

**Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 333, 08-04-2019 † Education Sunday**

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

**Galatians 5-6**

<sup>5:15</sup>But if you keep on biting and devouring one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. <sup>16</sup>So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

<sup>19</sup>The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

<sup>6:7</sup>Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup>Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.



Intro / Children's Message: An old Cherokee was teaching his grandson about life: "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two dogs. One is evil—he is rage, self-gratification, jealousy, sorrow, greed, arrogance, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, and ego." He continued, "The other dog is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, and compassion. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which dog will win?"

The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed the most."

Today on Christian Education Sunday, we are focused on this spiritual warfare within us. Already we can talk about feeding the dogfight going on right here, in our hearts. We have two dogs inside of us, the dog of sin and the dog of faith. We can call these dogs more scriptural terms: the dog of sin inside us is the inner sinner; and the dog of faith inside us is the new creation.

We are given the new creation at our rebirth in Jesus, when we first believe. It comes at the baptism of a believer and is created to drown the bad dog and to do good deeds. But in order to succeed, we need to feed that new creation. How? Church, Sunday school, family devotions, personal Bible reading. Who is going to win? The dog of faith, but only if we continue to feed it.

Heavenly Father, fill us with your Spirit so that we will show the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

A simplistic view of Christians would say we believe that we don't do wrong. No! Absolutely not. Being Christian starts with recognizing how wrong we truly are. A more complicated view of Christianity recognizes we know that we do wrong and we must try to do better. Today, in the Spirit, Paul tells us that it's more than just trying harder. Doing good and being better is impossible without feeding the new creation.

## FEED THE NEW CREATION

### I. NOT THE INNER SINNER

#### A. Who is the inner sinner?

Feeding our new creation is vital when it comes to what is the "sinful nature"; or what Paul calls, "the flesh"; or you might say, "the Old Adam" or the "Old Eve"; or what I like to call the "inner sinner."

*<sup>19</sup>The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

This describes the acts of the inner sinner. If you find yourself doing these things, you can know it is the inner sinner, not the new creation, at work. You can clearly blame your inner sinner, the self-gratifying part of you, when you commit these sins. It is not the new creature at work. It is the other dog.

You cannot reform the inner sinner. You cannot tame or retrain the dog of sin. The only language this dog understands is the Law. It needs to be told it cannot inherit the kingdom of God. This may sound cruel, but it is full-on Law, spoken not to the new creation. It is spoken to the inner sinner. The dog of sin will stop in its tracks with the Law, but only for a short time.

#### 1B. When does the inner sinner finally lose?

Don't be deceived: This dog is with us our whole life long.

Whenever I ask a crowd of Christians who is going to win the battle, I am told that the new creation will win. Jesus lives, all is well, we are more than conquerors, etc. At least, that has to be the answer that Pastor is looking for, right? The good-sounding answer?

But I'm talking about the internal, spiritual warfare within each Christian. And I can tell you that I've known Christians who have lost the battle and lost their faith. Their faith—and therefore, their new creation—is, for all intents and purposes, gone. How can that happen if the good always beats the bad? Is Jesus not capable?

The fact is that the winner of this battle is as that old Cherokee native ends his story – the winner of spiritual warfare is the one you feed the most. This can be true for the inner sinner if we continually feed the inner dog of sin.

And this happens naturally, doesn't it? Throughout the week, from Sunday to Sunday, we stream TV shows and movies that model sin, we read news stories about horrible crimes, we lose control of our temper and curse our neighbors, we rub shoulders with unbelievers and they cast doubt on our faith. We live our lives consuming the wrong thing, invariably sowing to the inner sinner, and so feeding the

wrong dog. We lose battles, we forget to pray, we forget to have personal devotions, we may skip a Sunday, we don't carve out the time for Bible class, Luther's Youthers, and Sunday school.

Is it any wonder that the inner sinner should win battles when we are constantly stuffing our soul with the wrong spiritual food, the food of temptation and unbelief? Is it any wonder that we enjoy certain pleasurable sins and it only emboldens the wrong dog? Is it any wonder that hate leads to murder? Is it any wonder that looking lustfully at the other sex leads to breaking marital vows? Is it any wonder that greed for gain leads to stealing? Is it any wonder that sitting and thinking about sin leads to actually sinning? Feed that dog and watch it fight to its own version of victory, that of sin.

This is so programmable it's almost humorous. We feed the dog of sin so often we aren't even aware. Of course we go back to rage and jealousy and dischord and all the other obvious acts against our neighbors and against our God.

But there is a way to win this battle. It's so programmable it is laughable. We can feed the new creation, the dog of faith, as sure as we have our Bibles nearby.

## **II. WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

A. You might think the Spirit is found in likeable commands.

I saw a nice sign recently. "Find a passion and pursue it. Fall in love. Dream big. Drink wine. Eat great food. Spend quality time with good friends." You might say these items on a rich list of advice. You might say that there's no way these things are intended theologically, or intended to say something about God. But if we Christians did not have the Ten Commandments to know what is right or wrong (or despite the fact that you do!), would you not consider these directions for a rich and full life? These are a whole new set of commandments! Isn't that scary?

"Laugh every day. Tell stories. Reminisce but look ahead with optimism. Travel often. Learn more. Be creative. Love with all your heart. Never give up. Be true to who you are. Smile often. Be grateful. Follow your dreams." Would you take these as gospel truth? Would you realize these are actually law, not gospel? "Try new things. Work hard. Embrace change. Be nice to everyone. Be happy. Live for today. And above all ... make every moment count." Sounds like gospel because it's a nice message, but this is really what Scripture means when it uses the word "law." It's crushing. What is your takeaway? If I don't do these things, I will not live life well. None of these things are done for me. No one can do them on my behalf. This list will chaperone you to the realization that we cannot live life quite right.

Because of that, these things do not truly feed the dog of faith, or the new creation.

2B. The dog of faith is fed with the Holy Spirit in the Gospel.

<sup>22</sup>*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* <sup>24</sup>*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* <sup>25</sup>*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

Finally we get where we were headed. Paul says, "*whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*" The only thing that recharges the dog of faith to victorious warfare is good news. To know that the Law is done in Jesus and the Savior Himself gives you peace that the world cannot give feeds the new creation. To know that the Son of God lived a holy life for you and died an innocent death for you feeds the new creation. To hear the witness that God has done praiseworthy deeds at the cross and in your new heart feeds the new creation. To be baptized into the triune God

feeds the new creation. Jesus Christ's body and blood in and with bread and wine feeds the new creation. To be invited to God's table of victory feeds the new creation.

With the Holy Spirit in the gospel, the new creation will win. With the means of grace, the dog of faith will be victorious; that is, with the the gospel in Word and sacrament, you will bear more fruits of faith that you wish to see in your life. It is natural-produced holy living, and it comes from the peace of forgiveness in Jesus Christ alone.

Where are you going to get the Holy Spirit? Where do you get the means of grace? Your dog of faith is fed at church. Your dog of faith is fed at Bible class. When you come and soak in the truths of God's Word, your faith will grow and you will have a stronger dog in this fight.

That's why I get distressed about this statistic: A survey asked the question, "Is attending church important?" Only 1/5 Americans under the age of 30 say, "Yes." People tend to assume that believing in Jesus is the end of their church attendance, when it is really the beginning. If believing in Jesus to you means there's nothing more to learn, you missed the point of the dogfight. You have so much more to learn! Now is the time to learn it and now is the time feed the new creation, because the battle will rage against you soon enough. Learn the value of feeding this dog, because if you spend your whole week sowing seed to the sinful nature, that inner dog of sin will drag you to hell. Spend more time sowing the seeds of God's Gospel and His love and grace, and you will see yourself winning more fights, defeating the devil's temptations, and more closely following after your Good Shepherd.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

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