Gathering Thought

Have you ever struggled with knowing the right thing to do but actually doing the opposite? That’s what we will be talking about in the new sermon series which begins today. The War Within is a fitting title to describe the struggle that many of us experience as we seek to live the way God wants us to live while being drawn back into the life that our human nature wants us to live.

The Apostle Paul was familiar with this war which rages within each of us. He writes about the battle you and I fight on an ongoing basis. In Romans 7:15, 18, and 20 he says: I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. But if I do what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

Paul’s struggle, his war within, is just like yours and mine. We know how we should live, the character that our life should express because we are disciples of Jesus. But the reality of our sinful nature causes us to struggle with the things that identify us more with the world in which we live. Paul identified that battle between the acts of our sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit in our text for this sermon series from Galatians 5:16-25

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 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.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

This morning we’re going to talk about the struggle to let love win over self-centeredness. But before we do that; let’s give thanks for God’s love and the example we have in Jesus.

[Tina Turner video] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaQkaY5-OVk
Begin at 2:45
Released in 1984, Tina Turner’s number one hit asked a question that we want to consider this morning.

"What's Love Got To Do With It"

[Chorus]
Oh what's love got to do, got to do with it
What's love but a second hand emotion
What's love got to do, got to do with it
Who needs a heart
When a heart can be broken

Tina Turner’s song cheapens true love and casts it aside in pursuit of something else that will satisfy her needs. Love is an emotion that she can do without—too many broken hearts have left her without a desire for real love.

Could it be that we are living in a time when true love has been cast aside as a second-hand emotion? Too many broken hearts today may be the result of seeking relationships that are devoid of true love, the kind of love Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 13. We’ll explore that more this morning as we deal with the struggle between self-centeredness and true love.

Governor Mark Sanford is only the latest in a long line of politicians and celebrities who have made the trip to the microphone to admit to an affair. His story is one of many noted in last week’s Time magazine cover story, “Unfaithfully Yours.” In reference to his and the many other recent public affairs, the writer notes that these midlife crises make manifest a bleak truth once observed: “Adultery is not about sex or romance. Ultimately, it is about how little we mean to one another.”

This is not a sermon about marriage, nor is it about adultery, lust or anything else you may be conjuring in your mind; this message is about how little we mean to one another; about the selfishness that wages war within us against the love which Paul states should be the fruit of a life lived as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

While none of us would lay claim to the acts of the sinful nature Paul described in Galatians 5—after all we’re not sexually immoral, ‘rage-aholics’ engaging in drunken orgies and the like (at least I hope not); we also know that we don’t always bear the fruit of the Spirit in our actions, our attitudes and in our relationships. So begins the war, the daily struggle to be what we know we should be as disciples of Jesus, but giving in regularly to the acts of our sinful nature.

So what are we as disciples to do? First we need to realize that we can win these battles, not on our own, but in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. We will
have victories, but we will also have defeats. What we want to learn today is how to help love win more of the battles and ultimately the war within?

I don’t think that I need to spend a lot of time defining the acts of the sinful nature- as Paul says, ‘they are obvious.’ But while many of us here this morning would not identify with Paul’s list of coarse behaviors; I believe that we can all relate to the attitude that is depicted in these behaviors – selfishness.

The quote that I shared earlier about adultery demonstrating how little we mean to one another; is a perfect example of our self-centeredness. As the author of the Time article noted, these cases of adultery demonstrate the narcissism of those who engage in this behavior. The adulterer only cares about him or herself- it is an act of selfishness; and it has far reaching effects.

One of those effects is seen in a situation that the Time article goes on to discuss; the lack of responsible fatherhood. The author notes that the last three presidents have encouraged marriage and especially fatherhood. President Obama, who spoke recently about men staying with their children, noted: ‘We need fathers to step up, to realize that their job does not end at conception; that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one.’ That statement speaks directly to the selfishness that is running rampant through our society and most of all how little we mean to one another.

And that selfishness is not limited to those who are not disciples of Jesus. You and I are in a constant battle to overcome selfishness with the selflessness of God’s love ruling and reigning in our lives.

The love that should be evident in our lives Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a: Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

The love Paul describes here is others-centered, it is sacrificial and it demonstrates how much we mean to one another. If other people really mean something to us then this is what we need to practice in all of our relationships.

We need to be patient and kind. (v. 4) In Ephesians 4:2 Paul says: “be patient with each other, making allowances for each other’s faults...” Love that is patient is marked by turning the other cheek, going the second mile... God is patient with us and we need to exercise that same patience in dealing with others. Later in that same chapter in verse 32 Paul reminds the Ephesians to be kind to one another...forgiving...as God forgave you. To exercise forgiveness is to give up my desire to get what I deserve, to give up exacting my pound of flesh. When we are selfish we are not patient and kind, we are only thinking of our needs, not the needs of others.
If others mean something to us; our love will be … …giving. If love is anything it is about giving. It is not giving to get back, that’s a love marked by selfishness. Too often we give because we expect something in return. True love does not keep score because it is never about winning for self.

We could go on and look at each of these traits which mark the kind of love God has for us and the kind of love we should have for others.

Loving like this is easy when it’s someone we like; but what about someone we don’t like- like an enemy? Jesus had a reply for that: Luke 6:32-33 “If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much!

Here is where the battle often begins. Here is where self-centeredness and love clash swords. We know that love is the answer; however we have a limited capacity for loving others, especially those we don’t like. We know love is the answer, but we can’t always do it. We don’t get into trouble because we don’t know the answer. We get into trouble because our pride and selfishness get in the way. It’s not that don’t know what to do; it’s that we just don’t do it!

So what is Paul’s advice to us? Paul says in verse 24 we must crucify the sinful nature with its selfish passions and self-centered desires. That means dying to self! We have to die so that Jesus can have full control of our life.

How do we go about dying to self? Paul shares three steps we can take to walk step by step with the Spirit in control.

1. Filter your influences. We talked over the last several weeks about filtering our speech, but now we’re talking about filtering our ears and eyes. In the verses that came before this passage we read this morning in Galatians 5 Paul was admonishing the Galatians to think about who they were listening to. That’s our problem also.

When we hear daily revelations about narcissistic adulterers, when we see selfishness rewarded, it makes us want to get something for ourselves!

I’ve heard this old story in a thousand different contexts, but the truth is always the same.

A grandfather was talking to his grandson. “Grandson,” he said, “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 before he said, “The one I feed.”

What’s influencing you on a daily basis? *Examples*

What should be influencing you is the word of God. A good exercise to build into your day over these next few weeks is several times a day repeating the list of the fruit of the Spirit.

Choose wisely what influences you will allow into your life!

2. Serve others (v. 13-14) The entire law Paul said was summed up in one command: Love your neighbor. Have you ever noticed that in scripture true spirituality is directly connected to how we treat others? Paul’s audience was leaning toward fulfilling laws; and that allows one to remain self-centered rather than others centered. It is always easier to obey a few rituals than spend your life serving others. Legalists are always focused on me, me, me… how well do I measure up (and the truth is we will never measure up); but those who live by grace are always focused on you, you, you…what can I do for you?

In the next chapter Paul continues in that vain by saying:
6:2 share each others troubles and problems
6:10 do good to everyone

3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

If you want to win the war over selfishness, serve others. As a church, as a family, as an individual.

3. Learn to think on your feet.

Keep in step with the spirit (25) Walking in the spirit doesn’t happen by accident; it is something we learn to do and it happens deliberately, intentionally. You have to stay focused when you walk.

Listen to Romans 8:5 “Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit.” When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, you get negative consequences. Think about the consequences of your behavior before you act- it will save you a lot of regret in the end.
When it came to the football field Steve McNair learned to think on his feet. He came up a yard short in what would have been one of the greatest come from behind Super Bowl drives. McNair did it thinking on his feet. But when it came to his personal life Steve McNair apparently wasn’t thinking on his feet. Apparently he did not consider the consequences of his selfishness—ultimately he displayed how little we mean to one another. The consequences of failing to think on his feet are obvious.

The war within us that is waged between love and self-centeredness is expressed daily in our relationships; whether it is revealed in our marriages or any other relationship in which we find ourselves. As with every war there will always be victims— and in reality everyone, victor or not, is a victim of the war. But the closing line of that Time magazine article says who the real victim is when love loses the war within us. The author writes: What we teach [the children] about the true meaning of marriage will determine a great deal about our fate [and their fate].

This wasn’t a message about marriage, although everything we’ve talked about could be applied to marriage; but this was a message about how the war for true love will not only affect our lives but ultimately the lives of those who learn from our example. So may we begin to let true love win not only for our sake, but for the sake of those who follow us.

Sermon Outline
The War Within – Week One
July 12, 2009

Paul’s Struggle
Romans 7:15-20
I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.

Galatians 5:16-25
…walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.
…But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

What’s Love Got to Do With It?

“Adultery is not about sex or romance. Ultimately, it is about how little we mean to one another.”
http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1908243,00.html

The Acts of the Sinful Nature
True Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a
Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Ephesians 4:2, 32
be patient with each other, making allowances for each other’s faults… be kind to one another… forgiving… as God forgave you.

Loving the Hard to Love

Luke 6:32-33
“If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much!

Crucify the Sinful Nature

1. Filter Your ________________

2. ____________ Others (5:13-14)

   Galatians 6:2, 10

   Philippians 2:3-4
   Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

3. Learn to ____________ on Your Feet (5:25)

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