

THE CIVIL WAR WITHIN US

Introduction / Explanation:

Each person finds a struggle within himself, a "civil war" between those forces that would pull him toward the ways of death and those that would pull him toward the ways of life. These forces are joined by others, outside of us, that also try to pull us the one way or the other.

One's relationship to God determines the nature of this "civil war." The person who does not know God struggles in a different way than the person who does know him. In the one instance, both body and mind/spirit are fighting together, on the side of death. The person who does not know God is dead in sin, even now (Ephesians 2:1+). And although he has a conscience that testifies to what is right (at least some of the time), his whole being chooses the way of life (= death) that is hostile to God. [Remember that God's evaluation takes into consideration not only the bad *actions* we do, but also the *motives and thoughts* behind actions that appear to be good. When all things are taken into consideration, even the good we do falls far short of what is necessary for standing in the presence of God - and remaining alive.]

In contrast, when a person repents of his sin and turns to God for salvation, God changes him. This person now has new life; his spirit is no longer dead. But this new life now creates a tension within him - one that was not present before. This is because, although his spirit and mind now fight for the ways of life, his body/flesh still fights - sometimes intensely - for the ways of death. (The body will not be changed until the resurrection.) The spirit powers (the Devil, etc.) that want to destroy us may also intensify their attack against us.

And so, the "civil war" within such a person may be much more intense than in the person who does not know God. It is worth the trouble, however, because the final outcome has already been guaranteed - one which involves total victory over the ways of death.

Ironically, for the person who does not know God, and who fights with all his being for the ways of death: even when he "wins," he loses. He suffers eternal death. And there is nothing victorious about that.

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THE CIVIL WAR WITHIN US

A. THE UNSAVED PERSON

These Encourage Us to Follow the Ways of Death	These Encourage Us to Follow the Ways of Life
<p style="text-align: center;">Our Flesh Our [Spirit]/Mind</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Other Influences, including the Devil)</p>	<p>[Conscience]</p> <p>(Other Influences, including the Holy Spirit's restraining power)</p>

Conscience testifies (Rom. 2:15) but it is weak and imperfect:

- Can be easily corrupted or "seared" - Titus 1:15, 1 Timothy 4:2

In this condition:

- Sin is our master / Slavery to sin - John 8:34
- Flesh and spirit/mind are both on the same side - that is, the total person is sinful; the spirit is already dead. - Ephesians 2:1; 4:18-19; Colossians 2:13

The final outcome is eternal death.

- Hostility to God's ways; unable to please God - Romans 8:7
- Death is earned, like a paycheck. - Romans 6:23a, 8:6a

The word "flesh" is used, in this context, to denote the sinful element of human nature as opposed to the "Spirit" (Romans 6:19; Matthew 16:17). Being "in the flesh" means being unrenewed (Romans 7:5; Romans 8:8-9), and to live "according to the flesh" is to live and act sinfully (Romans 8:4-5, 7, 12). The "flesh" includes the impulses and habits of the body, as well as sinful inclinations that one might inherit (genetically). Some translations use the terms "sinful nature" or "corrupt nature."

B. THE SAVED PERSON - IN THIS PRESENT LIFE

These Encourage Us to Follow the Ways of Death	These Encourage Us to Follow the Ways of Life
<p style="text-align: center;">Our Flesh</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Other Influences, including the Devil)</p>	<p>[Conscience]</p> <p>Our Spirit / Mind [made new]</p> <p>The Holy Spirit</p> <p>(Other Influences)</p>

In this condition:

- (Obedience to God) / God is our master
 - We have a new master, and need to oppose our former master (sin). Romans 6:6, 16-17, 22
 - The Holy Spirit now influences us in ways it didn't before - Romans 8:9
 - Spiritual growth, perseverance & godliness, etc. - 1 Peter 2:2-3 (compare 1 Peter 1:22-23); 2 Peter 1:5-7; 1 Timothy 4:8 (contrasted to 2 Timothy 3:5); Hebrews 12:14
 - As our mind is renewed / as God teaches us, we will better serve our new master. - Romans 12:1-2; Titus 2:11-13
- Most likely, the battle will be more intense, than when both Flesh and Spirit were on the same side. But victory is guaranteed for those who have Christ in them. - Romans 8:10; Romans 7:14-25; 8:1+

- Trusting God for growth and strength
 He will use all circumstances (good and bad) to accomplish good in our lives (Note: Some of the good won't be visible until eternity... but it is there.) - Romans 8:28+; 1 Peter 1:6-7
 He will use discipline and training to direct and lead us. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 12:5-13

The final outcome is righteousness and eternal life.

- Our spirits are now alive; our bodies will be given new (resurrection) life in the future - Romans 8:10-11
- Reminder: salvation is an undeserved gift. - Romans 6:23b; 8:6b

C. THE SAVED PERSON - IN THE FUTURE

These Will Encourage Us to Follow the Ways of Death	These Will Encourage Us to Follow the Ways of Life
[nothing]	Conscience Our Flesh/Bodies [resurrected] Our Spirit The Holy Spirit Other Influences

In this condition:

- Victory over the ways of death, because of our trust in Jesus (what he did on the cross) - 1 Corinthians 15:54-55, 57; 1 John 5:4
- All sinful influences will be forever gone; no more "civil war" within us! - Revelation 21:4, 8; 22:14-15

TO THINK ABOUT:

In this civil war, each of us must decide which side we are going to fight for. Each of us must choose between the way of life and the way of death. Read Romans 8:13-14 and evaluate your own life. What is your choice?

If you choose to fight on the side of life, there could be an increase in the number of trials you experience. After all, the forces you were once following have now become your enemies. (Read Ephesians 6:12) Also, your own flesh is now fighting against you. But remember the One who died for you. How much did he suffer for you? How much are you willing to suffer for him? Read Romans 8:17+, to see what promises you can look forward to.

When you are faced with sin, and it seems that you are constantly struggling and falling, remember that you are not alone. (God has not forsaken you - Hebrews 13:5-6.) Remember also that you are not the only one to experience such difficulties. (Romans 7:14-25 shows us how the apostle Paul struggled.) When you fall, get back up; don't keep on the ground! Turn your focus back to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2-3) and return to the battle (Ephesians 6:13-18). There is a difference between loving sin and struggling with it, and the very fact that you are now struggling (rather than rejoicing in it) is a reason for you to have hope. So don't give-up!

And one more thing: Do not fear weakness, for in weakness, God's strength becomes more visible (James 4:6-10; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 12:9-10).