

“War from Within the Heart”
2 Samuel 2:12-31
(Preached at Trinity, August 12, 2018)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Saul is dead and David is God’s anointed king. But as we’ve seen, Abner, the commander of Saul’s army, is hungry for power. He fears that with Saul dead he will lose the position he previously held. It is such a perfect picture of the fallen condition of man. We are self-willed and hungry for power. We hate authority and desire autonomy. Even though Abner knew David was God’s anointed he sought to have his own way.
Romans 1:21 NAU - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."
2. Abner brought Saul’s son, Ish-bosheth and made him king over Israel. There were now two competing kings, one over Judah, the other over Israel - one anointed by God, the other anointed by man.
There is no mistaking, Abner knew that David was God’s anointed. He’ll later declare to Ish-bosheth:
2 Samuel 3:9-10 NAU - "May God do so to Abner, and more also, if as the LORD has sworn to David, I do not accomplish this for him, ¹⁰ to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba."
3. Abner knew David was God’s anointed king but was not willing for David to reign. 1 & 2 Samuel sets before us God’s covenant promises through His covenant king. But they also hold before us with clarity the anatomy of the human heart. It is seen clearly with Saul’s self-willed rebellion against God. We can also see it displayed here with the actions of Abner.
Abner had the same problem that plagues us all. His heart was consumed by pride and self-love. These two poisons flow within the veins of us all. From pride and self-love flow all of the enmity and strife between God and man.
 - a. By pride, I’m speaking of the feeling of self-importance that puts our interests above all else. Pride swallows up humility and meekness. It causes us to lift ourselves above other people, but more dreadfully, it causes us to lift ourselves above God.
 - b. Self-love is placing one’s well-being and happiness above all else. Our desires are of the greatest importance. Self-love smothers love for others.
 - (1) The Law demands love of God and man:
Matthew 22:36-40 NAS - "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And He said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

- (2) This presumes we love ourselves but it commands that we love our neighbor as ourselves. In our fallen condition this is impossible. Our self-love swallows up all other expressions of love.
The Bible tells us that the lost man hates God as well as his fellow-man. This is because he is consumed by his love of himself.
- (3) It is interesting that in the 20th Century self-love has been re-interpreted into a positive thing. You have to love yourself before you can love others. The truth is, we naturally love ourselves. The modern emphasis on self-esteem actually turns attention back on ourselves. Genuine love demands turning our attention away from ourselves.
4. Paul describes human depravity. Notice all these sins are the result of pride and self-love:
Romans 1:28-31 NAU - "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;"
Galatians 5:19-21 NAU - "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."
2 Timothy 3:1-4 NAU - "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,"
5. In **Verses 12-31** Abner's pride and self-love leads Israel into civil war – tribe against tribe, brother against brother. It is important for us to understand the ultimate motivation for his actions.
James 4:1 ESV - "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"
The word for "passions" is ἡδονή from which we get our word hedonism. Hedonism is the love of pleasure – the love of satisfying self-desires. Paul says our desire to satisfy these desires is greater than our desire to please God.
It is the passions of pride and self-love that turn all attention on satisfying self. James says these passions rage within us.
6. We should take note of the contrast between the heart of David and the heart of Abner. Abner was the aggressor. He was the one who instigated the war. David, on the other hand, did not immediately attack this rival king. He was willing to pause and see how God would have him to respond. And he was not so willing to attack Israel over which God has anointed him king. The wise man is willing to exercise patience and self-control instead of allowing his passions to direct him.
Proverbs 25:8 NAU - "Do not go out hastily to argue *your case*; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you?"

7. Tonight I want us to view this passage through the lens of original sin. It is a heart problem.
Dale Ralph Davis writes: “Since Abner clearly knew that Yahweh had promised David the kingship (3:9–10, 17–18), his armed resistance seems baffling. But for anyone who looks at humanity and history through the doctrine of original sin, it is not baffling at all. Only perverse.”¹
- I. Abner’s passions caused a complete disregard for others
- A. Notice it was Abner that instigated the conflict
1. Verse 12 tells us “Abner went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon
 2. It was only at Abner’s instigation that Joab gathered David’s troops
- B. Abner had little regard for the lives of these young soldiers
2 Samuel 2:14 NAU - "Then Abner said to Joab, "Now let the young men arise and hold a contest before us."
1. The word for “contest” means “to amuse.” It can refer to joking or laughter.
 2. For Abner it was just a game. He was making sport of their lives. They were merely objects for his amusement.
Twenty-four men lost their lives.
 3. Abner’s actions were ultimately responsible for the death of Asahel
2 Samuel 2:23 NAU - "However, he refused to turn aside; therefore Abner struck him in the belly with the butt end of the spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died on the spot. And it came about that all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still."
- C. When we put all attention on ourselves we can fail to see value in others
1. We will rejoice only when it satisfies our pleasures.
R.C. Sproul spoke of when he realized when his team lost the other team was rejoicing. Could he share in their joy?
 2. When the entire universe is seen only through its effect upon me I can fail to marvel and rejoice in God’s work upon in others created in His image. We can’t truly keep the 6th Commandment without holding high the value of life.
 3. Abner only saw others in terms of what they could do for him. In **Verses 8-9** Abner made Ish-bosheth king over Israel but in **Chapter 3** he just as easily rejected him. Ish-bosheth was nothing more than a pawn to serve his selfish interests.
 4. How do you look upon others? Are they seen only with regards to how they affect you? Do you value them only if they are of use to you? Do you hold grudges against your neighbor, or even another Christian? Do you harbor feelings of racial superiority? Can you see this is merely reflecting a heart of pride and self-love which is great wickedness in the sight of God?

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary, (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 41.

II. No man readily admits to his pride and self-love

A. Abner plays the victim – a victim mentality is nothing more than a display of pride and self-love.

1. Abner’s victim mentality was not an accurate expression of the truth. He brought Israel into civil war. It was by his actions. He was the aggressor

2. He and his army were sorely defeated

2 Samuel 2:17 NAU - "That day the battle was very severe, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David."

3. Abner then kills Joab’s brother, Asahel

Joab and his other brother continue their pursuit and overtake Abner.

Abner calls out to him as if he was taking the position of righteousness.

“Brother, can we not have peace?”

2 Samuel 2:26 NAU - "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the end? How long will you refrain from telling the people to turn back from following their brothers?"

a. He speaks as one seeking peace. How long will we allow swords to clash? How long will you continue to pursue war? How long will you refrain from telling your armies to turn back.

b. It sounds like one who has the interests of others in mind. He sounds like a peacemaker—until we remember who started the conflict in the first place. This one who used the sword for his amusement now speaks as one who pretended to hate it – “Shall the sword devour forever?”

It was by the selfish actions of Abner that 380 husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers failed to return home that day.

c. Abner appeals to Joab to sound the retreat as if Joab was the aggressor. Abner saw himself as the victim of Joab’s sword. Would he be speaking these high words if his army had prevailed instead of Joab’s? Truth is, if he could have prevailed in the battle he would have been willing to destroy the entire tribe of Judah!

d. Joab doesn’t let him get away with such hypocrisy.

2 Samuel 2:27 NAU - "As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely then the people would have gone away in the morning, each from following his brother."

In other words, Joab says, “If you hadn’t given the orders for your young men to fight none of us would have drawn the sword.”

Matthew Henry – “Thou complainest that the sword devours, but who first unsheathed it? Who began? Now thou wouldst have the people parted, but remember who set them on to fight. We should have retired in the morning if thou hadst not given the challenge.” Those that are forward to make mischief are commonly the first to complain of it.”²

² Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 440.

- B. No man readily admits to the pride and self-love.
1. Human beings like to see themselves in the most positive light. Others might be guilty but not me.
 2. A man may have a bitter, unforgiving heart and be blind to the pride and self-love that fuels it.

This can even be true in the life of a Christian—even though, it is inconsistent with a Christian heart.

Matthew 18:32-35 NAU - "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Conclusion:

1. Pride and self-love keep men from Christ. It is the cause of all strife within the home and within the church. It is the cause of all strife within humanity – it is the ultimate cause of wars.
2. May God grant us discernment to recognize the great danger of pride that is always present.
Calvin: "We have here a mirror to show us how pride and haughtiness is a mortal plague which is bound to dissipate the Church of God, of which the reign of David was a type."³
3. Only the direct action of God upon the human heart can deliver us from our pride and self-love. Notice, Abner was sorely defeated and returned to his home camp. He retreated but not to follow David, God's anointed. His heart was unchanged.
4. As Christians, the remnants of our sinful hearts remain. The Holy Spirit provides us with the graces that counteract the sin of self-willed pride.
Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Self-control

³ Calvin, John, *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992) page 64.