

# "Civil War Is Unavoidable"

Text: Romans 7:15-8:3a

God grant to each one of us true honesty and wisdom, that we may rightly see and justly discern between good and evil, righteousness and sin, truth and falsehood – not only in the world around us, but in our own hearts and lives. Amen.

Fellow Representatives of the One True God:

Celebrating our nation's founding seems different this year somehow – more necessary, more important – probably for several reasons. First, because more of us recognize that our way of life, along with many of the freedoms that we have taken for granted for so long, are now not only under open and coordinated attack, but also because the threat, or enemy, is so hard to identify and therefore so difficult to repel. Crazy, preposterous ideas that would have been laughed into silence even a decade ago are now being promoted as "wisdom" and "progress." Material blessings, which honest, hardworking citizens have earned by the sweat of their brow and for which they have been taught to accept from the hand of God with thanksgiving, are now condemned as reasons for guilt and shame. "Racist" and "racism" no longer have any objective or meaningful definition. We have been given a glimpse of what our country could look like if we do nothing to deny the current madness. Maybe it is as simple as that. This year's Fourth of July celebration is special because we can again see what we have to lose, and how quickly that loss could happen. So we begin this morning by thanking our God for the gift of our country. May we never again take it for granted.

As most or all of you are well aware, we don't "talk politics" here. That doesn't mean, of course, that we can't or won't talk about *moral* issues – truths that have been dragged into politics and cleverly declared to be off-limits. Murder (in all its forms), lawlessness, rebellion, rioting, looting, and disrespect of authority are all sins. Of course we will address that sort of thing as part of the "full counsel of God's Word" which we are called to share. If God talks about something in his Word, it has a place in our religious discussions. Given the sermon title this morning, I wouldn't be surprised if some are cringing at the thought that we might drift into politics and the secular. We won't. That's not the sort of civil war identified in our text for this morning. For guidance we turn now to that text, found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the Seventh Chapter, beginning with the 15<sup>th</sup> Verse:

***Romans 7:15 - 8:3a*** <sup>15</sup> *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.* <sup>16</sup> *If,*

*then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.* <sup>17</sup> *But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* <sup>18</sup> *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.* <sup>19</sup> *For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.* <sup>20</sup> *Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* <sup>21</sup> *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.* <sup>22</sup> *For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.* <sup>23</sup> *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* <sup>24</sup> *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?* <sup>25</sup> *I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.* **8:1** *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.* <sup>2</sup> *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.* <sup>3</sup> *For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin."*

So far the words of our God. With confidence that these are not only the recorded words of our God, but that these words are living and active and that our God here visits and instructs us, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

It is difficult, almost to the point of impossible, to look back in time and find a war that could not have been avoided. Obviously deeply held attitudes and actions would have had to change, but it's hard to find a war that could not have been avoided. Had Germany and Japan been content with strengthening their countries within their historic boundaries (resisting conquest and aggression) World War 2 could have been avoided. Had the Southern states abandoned slavery and committed to preserving the Union, the American Civil War could have been avoided. You get the picture.

Our sermon theme for this morning is therefore unusual in that it speaks of not only an *unavoidable* war, but an unavoidable *civil* war.

In our text for this morning, Paul identified not only the civil war that is unavoidable, but *why* there is absolutely no way to avoid that war. The unavoidable civil war is the struggle that rages within every Christian,

the battle between the *"inner"* or new man and the sinful flesh or old Adam. As a Christian, you are very familiar with this struggle. The battle is so unique and remarkable because it is literally a civil war that takes place within each one of us. Part of every Christian wars against another part, daily, moment by moment. That civil war is *unavoidable* because the alternative is eternal destruction in hell. Since the fall into sin, every single human being is burdened by an old Adam. We are born sinful, and we will never be rid of that sinful nature during our lives on earth. That means that the only way our internal civil war could be avoided would be to never be converted, to never have the new man and faith come to life within us. The alternative, in other words, is hell itself.

There's really nothing else quite like the inner battle that rages within every Christian. It is a war, as Paul points out in our text, where we fail far more often than we succeed; where we lose far more battles than we win. You heard how Paul worded it in our text: ***"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."*** Since Paul was a Christian, he was speaking from the perspective of the "inner" or new man within him, that converted part that loves God's Word and will. The sinful flesh never wants to do anything that pleases God. Thus the conflict.

It is both sobering and telling that even a Christian like Paul faced such struggles in life – and had to repent of constant failures. We focus first this morning on the unavoidable nature of the struggle. The only way to avoid the struggle that so frustrated Paul was not just to compromise with his evil side, it was to yield to it completely. The struggle could only end with the annihilation of the new man, the total abandonment of faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing, of course, would please the devil more. He knows how difficult it is to convince a Christian to simply and suddenly denounce Jesus Christ and the Christian faith, so he seeks rather to dismantle saving faith piece by piece. Sin is his weapon of choice, and he spoon feeds it to us to increase our tolerance. One of his more clever tactics is to convince us that, since Christ died to pay for all of our sins, it is now acceptable to sin at will, and to abandon the struggle against sin.

I first heard the term *"the gospel involves risk"* several decades ago as a young man – from an older pastor that I greatly admired – and it intrigued me. I remember asking him exactly what he meant by *"the gospel involves risk"* and, as was his custom, he made me investigate further to see if I could come up with the answer on my own. (At the time, I think I took that as evidence that he himself didn't know for sure...) Eventually I got there. *"The gospel involves risk"* refers to the fact that we are always in danger of having the old Adam treat the full forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus

Christ as a license to sin more. Like a kid with his rich uncle's credit card, our sinful flesh will be tempted to run up the sin bill because someone else is paying. Paul talked about this very thing in Romans 6: ***"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"***

What then exactly does this have to do with you and me here today? Obviously much in every way. Whenever we hear that the great Apostle Paul himself lost the battle with sin over and over again, it is difficult not to entertain feelings of inevitability. In other words, if Paul couldn't do any better, what chance do I have?

Yet look again at Paul's words here. Not only did he honestly face his own failures and deficiencies, he saw them for what they were. He didn't refer to his sinful side as "playful" or "fun-loving" or "mischievous." He recognized the evil as truly evil, and he gave it an appropriate label: ***"wretched!"***

You and I need to take such stock regularly, and we pray God the Holy Spirit for the wisdom and honesty to do the job right. As the morals of the world around us continue to deteriorate, it becomes all the more critical to use the one and only source that God has given us as the standard to judge ourselves. Only the Bible, the sacred Word of God, can give us a true picture of what we ought to be like. Only God's Word can provide us with an accurate standard to use when evaluating our own thoughts and actions. Against the backdrop of perfection, we will quickly see that our old Adam is not just mischievous or fun-loving, it is wretched – a body of death and corruption. So we ought to loathe sin in our lives. All sin.

It is just here, at this point, that we often fail texts like this. What does that mean, to "fail texts"? It means that while we accept these words as true, we fail to honestly apply them to ourselves – specifically and individually – which is why God gave us the Scriptures in the first place. Only you can make such personal application, for only you can see accurately and honestly into your own heart. Only you can understand what your own personal civil war looks like. It might mean recognizing every bit of gossip in your life as loathsome, every rebellion against authority, every lustful look, every prideful thought as hideously evil. It might mean coming to terms with your laziness, or your ridiculous waste of so much of your time of grace on earth. God might here want you to recognize your obsession with your looks as the sin that it is, or the fact that you feed your ego by inciting lust in

others. He may want you to recognize that you love material possessions far too much, or that you love your children more than God. Each and every sin God wants us to identify as **"wretchedness,"** and our sinful bodies as **"bodies of death."** The very last thing that God wants any of us to do is to compromise with sin, or to take the failures of others as encouragement to accept and embrace sin in our lives.

Why is this so critical? Why make a big deal about how we regard every individual sin, especially the sin that has found a comfortable home in our hearts? The reason is Jesus Christ and his worth and value in our lives. What Jesus did for us is diminished or reduced every single time we fail to recognize the damning horror of every single sin. As soon as we downplay the evil of even one sin in our lives, God's grace (his *undeserved* love for sinners) is also reduced. When the debt is diminished, so is the payment. It is too easy for us to see ourselves as lovable and worthy whenever we soften the wickedness that is within us, as it is far too easy to regard forgiveness as a license to sin more.

The fact is Jesus came to save that which was absolutely unlovable and without any redeeming qualities of any kind. Whenever we play down our own corruption, we tend to develop an image of ourselves as sort of sweet and cuddly puppies abandoned by some cruel soul at the local pound. Oh we chew on stuff and we tend to nip and whine a bit, but who couldn't love such cuddly creatures? That's hardly the reality of the thing, is it? Jesus Christ came to earth to win freedom for us from the filth and perversion that was ours. He did this by offering his flawless perfection to pay the debt of our perversion. When Jesus offered his life on the cross, he was saying to his heavenly Father: *"Place the full penalty and perversion of their guilt on me, and credit my perfection to them. Make me filthy; wash them clean."*

Can you now understand how important it is for us to recognize the true nature of sin in our lives – to see it as the filth and corruption that it is? From time to time you and I lose sight of the reality of things. We tend to start loving this world and this shallow existence too much. We get too comfortable and we lose focus and direction. Always our God has to call us back. He has to remind us of just how bad things here really are, and thereby refocus our attention on the Life beyond this life. We are truly wretched men, women, and children, walking about in a **"body of death"** upon a wretched, sinful earth.

All of which would make for a supremely depressing outlook, but only if our text did not end the way it does. Paul, upon accurately reflecting on the terrible nature of his sinful flesh, first asked the question that ought to be

on our lips, and then he answered it: ***"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*** The answer, of course, is that Jesus already *has* rescued us. Paul goes on to explain how he did it: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin."*** Note well – what we failed to do because we were too weak and sinful to keep the law, God did for us by sending His own Son to keep the law in our place.

There can be no compromise between the good and evil with us. That war is inevitable, and the struggle will continue until we are called home. Accept this reality, pray God for the strength to survive the war, and rejoice in the victory that he provided through faith alone is Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

ESV **Zechariah 9:9-12** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. <sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. <sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. <sup>12</sup> Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

ESV **Matthew 11:25-30** At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. <sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 5, 2020

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

**The Opening Hymn** – 575 *(Red Hymnal)*  
"Before the Lord We Bow"

**The Order of Service** – Supplement page 12ff. *(Brown Hymnal)*

**The Scripture Lessons:** *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Zechariah 9:9-12) The Prophet Zechariah was part of the group that was allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple after the Babylonian captivity. That rebuilding project had stalled because the people had decided to build their own houses and farms – to reestablish themselves in the land – before doing what the Lord had told them to do. Their reasoning was undoubtedly "You can't help others until you first help yourself." They had no army for protection and no livelihood to provide for their own needs. They forgot that God had assured them that he would protect and provide for them. They weren't comfortable with that arrangement, just as later, when God sent the Messiah, they weren't comfortable with the salvation plan where God provides forgiveness and life, rather than man earning it himself.

**Psalm 146** (Supplement page 41) *(Brown Hymnal)*

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Matthew 11:25-30) Jesus himself here offers us a most tender and precious gift: "**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" Those who "labor" are those burdened by the cares and hardships of this sinful world. Those burdens come in every imaginable shape and form. The invitation to put that burden on Jesus therefore includes every single child of God the world over. No matter what is troubling you, Jesus here invites you to place all your cares on him – chief of which is our sin debt.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – *(Brown Hymnal page 15)*

**The Pre-Sermon Hymn** – 581 *(Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)*  
"All Ye Who on This Earth do Dwell"

**The Sermon** – Text: Romans 7:15 -8:3a *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*  
"**Civil War Is Unavoidable**"

**The Offertory** – (Supplement page 16 insert)

**The Post-Sermon Hymn** – 581 *(Stanzas 6-7) (Red Hymnal)*  
"All Ye Who on This Earth do Dwell"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

**The Closing Hymn** - 577 *(Red Hymnal)*  
"God Bless Our Native Land"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

**Attendance** – Sunday (18) Average (35)

**This Week at St. Paul:**

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Rich Kanzenbach is considering the call to St Luke's of Lemmon. Bethel of Morris has called Prof. Steven Sippert. A summary of the recent synodical meetings in Eau Claire is available on the entry table, and full minutes are available at [tinyurl.com/2020springcc](http://tinyurl.com/2020springcc)

**Confirmation** – Confirmation classes have now been completed for the year. There will, however, be no confirmands this year as the current second year students have asked to attend classes again next year.

**Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest** – Renewals for both the Lutheran Spokesman and Daily Rest have been sent. Unless otherwise indicated, all current subscriptions have been renewed. The annual subscription rate for the Lutheran Spokesman is \$14. Payment can be included with the regular offering.

**Independence Day** – While it is wrong to worship anything other than our God, it is certainly right to thank God for the blessings he has given us in connection with our country. God bless our native land.