

Salamo won his first boxing match at the age of fourteen. At sixteen, he was champion of his weight class and by the age of twenty, he was the undefeated champion of the Balkans, with twenty-four wins under his belt. But his boxing career came to an abrupt end in 1943 when the Nazi's arrived in his hometown, taking him and his family captive. Deporting him to Auschwitz, the Nazi soldiers found out he could fight and used him for entertainment. Over the next two years, Salamo was in a fight, but no longer for money or sport. This was a fight for his life. Those who became weak and could no longer fight, the Nazi's would kill.

Like Salamo, many today are in a fight for their life. Some are battling cancer, depression, addiction, and more, but as hard as these battles are, they are not our greatest threat. So often we look at external causes as our greatest threats, but our greatest threat is not emotional scars, health issues, political battles, or even social causes. Our greatest threat comes from within. It comes from "passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). You see, there is a war for the soul going on inside every man and woman alive today and this war took place the moment we were born.

Most of us will admit that we are selfish on some level, and far from perfect, since we are only human, after all, but the Bible gives us the reason for this condition. It says of the human condition, "in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). Sin is the problem and we "must rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). Whether it is lust or sexual sin, addiction, anger, pride, or whatever, it is all the same. Sin promises happiness, prosperity, and pleasure but ends in depression, pain, and death. Still, like a needy lover in a physically abusive relationship, we cling to sin as it slowly destroys us from the inside out. Like a malignant tumor, it eats away at us from within.

While some flatter themselves that the heart is good, the Bible is the only book brave

enough to tell us the truth about our condition. It says that the "heart is...desperately wicked," for "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts" (Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19). For those who have trouble believing this, James appeals, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you" (Jas. 4:1)? The answer is, "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (Jas. 1:14). It is an internal struggle that each of us must battle.

So often we flatter ourselves that we are good when we are no better than those we hate. We shout, "love trumps hate" with hearts full of hatred. One group is no better than the other. We stand on our moral pedestal accusing, attacking, and calling people names, as if we were better than them, while we say with the Pharisee, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11). We claim to be morally superior than those of the other political persuasion. We think we are better than the racist or the rapist, the killer or the thief, without realizing that we are no better than the worst sinner. The truth is, we are all desperately wicked sinners.

John Wesley once told a story about a time when he was walking with a friend past an alley. They noticed an alcoholic sleeping in the alley and his friend pointed and said in disgust, "Look at that drunk," to which Wesley replied, "If it was not for the grace of God that would be me." And this is the key we must all remember. Any goodness we have comes from God. Believe it or not, any good motive in our heart is put there by God. Our hearts are selfish, but God moves upon our hearts to do good, allowing us the opportunity to follow His lead or reject it, so even our goodness is not really ours.

Like Wesley, we must recognize that our own hearts are sinful and any goodness we have comes from God. That's why Paul, who lived an entire life of service said, "Jesus came

into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul knew that any goodness he had, came from God, and that if God were to leave him, he would become just as evil as he had been before he gave his life to Christ. You see, before Paul came to Christ, he thought he was a good person. It wasn't until after he saw the goodness of God through His holy "law" that his sinfulness was exposed (Rom. 7:7). In seeing his sinfulness, Paul became more sympathetic.

The reason there is so much hatred, riots, conflicts, and disunity today is because people do not see their own sinfulness. Some people join social activist groups or watch rapists and killers on the news while we sit on our moral high ground, saying with the Pharisee, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men," when we are no better. God knows that if we were under different circumstances that rapist or killer could have been us. You see, we are all sinners. God simply tests some people, allowing them to be put into situations to reveal their sinfulness so they will see how bad they are.

The truth is that none of us are any better than the other and the greatest battle that we have to fight in this life is not against people, the government, or our circumstances, but our sinful hearts. It used to be said that when we point one finger of blame at someone, there are always four other fingers pointing back at us. There's an old African American spiritual that illustrates this concept. It sings, "Not the stranger, not my neighbor, but it's me, O Lord, standin' in the need of prayer." We have got to stop pointing the blame for our problems at the world around us and start fighting the battle where the real fight is – inside us.

The battle against self is the greatest battle you will ever fight, but so few people fight it because so few people are willing to admit that they are sinners. Most who read this will shrug it off, justifying their sins, instead of gearing up

for the “fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12), but those who cry out, “I am a sinner, I am responsible for my own sins, and I need your help, oh God, to escape the grip that sin has in my life,” will find help. The good news is that those who are willing to cry out to God for help to overcome will find power to war against the sinful heart, and God will give them the victory.

While the battle against our sinful heart is difficult, God has given us weapons of warfare to fight with. He has given us “the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). He has given us church and the privilege of prayer. He has even offers us His “power” so that we may be “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (2 Cor. 12:9; Rom. 1:16; Rom. 8:37). God “has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” to wage this war against the greatest enemy we will ever face – ourselves (2 Pet. 1:3). The good news is that through the power of God, we can win this battle.

On April 15, 1945 Salamo Arouch was finally liberated and you can be too. The key is to surrender, putting “to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). Pray for God’s power to put away your sinful habits, invite Christ into your heart, and strive for holiness. The fight of your life lies ahead. The battle against self is the most brutal battle you will ever fight, but if you will just cry out to God, He can give you the victory, resulting in the best life ever. So get your gloves on. It’s time to fight.

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