you commit? No, you don't. Remember, your righteousness wasn't based upon you having perfect obedience. It was based on you putting your trust in Christ. So when you sin, you don't automatically lose your salvation and go back to the state of condemnation. Rom 8:1 “there is therefore, no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.” Remember Abraham? He was called righteous because he believed God. Yet was he perfect? Let's think about some of Abraham's actions after being called by God:

- ⤴ He didn't trust God to protect him and so put his wife Sarah in a tough spot by saying she was his sister – twice! This wasn't a sin of immorality, but it was a lack of faith in God's protection.
- ⤴ He didn't trust God to provide a child through Sarah and so heeded the urging of his wife and had a child by her maid servant Hagar. Thus was born the Arab nation, and enmity between them and the Jews persist till this day. Again, God didn't tell him “thru Sarah” initially, so...

Yet it never says Abraham's righteousness was in jeopardy. Nor does it say he lost the right to be the Father of many nations. Why? Because God was faithful to work to completion the work he started in Abraham and brought him to a point where Abraham trusted God so much that he was willing to even kill his own son Isaac as an offering when God asked him to because Abraham trusted that God would raise him up again because God had promised to create descendents through Isaac.

So we see some short comings in Abraham. But we see him growing in trust and obedience. Yet the whole time, in God's eyes, he was righteous. Because he believed God and it was credited to his account as righteousness. **Our trust and faith is in God and his promises, not in our ability to obey.**

So how do we view sin then, as followers of Christ?

So we start out by recognizing there is a battle. I said earlier we don't lose our salvation every time we sin. We have righteousness credited to our account because of what Christ has done – hallelujah. We don't have to repent for sin like we fear that our salvation is lost. But yet we do repent and ask forgiveness right? Why?

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

2 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

This again clarifies some important things. One, the goal is that we don't sin. Two, if we do sin it is covered. Jesus is the righteous one who forgives our sin. Third, why does Jesus forgive us? Because of the sincerity of our confession? Or the length or our weeping? No, because of his faithfulness and justice. Because if we are in Christ and we sin and we go to God in confession he looks at our account and says “he's in Christ – he's got a 100 gazillion righteousness points.” Nothing changed.

So why do we even need to repent? Is it to win back God's favor? God's love never fails right? But notice in 1 John 1:9 – God cleanses us from all unrighteousness. There is the purifying of our conscience and the cleansing of our souls that takes place in confession. This has nothing to do with salvation, but rather the health of our souls in relation to God.

We also repent (in other words change our mind) because of the relational aspects of it. Let's say I have angry words toward Janet and allow selfishness to rise up and I treat her in an unloving way. When I sin against my wife it may not cause me to lose my salvation. It may not cause her to divorce me and end our marriage. But it certainly affects our relationship. It causes separation between us. Distance between us that cools the heart. Same too when we sin against God by not loving him first above every other thing, we have to recognize the hurt to our relationship with him. If I hurt my wife, we talk about it. I apologize and ask forgiveness. Is she quick to give it? Of course! But if I skipped over asking for forgiveness it would leave a coldness that could build into a wall. **So we repent because sin causes hurt to relationships.**

We also need to see that sin is harmful to ourselves.

Jer 7:19 But am I the one they are provoking? declares the LORD . Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?

Sin is self-destructive. By definition you are unplugging from the the source of life and choosing something that brings death instead. This harms you.

And finally, we have to recognize and give respect to the fact that sin is deceptive and can lead us to fall.

1 Cor 10:11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. ¹² So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Scripture does talk about wandering away from the faith, and turning from God. This is not just the occasional sin, but a conscious rejection of God and his Lordship over our lives. Scripture warns that we must continue in our faith until the end.

Heb 3:12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

So how do we make war?

We battle sin on the outside (in the flesh) by change on the inside (transformation). I'm not here to encourage any form of legalism in the battle against sin. That would be defeatist and would lead to frustration and failure. If it's not a work of the Spirit it will not empower you to truly be free.

a. Recognize it is an active cooperation between us and the spirit of God. This includes daily dying to yourself and offering your life to God.

Rom 8:13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

The Spirit can identify in us the things that need to die. The Spirit can also give us the power to kill off those things while replacing them with a love for Him that gives life.

b. It requires the renewing of our minds, the washing of the word (Rom 12:2, Eph 5:26)

Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

c. It relies on communion and communication with our Lord (Heb 4:16)

Heb 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

d. It happens in the context of the body of Christ (1 Th 5:14)

1 Thess 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

We don't always see the sin that is besetting us as well as someone else might. Especially the more subtle things like pride, self-righteousness, having a critical spirit, self-pity. We need each other to spur us on at times and encourage us, warn us – and most of all – to be patient with everyone!

e. **We must see ourselves as dead, but alive in Christ (Gal 2:20)**

Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

What an awesomely powerful yet simple verse. We offer ourselves daily to Christ that he might live within us and through us as we go through each day. Communing with Him. Working for Him.

Conclusion

There are two dangerous extremes in our walk that we need to avoid in this battle. One is to think that we are nothing more than sinners saved by grace. That is what you were – it isn't what you now are. If you are in Christ you are a new creation. Don't buy the lie that you are trapped in sin. That some struggles are too hard and God doesn't expect you to win those battles. That's simply not true. Jesus death AND resurrection won a powerful victory over both the penalty of sin and by the residence of the Holy Spirit in your heart you also have the power to not sin. Jesus teaches us how to say no to sin.

The other dangerous extreme is to believe that because you are a new creation that means you can just follow your own way and it will be God's way. You have a new start with a new heart, although you still have a mind that needs to be transformed and a flesh that is still susceptible to worldly temptations. The devil is not stupid. He isn't omniscient, and he isn't omnipresent or omnipotent. But he wasn't born yesterday. He knows the human race and uses our tendencies to try and entice us. But all he can do are launch small scale terror attacks against the army of God. We have superior fire power and we are called to live in FREEDOM! Oh Happy Day! There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! We ARE children of God. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Let us not settle for less than what God has promised us. Jesus is our righteousness, and His Holy Spirit works in us to help us battle against the flesh, the world, and the devil. Let us run joyfully, looking to Jesus that we might have strength and power to complete the race.