

## Romans 7:21-8:1

On Saturday mornings, after we helped milking the cows and throwing the wood into the basement for the furnace for the next week, we were allowed to watch cartoons. Do they still call them cartoons? Maybe they are animated dramas or something. There was the typical cast of characters, Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig. One of the common features was when Porky Pig was trying to make a decision about what to do; there would be an angel sitting on one shoulder and a little devil sitting on his other shoulder. The Devil would say, "Go ahead, do it, it will be fun." And the angel would say, "Don't do it, it would be wrong." In a way, that is what St. Paul is talking about in our text for today, but it is not funny. We all know what he is talking about; the fight that we Christians go through on a daily basis, making the right choice. It is a battle that we too often lose. So today I'm going to talk about, **"HOW CAN WE WIN THIS FIGHT?"**

First of all, let me explain that even people who are not Christians, have the battle. God has put into the heart of every person a conscience. That little voice that tells them what is right and what is wrong. It is the law of God that is written in our hearts. But we Christians have something that is even stronger. It is the Gospel that is written in our hearts. At some point in our lives the Holy Spirit has grabbed hold of us and made us alive in Christ, true believers. We are thankful that Jesus laid down his life for us, forgiving us. We know that the way we live our lives is the way we thank him for what he has done. We want to live the way he wants us to live. But we don't always succeed. That is what St. Paul is talking about. He had just lamented that the good he wants to do, he doesn't and the evil that he doesn't want to do, he does and then he says this. (read 21)

I want to do the right thing, but evil is right there with me. The truth is, the wrong way of living is all around us. In a way we kind of get used to it. We turn on the TV and we fully expect that the show we are watching will present a lifestyle that is contrary to our beliefs. I don't have to specify, you know what I'm talking about. We get kind of used to it. We are watching one of our favorite movies with our kid or grand kids and a scene comes up and we think, "Whoa, I forgot that scene was in there; my grand kids shouldn't be seeing that." Maybe we shouldn't be seeing that either. Evil is right there with me, St. Paul says.

He also says he wants to do the right thing. In another place St. Paul says, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." Doing the right thing is what God has created us to do. When we do, we are being who we are. It feels good to do the right thing, right? It feels good to do the right thing. But it is so frustrating when we find ourselves thinking and sometimes doing what unbelievers think and do. People who don't know what we know, don't have what we have. The only upside is that if you feel St. Paul's frustration, you know that you are still in the fight. Sometimes people wonder, "Am I really a believer?" "How do I know that I have faith?" If you feel the frustration, if it bothers you to sin, you are a believer.

St. Paul is so frustrated that he finally proclaims. (read) What a wretched man I am. This body of death. I can't win it. I will never win it. I will never be free from the fight. Who will rescue me? Jesus. Jesus gives us the victory. It is kind of like the famous Battle of New Orleans. Every year in Chalmette, I think it is January or February, they reenact the battle of New Orleans. The British came up Bayou Bienvenue to attack the Americans in the war of 1812. The Americans mowed them down by the thousands. The ironic thing was that the war was already over. The Treaty of Ghent had already been signed. America had won the war. The battle didn't matter. But they still died, they still fought, the bullets were

real, the pain was real. The victory in our battle with sin is really over. Jesus has won the victory. We are still in the battle. We know the outcome, but we are still in the battle.

What is the outcome? (read 8:1) Because of what Jesus has done, there is NOW no condemnation.

Ok so Jesus has won the victory but don't you think you deserve a little condemnation. I know you are not murderers or terrorists. But Jesus did say, "Love your neighbor as yourself." But you know when someone you work with does something to hurt you out of spite. Do you love them as yourself? Where I used to live, one of my neighbors would walk her dog and she would always stop to let her dog do it on my lawn. Sometimes when I was standing right there. I didn't feel loving. My test for this is always the shoe test. You have two pair of shoes, one nice pair and one old ratty pair. Your neighbor has no shoes and asks you for some shoes. Which pair do you give him? Love your neighbor as yourself. You deserve some condemnation.

OK, but do you love the Lord your God with all your heart. You do a good thing and you think that that is going to earn you points with God. That's not right.

Come on, don't you ever kind of think that you are a sinner but at least I don't do that. At least I'm better than that.

You are right St. Paul choir. No means no. No condemnation. That is the point when the Bible says, "If your heart condemns you, God is greater than your heart." When someone tells you that you have to earn salvation, you need to say, "Shut up." When you feel frustrated because you just lost the fight again, you need to say to yourself, "Shut up" because (No Condemnation). Imagine how Christians with addictions must feel.

So as we fight on, we know that we will never stop fighting here. We thank Jesus for his victory for us. Ask him to help me live like the victorious person I am. And remind me that in Christ there is NO Condemnation. AMEN