

**July 13, 2008**

**Title: Being Under the Influence**

**Text: Romans 8:1-11**

**The Big Idea: There are two ways to be controlled: Our minds are either under the influence of our own sinful nature or the Holy Spirit.**

### **Introduction**

**The conflict between good and evil is as old as time... the earliest was a cosmic battle between the powers of good and evil when Satan presumed to become like the Most High. Some point to Isaiah 14 as descriptive of his ouster from the presence of God.**

**We are familiar with the conflict between good and evil as the temptation story unfolded in the Garden of Eden...**

**The story of the Cross of Jesus Christ is a classic clash of the powers of good and evil... the evil intent of Satan was to destroy the Son of God but God's good prevailed and the powers of sin and death were broken in the resurrection of Christ.**

**In popular culture we have super heroes like Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Super Woman, The Fantastic Four, and the X-Men who are forces for good, gone to battle against the forces of evil.**

**In literature, The Harry Potter, Chronicles of Narnia, and Lord of the Rings series are wrapped around the ongoing battle between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of good.**

**The Shack, by William Young, currently the number one paperback fiction on the New York Times Best Seller List is largely about God's work of transforming and bringing good out of evil.**

**TV dramas like The Unit, the CSI series, Law and Order, and others are all about the good guys trying to catch the bad guys in the classic battle between good and evil.**

**Even in politics and war... we frame ourselves as forces for good and our enemies as forces for evil. Perhaps you remember the "axis of evil" terminology used to describe rogue nation states with growing interest in developing nuclear weapons.**

**We understand the clash of good and evil in our own lives... the tension between wanting to do the right thing and then not doing it or not wanting to do a bad thing but doing it anyway.**

**Our text describes this tension as the power of our sinful human nature in resistance to the power of God's Holy Spirit. The human nature pulls to toward sinful thoughts, talk, and behaviors and the Spirit of God pulls us toward good and God like thinking, talking, and behaving. Last week we acknowledged that Christians sometimes succumb to the power of sin, but when we do, God in his mercy and grace extends the gift of forgiveness.**

**We are grateful to God that Christ took upon himself all the sin of all men of all time that he might bring us safely home to God. I Peter 3:18**

**1. Christians are no longer condemned for their sins.**

**Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. For the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you through Jesus Christ from the power of sin that leads to death. Romans 8:1-2**

**I was reading Edmunds INSIDELINE about their test drive of the 2009 Rolls-Royce Phantom Coupe this week. The story begins like this, "Wafting down a poplar-lined French motorway at 100 mph, the 2009 Rolls-Royce Phantom Coupe's unique Power Reserve meter informs you that fully 90 percent of the 6.7-liter V-12's 453 horsepower is still available, should you need to whisk past a dawdler." The writer went on to describe the crisp rack-and-pinion steering, the seat as comfortably deep and plush, and virtually no engine noise. Following a heading: "If You Have To Ask," the article states, "Although the price of the Phantom Coupe has not yet been announced, it's thought to be in the vicinity of \$400,000. (Ken Gross, Edmunds INSIDELINE, July 1, 2008)**

**There is a story that I suspect falls into the Urban Legend category but it's a good story. A wealthy Englishman, who planned to spend an extended time in the states, shipped his Rolls Royce to the U.S. While traveling across the country his Rolls developed a mechanical problem. He made an international call to the Rolls-Royce people and was told that a mechanic, with the parts necessary to repair the car, would arrive within 48 hours. The mechanic arrived at the resort on schedule, repaired the car, and returned to England.**

**Later, after completing his tour of the states, he shipped his car and returned to England. Upon arriving home, he contacted the Rolls-Royce people regarding the repair bill. He wrote, "While touring the United States in my Rolls-Royce, the car developed a mechanical problem. You flew a mechanic over to help me. He fixed the car but I have never received a bill for your services." He received a letter back from the Rolls-Royce people stating, "We have no record of there ever being anything wrong with a Rolls-Royce anywhere."**

**That is what it means to be without condemnation. There is no record anywhere of there ever having been anything wrong with you, when you belong to Jesus Christ.**

**Oceans cover 70% of the surface of the earth and we are told that at the deepest places of the ocean there are trenches that are nearly 7 miles beneath the surface of the ocean.**

**The bible says of God's forgiveness:**

- **“Where is there a God like you, who pardons the sins of his people... who tramples our sins under your feet and throws them into the depths of the ocean!” Micah 7:18-19**
- **“I alone am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.” Isaiah 43:25**
- **And I will forgive their wrongdoings, and I will never again remember their sins.” Hebrews 8:12**

**When God says there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ, he means there is no record of any wrongs that may be dredged up and held against us. “Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith or justified by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.” Romans 5:1**

**That is good news for those who experience the inner struggle described in Romans 7 of desiring to do good, but doing bad. Edward Markquart aptly points out that both Romans 7 and Romans 8 are true. Christians experience Romans 7, wherein they are dominated by sin. And Christians experience Romans 8 wherein they are delivered from the power of sin. The reason this can be is that while both are true, they are not equal. The power of God's Spirit to deliver us from the domination of sin is stronger than sins power to dominate us. He distinguishes Christ's nature as being stronger than human nature. (Edward F. Markquart, [sermonsfromseattle.com/romans](http://sermonsfromseattle.com/romans))**

**Beyond the good word that we are no longer condemned for our bad behavior and the knowledge that we are delivered from the power of sin in our lives, the bible teaches us that the life-giving Spirit of God can help us live differently.**

**The way we live, is determined by the dominant influence in our lives.**

**2. People are always under an influence.**

**“Those who are dominated by the sinful nature or flesh, think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.” Romans 8:5**

The idea of influence is supported by a verse in Ephesians, which addresses the subject of living in the power of the Holy Spirit. “Don’t be drunk with wine, because it will ruin your life. Instead, let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.” Ephesians 5:18

The concept of being filled, is sometimes a bit confusing. It sounds like the Holy Spirit is a quantity as if being filled with the Spirit may be likened to being full of prunes or whatever. Being filled is better understood as being under the control of or influence.

While there is truth in the warning about the abuse of alcohol, the text is making a comparison / contrast point. The writer is saying that just as you may allow yourself to be under the influence of alcohol, you may allow yourself to be under the influence of God’s Holy Spirit. In fact, rather than be under the control or influence of anything else, opt to be under the control or influence of the Spirit. So the question each of us must ask is this, “What is the controlling influence in my life? Is it my sinful nature or is it the Holy Spirit of God?”

The way you can determine the dominant influence in your life is to examine what occupies your mind or what you think about. Our thoughts lead to attitudes and our attitudes lead to actions. Our attitudes and actions reflect that we are either under the influence of our sinful nature or God. If Jesse Jackson were to explore the dominant influence in his life when he made offensive, crude, and cutting remarks about Senator Obama that were overheard on an open microphone at Fox News on July 10<sup>th</sup>, I suspect he would have to admit he was not speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We can all relate...

“If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace.” Romans 8:6

The mind is the battleground for good and evil.

3. The mind is the battleground for good and evil.

In Galatians 5, the Apostle Paul contrasts the influences of the sinful human nature and the Holy Spirit.

“The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is the opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us the desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.” Ephesians 5:17

Whichever has the greater influence on your mind will determine the direction of your life. If the sinful nature controls your mind, the difference will be a downward spiral of spiritual failure. “When you follow the desires of your sinful nature your lives will produce these evil results: Sexual immorality, impure thoughts, eagerness for lustful pleasure, idolatry, demonic activities, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, divisions, feeling that everyone else is wrong, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other kinds of sin.” Galatians 5:19-21

However, if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, the difference will be a life of graciousness and goodness. “When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self control...” Galatians 5:22-23

We are delivered from the domination of our sinful natures so that under the direction of the Holy Spirit, our lives can be different.

While eating lunch in a small café in Camarillo, California, a patron saw a sparrow hop through the open door to peck at the crumbs near his table. When the crumbs were gone, the sparrow hopped to the window ledge, spread its wings, and promptly flew into the windowpane. The bird tried repeatedly to escape but each time fell back to the window ledge. Then the patron reached out and gently caught the bird, folding his fingers around its wings and body. And then he took the bird to the open door and released it. (PreachingToday.com, Fresh Illustrations for Teaching and Preaching (Baker), from the editors of Leadership)

This is something like what happens when we let our lives be caught up in the loving hands of God, who then frees us from the life that held us captive.

However, it is seldom that simply done.

4. We each decide who and what will control their minds.

“...your choices are never free from this conflict [between the tug of the sinful nature and the tug of the Holy Spirit].” Galatians 5:17b

One version of a simple story that illustrates who or what controls our minds is that of a Native American grandfather sharing folk wisdom with his grandson. He said, “Grandson, there are two wolves living in my heart and they are at war with each other. One is vicious and cruel, the other is wise and kind.”

“Grandfather,” said the alarmed grandson, “which one will win?”

**The grandfather paused and then said, “The one I feed wins.”**

(PreachingToday.com, unknown author; submitted by Bill White, Paramount, CA)

**Ultimately, every person decides what he or she will think about and do. However, Ancient Church Father Augustine of Hippo tempered that statement a bit in saying, “Free will, without God grace and the Holy Spirit, can do nothing but sin.” He was and is right. Humanly speaking, we are powerless to think and do right on our own... but we are not on our own.**

(PreachingToday.com, Augustine of Hippo, Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations, Baker 2000, p. 377)

**We have free will to decide, but we also have the influence of God’s Spirit within us to help us in our decision-making.**

**5. Christians have the presence and power of God’s Spirit living within them.**

**“Those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you.” Romans 8:8-9**

**Kofi Annan was the 7<sup>th</sup> Secretary General of the United Nations, serving between 1997 and 2007. He was co-recipient along with the U.N. of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007. At one point in his education, he attended an elite boarding school in Cape Coast where he learned that “suffering anywhere concerns people everywhere.”** (wikipedia.org/kofi\_Annan)

**He tells of an educational moment when, as a 17-year old student, the headmaster of the school walked into the classroom and put up a broad sheet of paper with a small black dot in one corner. “Boys,” he asked, “what do you see?” Kofi said we all shouted in unison, “A black dot!” Then the headmaster said, “So not a single one of you saw the large white sheet of paper? Don’t go through life with that attitude.”** (PreachingToday.com, Sermonnotes.com; source: Phillip Gourevitch, “The Optimist,” The New Yorker, 3/3/03)

**When we read the Word of God today, what do we see? Do we see the black dot or blotch of our sinful nature? Does our sinful nature loom large or leap out and capture our minds? Or does the largeness of the reality of the power of God’s Spirit living within you, giving you the will and the way to live under the life-giving power and influence of the Holy Spirit, capture your mind?**

**When we see the big picture the dot of doubt and the blot of our sinful nature looks very small... The big sheet of white paper shouts, “God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:13**

## **Conclusion:**

The secret to living under the influence of God's Spirit is really a two-fold challenge.

The first thing is something we do.

### **1. Fix your thoughts and keep practicing.**

**“Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you have learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.”** Philippians 4:8-9

The story, *A Beautiful Mind*, traces the life of brilliant mathematician and Nobel Prize winner John Forbes Nash. He is a paranoid schizophrenic. His illness is quite severe but he is brilliant enough to differentiate between who and what is real... he learns to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary. At one point in the story, when confronted with two figments of his imagination, he speaks to them, as if they were real and says, “I’m not going to talk to you anymore.”

We too must learn to discipline our thoughts and control our conversations and actions.

The second thing we do is let God be God.

### **2. Let the Spirit of God lead you.**

**“...let the Holy Spirit fill and control you.”** Ephesians 5:18b  
**“Let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. Let the Words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise...”**  
Colossians 3:15-16

The concept of letting the Holy Spirit rule or letting the Words of Christ rule or letting the peace of Christ rule is an interesting and easily understood concept.

Do remember a few years ago when President Bush, in defending Donald Rumsfeld said, “I hear the voices and I read the front page and I know the speculation, but I’m the decider, and I decide what’s best. And what’s best is for Don Rumsfeld to remain as Secretary of Defense.”

The key word here is “decider.”

**We can most easily understand the meaning of letting someone be the decider in the arena of athletics, where we have referees and umpires. Whenever there is a controversy or a clash or a conflict – we look to the umpire to see how he will rule. The umpire is the arbiter. The umpire makes the call... the umpire decides and calls the play.**

**When we experience a clash of feelings or inclinations being tugged in two directions at the same time, we need an umpire.**

**So we turn to the Holy Spirit and say, “What’s your call? You tell me what is the right thing to do. You influence my thinking, speaking, and acting out.”**

**In this vein of thinking, William Barclay suggests we test our thoughts, words and deeds. He wrote, “The great principle for living that everything we do or say should be done and said in the name of Jesus. One of the best tests of any action is: Can we do it, calling upon the name of Jesus? Can we do it, asking for His help? Can we speak it, and in the same breath name the name of Jesus? Can we speak it, remembering that He will hear, and asking him to hear? If a man brings every word and deed to the test of the presence of Jesus Christ, he will not go wrong.” (William Barclay, The Letter to the Colossians, Westminster, pp. 190-191)**