

WEEKEND Edition 01/02 Oct 2022 "Sinful Nature" (Gal. 5:16-18)

Good weekend to you my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

No matter where you live in the world, probably serious conflict, even warfare is not too far away from you, is it? Of course, through modern media communication no matter where you and I live we have been kept well informed about the war in Ukraine or the violence in Tigray Ethiopia or so many other areas of our world in conflict.

So, I have two questions for us to consider as we begin today?

- 1. Where does all conflict of every kind begin?*
- 2. Why are we human beings so easily drawn into disagreement and then conflict and even violent, life-threatening conflict?*

Come, join me again in the little house in Syrian Antioch where the apostle Paul is writing his first letter. Despite the fact that Paul had dedicated his life to peaceful living and calling people to know God and live by God's standards, Paul had himself become embroiled in conflict, sometimes life-threatening conflict. So, let's listen as Paul speaks and writes the words, he senses the Holy Spirit of God is speaking into his heart and mind. Paul is writing the fifth chapter of this letter beginning today in what we know as verse 16. ***"So, I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of your sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."*** (Gal. 5:16-18)

We notice the word Spirit here has a capital 'S' and that helps us remember that Paul is writing about the Holy Spirit of God. When Paul writes about the 'sinful nature' he was not referring to a problem unique to the Gentiles in the four towns he and Barnabas had visited and to which Paul was going to send this letter. Oh no, my friends, *Paul was writing here about a human condition that is familiar to every human being in every generation in every part of the world.*

Our 'sinful nature' is our human nature which we inherit from our parents as part of our conception and birth. ***Our human DNA includes a sinful nature.*** That means we are from birth humans who have a natural propensity toward thinking selfish, sinful thoughts; and having selfish, prideful, sinful attitudes; and sometimes we speak sinful words which reflect what we are feeling and thinking, and sometimes we make sinful choices and behave in sinful ways. *The word 'sinful' simply means 'less than perfect' or 'not holy'.*

The standard of perfection is God Himself, of course, and compared to God every person falls far short of His holy perfection. Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Romans in chapter 3. ***"There is no one righteous, not even one..."*** (Rom. 3:10)

For Jews and others familiar with the Old Testament, that phrase was easily recognizable as having been written in two different Psalms, 14 & 53! But Paul continued in Romans 3:23 to write **"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."** *Every thinking person understands this truth and we see it in ourselves and in every other living person we've ever met, don't we?*

While it is true some people grow up in horribly wicked families and so learn from their childhood how to be especially evil, our sinful nature is not something we learn, it is something we are born with, all of us! David wrote in Psalm 51:5 **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."**

Paul had written a powerful statement which he was now pondering deeply as he looked out the door of his little house. Out there in the busy street, it was not at all difficult to watch the sinful nature in every person. Arguing over prices in the market; deceitful things being said to each other; anger suddenly arising from normal conversations... all sinful nature stuff! Paul wrote: **"...the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."** (Gal. 5:17) Years later Paul wrote an entire chapter about this internal battle which rages in each of us, that I'm sure we all know firsthand only too well. You'll find it in Romans 7.

But I have a question or two for you and me to consider here.

- 1. Where does this sinful nature come from, that we are all born with? Is it biological or neurological or physiological?*
- 2. Does it develop with us as our bodies grow and develop, or does it remain infantile all our lives?*
- 3. What are some factors that affect the power of this sinful nature in a person?*
- 4. What can a person do to control or minimize the effects or even eradicate this sinful nature from our lives?*

I wonder what your answers are to those questions as you consider the 'sinful nature' that is alive and well inside of you and me? Well, may I offer these thoughts for you to consider?

- 1. Our sinful nature is part of our DNA.*

It is biological, in that it is inherited from our parents as part of our humanity. It is neurological in that it affects our minds and how we think, and our emotions and how we feel, and it profoundly affects our human will power and our reasoning and eventually our choices and behavior!

- 2. Yes it does develop as we grow.*

In fact, I suggest our sinful nature matures faster than our bodies and even faster than the educational process expanding our learning. And in our older years, while our

bodies are actually decaying as we age, and our minds may begin to lose their reasoning capability, our sinful nature just keeps growing in its natural wickedness potential until the day we finally die.

3. Some of the factors that affect the growth and development of our sinful nature are...

a) the family environment of our childhood and teen years. We are profoundly affected by our parents, grandparents, siblings and extended family, and their values, their behaviors, their attitudes etc.

b) the schools we attend and the neighborhoods in which we lived as children and teens have profound influence on how we think and our values. Our sinful nature gravitates naturally to our peers who behave more wickedly than we do rather than those who have values and behavior which calls us to more righteous living!

c) all forms of entertainment have extremely powerful influence on our sinful nature. Music, movies, theatre, internet, social media, even athletics all have significant influence, and our natural tendency is to be drawn toward entertainment which is on the outer edges of what we feel is morally acceptable.

d) friends, no matter where they are in the world, no matter if our friendship is face to face in person, or virtual through technology, are very, very powerful in their influence in our lives and especially our moral values and thus our sinful nature.

Obviously, there are many, many other major influencers in your society and mine. The question we all face is a simple one: *Can I discern anything or anyone who has the potential to influence my sinful nature to even greater wickedness and what do I do to protect my heart and mind from their influence?*

Now when Paul says our sinful nature and the Spirit of God are in direct conflict with each other, I doubt you need any instruction or explanation, do you? So, the issue is simple yet very profound. *You and I, from the time we are infants, by our very nature, are people who have a sinful nature which opposes God and everything righteous which God seeks to bring into our lives.* The battle is real and ferocious, and we've all felt that battle in our hearts and minds many times. The decision to trust God and His truth; to trust Jesus Christ to be your Savior, brings this battle into central focus, for God promises His Holy Spirit will come to live within us and take supremacy over the sinful nature in our lives when we fully trust Jesus Christ to be our Savior.

Please note, our sinful nature does not immediately die when we trust Jesus to be our Savior, nor does it begin a slow death. On the contrary, the battle for supremacy in our lives actually intensifies through our Salvation experience, for as God the Father forgives our sin by accepting the atonement death payment of Jesus; and as Jesus the Son breaks the sin strongholds in our lives by His resurrection power; and as the Holy Spirit takes us residence within us and begins His cleansing work, His regenerative work, His healing work in us... the devil and his dark forces fully engage to tempt and nurture our sinful nature, thus an all-out war deep within us, between Satan and Jesus, is our living, result experience. Can you grasp the meaning of that, and do you see it as the actual experience you have been living my friends?

Now we need to pause right here and ponder this spiritual, moral, ethical conflict in each of us. May I suggest you make a few notes in your journal about HOW you recognize this battle within yourself and tomorrow we'll come right back here and continue with Paul seeking to find some answers to this conflict.

Today's Scripture is Galatians 5:16-18.