

### ***Your Evil Twin***

In the name of him who invites us to come to him for rest, dear friends in Christ: Sometimes, as passing thought, I think it would be nice to have an identical twin—in particular, an *evil* identical twin. That way whenever anyone observed me doing something wrong and then confronted me about it later, I could say, “No, you’re mistaken. That wasn’t me. That was my evil twin you saw. I’m the good one. *I* would never do a thing like that.” I know that there sure were times when I was growing up that it would have been especially helpful (and no, I won’t go into details). But even today there are times when I’m feeling grouchy, or irritable, or angry and it sure would be nice later to be able to pass the blame for what I did or said under such moods onto somebody else. I wonder: is there anyone else here who wouldn’t sometimes like to have an evil twin? (Or could it be that *you are* someone else’s evil twin?)

Of course, it’s not really a good idea to have an evil twin because in the end it would backfire on you. Just think: if you were passing the blame for your transgressions onto your evil twin, don’t you suppose that your evil twin would be doing the same thing to you? And being the evil one, he or she would have more and worse transgressions to pass your way, so you’d end up looking like the evil one. And just as bad, being evil, they’d also be better at lying about it. So not only would you get blamed for all their offenses, they’d probably twist things around and make you take the blame for the things you did and tried to blame your twin for too. And then on top of it all, you’ve got to figure that a lot of the terrible things your wicked twin did would be directed against you. They’d insult you, hurt you, lie to you, lie *about* you, cheat and steal from you, and take every advantage of you. No, it definitely would not be good to have an evil twin. No good could possibly come from it.

But with that in mind, *what if you did* have an evil twin? And what if you weren’t just twins, but you were *conjoined* twins? You know: what they used to call Siamese twins? And let’s say that there was no way for the doctors to separate you: your internal organs were far too entwined and shared to attempt surgical separation. If they tried, at least one of you would surely die. Can you imagine how awful *that* would be? Why, there’d never be any relief from it. You’d be stuck all the time to this evil person who looked just like you. And they’d make your life a living hell. You’d try to make compromises, naturally; you’d try to get along – you’d have to in order to survive – but you’d find that in the end the evil twin always got their way. They’d be skillful at manipulation, doing whatever it took to get you to give in and go along to do the evil things they wanted to do. You’d never get to do what you wanted. And you could never get away from it, not even for a moment’s respite.

Now, if you can imagine that – and how bad it would be – then I’d like you to consider that it isn’t very far from the truth of the life *you are* living now; or maybe I should say, the life *you should be* living. This is what St. Paul is talking about in today’s Epistle. He’s discussing the internal conflict every Christian struggles with. It’s the war between the old sinful nature we all possess, that’s the one we’re born with that is completely self-centered, that’s “me first”, and rejects God’s will and rebels against him; and the new nature which the Lord gives by his grace and the power of the Holy Spirit when he works saving faith in the Lord Jesus in our hearts. This new nature loves God, trusts him, wants to do his will, and wants to serve and love all people. So it’s like having two different persons share the same body: one evil, unbelieving, and rebelling against God; and the other good, godly, and trusting in Christ. It’s like being completely conjoined twins.

Now, of course, it isn't that way exactly. There's still only one you, so you can't go blaming somebody else for the sins you commit. That's *you* doing those things – your “evil twin” is you too. But what I want you to see is that as Paul writes, he identifies *himself* entirely with the new nature. That's the *real* me, he says. That's who I am: the one who wants to do God's will. But, he says, I've got a problem. “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want ... it is no longer I who do it, but the sinful nature that dwells within me. ... For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but the sinful nature that dwells within me.”

So what's he doing is describing a war of wills within himself. By disassociating himself with his sinful nature, he's saying the fight is on. “I hate that guy and the things he makes me do. I hate that he keeps me from doing God's will. I'll fight him until the end.” And you can sense that he's passionate about it. He's suffering real anguish because his sinful nature is preventing him from doing the good that he wants to do. And what Paul's doing is encouraging us to have the same attitude. You should be at war with your evil twin. You should make it your daily goal to fight and suppress it.

And that's the first problem. Too often we settle for a draw. We compromise. We feel we're doing okay if we can prevent the wicked twin from running completely amok: “Go ahead and sin; but keep it within bounds.” We allow it certain victories and let it have its way as long as things don't go too far. And then we dismiss those transgressions as if they were not serious or unimportant by saying, “Well, I'm forgiven; so I don't have to worry about it.” And that's a real problem. To compromise with evil is itself evil. And to willfully take advantage of God's grace in Christ; that is to say “I can go ahead and indulge my sinful nature because I know God will forgive me for Christ's sake” is to use the Gospel as a license to sin. It's an abuse of the Gospel. And it's no way for a child of God to live. No, having been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and understanding just how much Jesus suffered to save us, the child of God strives to do better.

And it's a lot more than just not giving in to temptations to sin. You see, the Law of God not only tells us what's off limits, it also tells us how to live as God's children. Too often we see it just in terms of what we're *not* supposed to do. “Don't do this, and don't do that.” And we think if we can keep from crossing those boundaries, we're doing pretty well – we're holding the evil twin in check. But that's missing the greater part of the Law. It's not enough just to avoid the evil. The evil side wins if it can get you to avoid doing the good that the commandments prescribe. Consider: we just reviewed the Ten Commandments with their explanations from Luther's Small Catechism. And with the exception of the First Commandment, for which the explanation is stated only positively – what you're supposed to do – all the rest are explained both negatively and then positively. That is to say, first it says what you shouldn't do, and then it says what you should do. In general, we tend to stop at the first part and forget all about the second.

Take the Second Commandment, which is “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God”. We look at the first part of the explanation, which says that we shouldn't curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by God's name and then we do a quick self check: “Let's see, I haven't called upon the Lord to damn anyone, I haven't 'swore to God' and told a lie, and I haven't tried to hex anyone with a witches' spell lately, so I must be doing all right.” But what about the rest of it? What about using the name of the Lord for what he gave it to us for, namely to call upon it in every trouble, to pray, to praise, and to give thanks? Have you been doing all that? Or have you been looking elsewhere for help, neglecting prayer, and forgetting to praise

the Lord and give him thanks? If so, your evil twin has the upper hand. You're letting it prevent you from doing the good.

Or consider the Third Commandment. Understanding that in the New Testament era we are not required to rest and to worship on a particular day of the week, we learn that what this command means for us now is that we are not despise preaching and hearing God's Word. So, again we do the self check. "Hmm, I don't actually hate hearing God's Word (even though I prefer those Sundays on which the readings are short ... and preaching, wellllll, it's okay, I guess, as long as the pastor is interesting, occasionally funny, and very brief. So, I've got this one covered. But the commandment requires more: that you hold God's Word sacred. That means that you hold it precious and you cherish it as something extremely needful; and that you *gladly* hear and learn it. The idea is that you have a steady hunger and ready eagerness for hearing and learning more about the Word of God. If that doesn't describe you, you've caved in to your evil twin. You're letting him or her have their way.

The Fourth Commandment says that you shouldn't despise or anger your parents and other authorities the Lord has placed over you. And so you say to yourself, "Let's see, I don't actually hate my parents and I try not to make them angry (most of the time). Oh yeah, and other authorities ... that would be the representatives of the local, state, and federal government, the police, my teachers if I'm in school, the pastor of my church when it comes to spiritual matters ... Let's see ... I can't say that I hate any of them (or maybe you can but you shouldn't). But again positively the command requires much more: that you honor, serve, obey, love, and cherish them. And this is true whether you agree with their politics and methods or not. It doesn't matter if you didn't vote for them. They are the authorities the Lord has given you. Now, this doesn't mean that you can't disagree with them or campaign and vote for other candidates during elections, nor does it mean that they are above the law and shouldn't be prosecuted if they violate it; but it does mean that while they are in office and while they are the authorities the Lord has place over you, you owe them your willing obedience, your respect, and your sincere devotion. It also means that you ought to pray for them and ask the Lord to bless their work in the offices in which he's placed them—bless them precisely so that you and others will be blessed by their leadership. Now do the diagnostic: who's winning with respect to this command, you or your evil twin?

The Fifth Commandment says you shall not murder. And we know this prohibits more than just physically killing someone; it includes anything you might do to hurt a person physically, mentally, or spiritually. But those are only the negatives. Positively the commandment requires that you help and support your neighbor in every need. It means that you do what's in your power and means to feed the hungry, house the homeless, welcome and befriend the stranger, find work for the unemployed, care for the sick, educate those who need it ... you get the idea. If you are neglecting to do these things, then your evil twin is having its way.

The Sixth Commandment prohibits adultery, which is having sexual relations with anyone who is not your publically recognized spouse. But that's only a small part of what the commandment requires. As children of God we are to press on toward the goal total sexual purity in whatever state of life we find ourselves. If you're not married, it means celibacy. It means keeping your thoughts pure and free of lust. It means avoiding crass jokes and stories full of sexual innuendo. If you are married, it means honoring and loving your spouse as the Lord intends, with complete commitment and absolute fidelity of body and mind – not just turning away from all others, but turning toward your spouse and striving to be the best husband or wife for them that you can possibly be. It means too that you hold marriage (yours and

everyone else's) to be a lifelong, unbreakable, sacred union given to us by the Lord for our good. Anything less than all this is a victory for your evil twin.

Now, there are four more commandments before we get to the end I could talk about, but I think I've made the point. We – all of us – are letting our evil twins sit unchallenged in the driver's seat of our lives for far too much of the time. We're letting it have its way both by the sins we commit and the good things we should do but don't (which, by the way, are called "sins of omission" – so they're sins too). And the biggest reason for this is that we don't keep the First Commandment; the one that says we are to *fear*, love, and trust in God above all things. That's it: we don't fear God. We don't think it's a big deal to sin. We think it's even less a big deal to skip doing something positive that a command of God requires. And that's just wrong. We have only to look at the cross of Jesus to realize just how serious God thinks sin is. And Jesus said, "Don't fear those who can destroy your body; but fear him who can destroy both your body and your soul in hell." He meant that.

So what we need to do is get serious about this. We need to see our sins and failures to do the good that we ought to do from the Lord's point of view. And when we do, like Paul, we'll come to hate the evil twin within. And like Paul, we'll let it know that the fight is on. We'll struggle with it like he did. We will seek its destruction. And instead of brushing off our defeats like they didn't matter, we'll feel genuine sorrow and disappointment and frustration for not being the children that God has called us to be.

Because it's in those times of feeling weak and defeated and miserable that the most progress is made. Then, like Paul, we'll cry out, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death – this evil twin I'm stuck to?" And the answer will be there: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ." He's the solution. He's the one with the power to kill your evil twin and give life and increased strength to the new nature he's given you. That's the real you. He does it when we reach the end of ourselves, when we repent of our sins and failures to do good, and when we place our complete trust in Jesus who lived, who died, and who rose again for us.

So let's do that. Let's get serious. Today and every day let's seek the death of the evil twin, while we look forward to the day that this body of death dies for good, and the evil twin is gone, and only the real you will remain to live forever with Christ. In his holy name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***