

Romans 6:8-18 by Brian Bill

PREVIOUS

SERMONS BY
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ROMANS SERIES

(Note: Exposition not available on some passages)

NEXT

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Romans 6:8-18 The Goals of Grace -6/3/07

Before last Sunday's service one of our daughters turned to Beth and asked this question: "Is Daddy not preaching today?" Beth told her that some special guests were going to talk about their ministry in the Middle East so there wouldn't be a regular sermon. To which our daughter flashed a big grin, pumped her fist and said, "Yes!"

That reminds me of the pastor who was searching for something in his wife's closet when he came across a small wooden box, tucked away in a remote corner. When he opened the lid, he was surprised to find nearly \$200 in cash, along with two eggs. Curious, he took the box to his wife. She smiled awkwardly and said, "Oh, I figured you'd find that some day. Over the years, whenever you'd preach a bad sermon, I'd place an egg in the box." The pastor looked at the two eggs in the box and thought to himself, "After twenty years of preaching and only two eggs, that's not too bad!" But then he asked, "But what about the \$200? Where did that come from?" To which she explained, "Whenever I collected a dozen eggs, I would sell them and put the money in the box." I don't know why you think that's so funny!

If you were here last week, you would agree that the preaching was actually quite strong because we heard from people who are practicing what they've heard preached...and they're doing it in the midst of incredible persecution. Two weeks ago we were reminded that conversion must lead to life change; that justification is designed to move us to sanctification. Because of what Christ did on the cross, we can *know*, we can *grow*, and it must *show*. This morning we're going to go to the next level as we look at the goals of grace by focusing on the *what*, the *how* and the *why*.

The What

Everything up to now has been foundational and propositional. From here on we move to faith and practice. There are some very important things we must know if we ever hope to grow. Christian living is always dependent upon Christian learning because duty follows doctrine. We're going to spend most of our time in Romans 6:11-13, but let's begin by looking at verses 8-10 to see the *what*. This is essentially a reiteration of the first seven verses:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

While this is a difficult concept to grasp, in a very real sense, born-again believers have died with Christ, we live with Christ, and we are raised with Christ. Our identification with Him is the basis of our belief and our behavior. The word "**with**" speaks of an intimate union; we died united with Him and we live united with Him.

The main point of these three verses is that Jesus has conquered sin and death, and as a result, so have we. Verse 10 says that "**He died to sin once for all...**" This is very similar to Hebrews 10:10 which says,

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Jesus died "once for all," which means there is no need for him to do it again, and no requirement for us to do it either. His work on the cross is finished and completed. Hebrews 10:12 continues this thought:

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

The How

With that as background to the *what*, let's move to the *how*. Notice this key linking phrase in Romans 6:11: "**In the same way...**"

Let me make something very clear. Our practice must be rooted in our position with Christ. Everything comes down to Christ and His finished work on the cross, and our identification with Him. This is quite different from “positive thinking” or even “possibility thinking.” I like to call it “positional thinking” because Paul is going to give us three very practical steps that are rooted in the cross of Christ. We’re going to picture these steps by using three common road signs.

1. CAUTION SIGN.

This sign slows us down in order to get our attention. It might be difficult to believe but this is the first command in the entire book of Romans! Look at Ro 6:11:

“...Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

The word “**count**” is very rich and literally means “to make a mental calculation.” It’s actually an accounting term for calculating and computing. In Paul’s day it was used when someone put something into your account. “**Count yourselves...**” is a **present imperative**, urging us to constantly view ourselves in this light.

We are commanded to count two things to be true: First, we are dead to sin; second, we are alive to God. These truths must be considered carefully and continually. They’re already true but now must be appropriated and applied in order for them to be activated in our lives. The idea is that we are to keep on counting ourselves to be what God says we are by putting the truths of the Book of Romans into the calculator of our minds.

Let’s flesh this out. When you’re faced with a temptation, respond to it as a dead man would. You might want to say these words out loud:

I count myself crucified with Christ and therefore I am dead to this sin and alive to God. I consult my account and know that what Jesus has accomplished has been credited to me. I appropriate it and apply it to this situation.”

We need to talk theology to ourselves.

Augustine, who was converted as an adult, was once approached by the woman who had been his mistress. He turned and walked away quickly but she called out after him, “*Augustine, it’s me! It’s me!*” Quickening his pace, this new believer called back over his shoulder, “*Yes, I know, but it’s no longer me!*”

This past week the lights went out in our laundry room. I flipped the switch a couple times and noticed a strange sound in the switch so I assumed that something was seriously wrong. I know I’m not the brightest bulb in the bunch but I did go downstairs and check the circuit breaker and it was fine. Over the next two days I would go by the switch and flip it but nothing happened – I guess I was hoping it would just start working on its own. I figured this was a big problem but since I’m no electrician I just ignored it. Finally, Beth asked if I had checked the light bulbs. I told her I thought it was a much bigger issue than that but when she wasn’t looking I decided to put some new bulbs in. Amazingly, we have lights again! You see, what I had failed to do was consider carefully what the problem might be. My problem was that I had a “short” in my thinking.

Brothers and sisters, we must carefully consider what Jesus has done. And I can tell you that there is no short-circuit! You don’t have to live in the dark, or stumble around in your Christian life. Everything’s already been done – you can count on it.

2. STOP SIGN.

After counting on what Christ has done, we can stop allowing sin to reign supreme in our lives. We see this in Ro 6:12:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.”

We’re not only to be cautious as we count on Christ, we’re also to stop letting sin reign in our lives. We see that in the use of the word “**therefore.**” As a consequence of our calculating and counting, stop allowing sin to rule as king in your life. That’s what the word “**reign**” means. We’ve been transferred to a new kingdom so we should no longer allow sin to have supremacy in our lives.

God had warned Cain about sin’s desire to dominate in Genesis 4:8:

But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.

King David was cognizant of this in Psalm 19:13:

Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.

Psalm 119:133 is a prayer that we should all pray every day:

Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.

The reason we must be vigilant about sin is because if we're not, it will seek supremacy in our lives. Jesus put it this way in John 8:34:

I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Pastor Jeff shared something with me that he read in a book in which a pastor described how Christians often approach sin. We look up to God and in essence say something like this: "God, I just need a time-out. I'm going to do this little sin-thing for a little while, but I'll be back." And then we go off and sin and then come back and ask for forgiveness, or not. I don't know how to say it any stronger than this:

Don't excuse sin.

Refuse it!

Don't dabble in it because sin will always take you further than you were planning to go and it will keep you longer than you were planning to stay. Sin entices and then it enslaves.

Some of us are way too cozy with sin. Sure, we're saved but frankly not much has happened since our conversion. Instead of fighting, we often fall. That reminds me of the little boy who fell out of bed one night. His mom heard him crying, ran into the bedroom, picked him up and put him back in bed. After tucking him in, she asked, "Honey, why did you fall out of bed?" To which he answered, "I guess I stayed too close to where I got in." Friend, are you staying too close to where you got in? It's time to stop so we can start knowing, growing and showing. First, count on Christ. Second, stop sinning. And finally yield your body to Christ.

3. YIELD SIGN.

Ro 6:13: ***"Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."***

Paul says it both negatively: ***"Do not offer"*** and positively: ***"but rather offer."***

To "offer" means to place at someone's disposal and was used of presenting offerings for sacrifice and therefore has the idea of yielding, or "relinquishing one's grip."

What's he talking about specifically? Our body parts. Instead of yielding to our yearnings, we must yield every part of our body to Christ. The word ***"instruments"*** or ***"members"*** in some versions, means "weapons." That means that our body parts are either weapons of wickedness or weapons of worshipful warfare. Because there's a certain "gravity of depravity" which pulls us south spiritually, it's critical that we offer our bodies to Him. If we don't we'll end up serving sin.

The order here is important. The caution sign tells us to keep on carefully considering our position in Christ. The stop sign signals that we must resist our rebellious ways. It's only then that we're able to yield. It's a daunting responsibility to stop engaging in those sins that we have been falling into for years. The parts of our body can be used for rottenness or for righteousness. Spiritual victory won't happen until our yielding becomes very particular and very personal, so let me ask you some particularly personal questions. Have you yielded every part of your body to the Lord?

- Mind.** What thoughts are flying around right now?
Colossians 3:2-3 says: ***"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."***
- Heart.** What do you value the most? On what are your emotions centered?
Jeremiah 17:9 says: ***"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"***
- Eyes.** Have you been looking at things you should not be looking at? Men, yield your eyes to the Lord by making a covenant like Job did in
Job 31:1: ***"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."***
- Ears.** Have I been listening to gossip, dirty jokes and slander?
Proverbs 18:8: ***"The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts."***
- Mouth.** What comes out of my mouth most of the time?
Proverbs 13:3: ***"He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin."***

- Hands.** Are you grasping the things of the world or are you using your hands to serve? God's Team Livingston County would be a great place to start.
Ecclesiastes 9:10: ***"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might..."***
- Feet.** Are your feet taking you where you shouldn't be going or are your soles surrendered to the Savior?
Psalm 37:31: ***"The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip."***
- Intimate Parts.** I won't go into detail here for the sake of our younger ears, but suffice it to say that Scripture is very clear in 1 Corinthians 6:12:

...the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body"

And in 1 Corinthians 6:12-18 we're told to

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

One pastor put it this way: *When your lips become His, your eyes become His, your ears, your hands, your feet, all become His, do you know what's going to happen? You'll be His.*" It ultimately comes down to a choice, doesn't it?

I came across a true story from *Preaching Today* about a woman in Rwanda whose son was murdered in the genocide. This woman was very bitter and was filled with thoughts of revenge. She was determined to find out who killed her son so she could kill him. But one night she had a dream, and in that dream she saw the house of her *enemy*. She then heard God say, *"Go into the house."* She said, *"I don't want to go into the house."* She eventually went in and God led her through many rooms and then to the foot of the stairs where He said, *"I want you to go up the stairs."* To which she replied, *"I don't want to go up the stairs."* Finally she went up the stairs and opened the door at the top, only to find out that the door led into heaven. And then she realized that the path to heaven goes through the house of her enemy.

Two days later there was a knock on her door. She opens the door to find a young man, and he's shaking. He says to her: *"I am the man who killed your son. I place my life into your hands; whatever you want to do with me, I accept it. I have had no peace ever since I did what I did. If you want to kill me, you can kill me. If you want to turn me in to the authorities, turn me in to the authorities. Whatever you want—my life is in your hands."*

The woman replied, *"I will not do any of this. But I have one request. You must now become my son."* She took him in and fed him at the table where she fed her son. He was the same size as her son, so he wore his clothes. He moved in and became a son to her because heaven passes through the house of her enemy. He still lives with her and now this woman travels around Rwanda, helping the whole nation deal with the issue of reconciliation, because heaven passes through the house of your enemy. (Source: "Unprovoked Love," Mark Buchanan, Issue 285).

The only way she was able to do this was by giving her grudge to God. She yielded the memories in her mind, and offered up her rights for revenge that were hidden in her heart. Is there any part of you that you have not fully surrendered?

I'm reminded of the booklet called **["My Heart Christ's home"](#)** which so graphically portrays how difficult it is for us to open every part of our lives to the Lord. We invite Jesus to come into our lives but we often struggle to open every closet and room to Him. After going through the different rooms in the house of his heart, Robert Boyd Munger writes this:

One day I found [Jesus] waiting for me at the door. An arresting look was in His eye. As I entered, He said to me, *"There is a peculiar odor in the house. Something must be dead around here. It's upstairs. I think it is in the hall closet."* As soon as He said this, I knew what He was talking about. There was a small closet up there on the hall landing, just a few feet square. In that closet, behind lock and key, I had one or two little personal things that I did not want anyone to know about. Certainly, I did not want Christ to see them. I knew they were dead and rotting things left over from my old life. I wanted them so for myself that I was afraid to admit they were there.

Reluctantly, I went up with Him, and as we mounted the stairs the odor became stronger and stronger. He pointed to the door. I was angry. That's the only way I can put it. I had given Him access to the library, the dining room, the living room, the workroom, the rec room, and now He was asking me about a little two-by-four closet...

"I'll give you the key," I said sadly, *"but you will have to open the closet and clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it."* *"Just give me the key,"* He said. *"Authorize me to take care of that closet and I will."* With trembling

fingers I passed the key to Him. He took it, walked over to the door, opened it, entered, took out all the putrefying stuff that was rotting in there, and threw it away. Then He cleaned the closet and painted it. It was done in a moment's time. Oh, what victory and release to have that dead thing out of my life!

A thought came to me. "Lord, is there any chance that you would take over the management of the whole house and operate it for me as you did that closet? Would you take the responsibility to keep my life what it ought to be?" His face lit up as He replied, "I'd love to! That is what I want to do. You cannot be a victorious Christian in your own strength. Let me do it through you and for you. That is the way." "But," He added slowly, "I am just a guest. I have no authority to proceed, since the property is not mine."

Dropping to my knees, I said, "Lord, You have been a guest and I have been the host. From now on I am going to be the servant. You are going to be the owner and Master." Running as fast as I could to the strongbox, I took out the title deed to the house describing its assets and liabilities, location and situation. I eagerly signed the house over to Him alone for time and eternity. "Here," I said, "here it is, all that I am and have, forever. Now you run the house. I'll just remain with you as a servant and friend." Things are different since Jesus Christ has settled down and has made His home in my heart.

Yielding to the Lord must be decisive and it must be definite. **Are you ready to do that right now?**

The Why

We can count on our position with Christ, we can stop sinning and then yield our body to the Lord because we have changed kings. We are no longer to be servants of sin because we've become servants of the Savior.

We see this in Romans 6:14-18:

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. [Grace is not a license to do what we want, but a power to do as we should] ***What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*** [This sounds a lot like verse 1, doesn't it?] ***Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey-whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.***

Let's go back to John 8 for a moment. Jesus said that whoever sins is a slave to sin but He also offered hope and victory when he declared in verse 36: ***"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*** We are now free to serve the Savior!

Bob Dylan sang a song more than 25 years ago that actually could have come from this passage:

"You gotta serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord but you're gonna have to serve somebody." ([Bob Dylan's -Gotta Serve Somebody](#))

You and I were made to serve someone or something. That leads to a couple questions. Who or what are you serving? Are you serving sin or are you serving the Savior? The general pattern of how we live reveals who our Lord is because we are slaves to the one we obey.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we have been set free and now we are slaves to righteousness. I love this phrase in Ro 6:17: ***"Though you used to be slaves to sin"*** and this statement in Ro 6:18: ***"You have been set free from sin."***

The "what" part is that we are united with Christ. The "how" is that we are to...

- Proceed with caution and count ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.**
- Stop letting sin reign.**
- Yield our bodies to the Lord.**

And the "why" is because we have changed kingdoms to serve the King of Kings, who has set us free from the dominion of sin. Unfortunately, too many of us are not even aware of the freedom that is ours.

Harry Houdini made a name for himself by escaping from every imaginable confinement – from straightjackets to handcuffs to locked rooms. He loved to boast that no lock could hold him. Time and again he would be in an impossible situation and would be able to free himself. It worked every time – but one. He entered a small room and the door was slammed shut. Once alone, he

pulled a thin but strong piece of metal from his belt and began working on the lock. But something was wrong. No matter how hard Houdini worked, he couldn't unlock the lock. For two hours he applied skill and experience to the lock but nothing happened. Finally, bathed in sweat and visibly frustrated he fell against the door in total defeat. But when he fell against the door, it swung open because it had never been locked! The only place the door was locked was in his mind.

Friend, Jesus has given you freedom. The door has been unlocked. You have been set free to serve Him. Now that's a sermon you can say "yes" to!

Missing Romans 6:19-23 Extreme Soul Makeover

Romans 7:1-6 Dying in Order to Live -6/17/07

This past Sunday I preached at Calvary Memorial Church in Oak Park. Beth and I spent about 10 years at Calvary and were supported by them for three years when we were missionaries. For the last several summers I've been invited to come back and preach and always enjoy my time there. They have four services – three of them are "live" and one is simulcast to their gym area for a service they call "The Upper Room." The first service went well and then I decided to attend a few minutes of the Upper Room service before I had to come back to the auditorium to preach the second service. I was singing along with the music and taking everything in until I heard the worship leader ask Dr. Michael Easley, the president of Moody Bible Institute, to lead in prayer.

I must confess that I didn't concentrate very much during this prayer because I was suddenly paralyzed by the thought that the president of this world-renowned Bible Institute was about to hear my simple sermon. Talk about feeling intimidated! I snuck out of the service, making my way back to the auditorium, wondering how I could massage my message to make it better. A quick look at my watch was all it took for me to realize that I was stuck...and so was he. And then a funny thing happened. Instead of feeling intimidated I started to wonder if he would be impressed with the sermon. Maybe he would ask me to speak at Moody or drop my name in conversations with Christian leaders from around the country.

Thankfully, God brought me back to reality by reminding me that I was just His messenger and my role was to faithfully preach the Word of God. It's all about Him and not about me anyway.

As I was driving home I realized that before I became a Christian I swung on similar extremes: most of the time I was intimidated by God and at other times I tried to impress Him with my behavior. I knew that I fell far short but every once in awhile I thought I was doing OK, especially when I compared myself with others.

What about you? Are you paralyzed by your sins or are you on the performance track? When faced with God's Law do you feel like a loser or do you feel like a winner? As we come to Romans 7:1-6 we're entering the heart of Paul's argument. While many of us would like to avoid the authentic agony in this chapter and move on to the great glories of chapter 8, we can't skip over this key section of Scripture. While commentators differ on how to interpret these verses, the outline is rather clear. It's the perfect sermon with a main point, an example, and some action steps. We see the *proposition* in verse 1. In verses 2-3, Paul uses an *illustration* from marriage and in verses 4-6 we're given the *application*.

Please turn to Romans 7 and follow along as I read:

"Do you not know, brothers-for I am speaking to men who know the law-that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."

The main point of this passage is that we can try to live by rules or we can live by a relationship. We could put it this way: *True release comes from a relationship with Jesus, not from rules.*

1. Proposition (Ro 7:1).

Amazingly, in just this one chapter of Romans the word "law" is used 28 different times. Let's look at verse 1: ***"Do you not know, brothers-for I am speaking to men who know the law-that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives?"***

The “law” refers to the Old Testament law, or specifically, the 10 Commandments. Actually, if you were to count up all the laws and rules, there are 613 of them! Paul is assuming that there is general knowledge among his readers about the nature of law – that’s what he means when he writes, **“Do you not know...”** that the law has absolute authority or jurisdiction over us? The problem is that none of us can live out the law completely, and when we try to do so some bad things can happen.

David Hoke suggests the following characteristics of those who live under the law. See if any of these find traction in your actions and attitudes (www.horizonsnet.org).

- Pride.** Even though we know we cannot meet all the standards, it’s very easy to boast about our own accomplishments. A focus on performance always leads to pride.
- Critical spirit.** Another way to recognize people who live under the law is that they become very critical of others. Have you noticed that there’s just something about the law that makes us judge others? We can be blind to error in our own lives and yet we often have our eyes wide open to the faults of others.
- Hypocrisy.** Because there is an inherent tension in trying to live by the law, and we know we’re not meeting the subscribed standards, there’s a temptation to appear like we’re meeting them. This leads to hypocrisy.

So how do we get out from under the law? The only way to break the bondage is through death: **“...the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives.”**

The question becomes this: *Have you died to the law?* The law can be one’s lord but that ends when death dissolves the dominion. As we’ve already established from chapter 6, believers have died with Christ, and therefore the law is no longer master.

I came across this statement that sums it up well...

Though freed from the Law with its stern demands

No longer ruled by its harsh commands

I’m bound by Christ’s love and am truly free

To live and act responsibly

Why is that? Because *true release comes from a relationship with Jesus, not from rules.*

2. Illustration (Ro 7:2-3).

In chapter 6, Paul uses the simile of slavery and now he uses the metaphor of marriage – some would say they are very similar! It’s like that old saying: *“Love is blind and marriage is an eye-opener.”*

Let me just say that this is not the definitive passage on the biblical view of divorce and remarriage. For that, we’d have to survey several Scriptures to understand this completely. In other words, this passage is not so much teaching about marriage but is instead an illustration that we have been released from rules and have entered into a new relationship with Christ. Paul’s main point is that when we’re trying to live by the law we are bound to the law:

For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man.

A new relationship is only possible when there is a release from the old. The word **“release”** is used in Ro 7:2-3 and then again in verse 6 and means *“to be discharged, free, at liberty and unconstrained.”* It was also used of making the power or force of something ineffective. Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 7:39:

A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.”

Marriage is a contract and a covenant that is dissolved by death. That’s why most wedding vows include the words *“till death do us part”* or *“as long as we both shall live.”*

True release comes from

a relationship with Jesus, not from rules.

3. Application (Ro 7:4-6).

We know that we're moving to application now from the use of the phrase, "**So, my brothers...**" Let's break-down these action steps phrase-by-phrase, taken directly from these three verses.

- Proclaim your death to the law.** Look at verse 4: "**...you also died to the law through the body of Christ...**" Galatians 2:19: "**For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.**" Friend, you and I can never live for the Lord until we first declare our death to the demands of the law. Let me remind you that the law itself is not bad. Galatians 3:24 tells us that the law is a tutor to lead us to the Lord and Psalm 19:7 says: "**The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.**" While the law is good, it can't make you good – it's incapable and inadequate to do so as we learned in Romans 5:20: "**The law was added so that the trespass might increase...**"

Would you also notice that the law does not die but rather it is we who have died *to the law*? Friend, live as one who has been liberated from the law, which you couldn't keep anyway! The law condemns; it doesn't commend. It cannot save or sanctify us. We'll learn next week from verse 12 that the law is "**holy, righteous and good**" but it can never remove sin. The law always points out what we've done wrong but never compliments us when we do things right.

A couple months ago I was driving back from Bloomington and was pulled over by a Pontiac policeman. Just so you stop wondering the officer does not attend this church. Apparently while I was driving on I-55 the car behind me thought I was weaving a little bit and called 911. The officer pulled me over and asked to see my license and insurance information. I gave multiple assurances that I have not had a drink in over 25 years but that I had been talking on my cell phone and was apparently not paying attention. Officer Friendly reminded me to be careful and I politely and humbly agreed to change my ways. I was in the wrong and should have been pulled over. It was only by grace that I did not get a ticket. Can you imagine that an officer would ever pull you over to congratulate you for driving the speed limit and for being an attentive driver? That would never happen...especially to me. Why? Because the law is designed to condemn, not commend.

- Say "I Do" to Jesus.** Verse 4 continues: "**...that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead...**" Our relationship with rules and expectations has ended and we've been released so that we "**belong to another.**" In the New Testament, the church is described by three words that all start with the letter "B." The church is called the *body*, with Christ as the head; a *building* with Christ being the chief cornerstone, and believers as living bricks; and we're called the *bride* of Christ.

In that sense, we're "married to Jesus," which is beautiful because when you're married to someone you have a personal relationship with them. We used to be married to rules before we were Christians, and now we've been released for marriage to the Master, Jesus Christ. It would do us well to ponder our betrothal as the bride of Christ.

The Bible declares that as believers we are the bride and Jesus is the bridegroom. 2 Corinthians 11:2 reminds us that we must be faithful and pure: "**I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.**" John looks ahead to the wedding feast in Revelation 19:7: "**Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready**" and in Revelation 21:9: "**Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.**"

The key is to make sure that you have a love relationship not a law relationship because love matters more than law. After his wife died this week, Billy Graham made a statement that reveals how close they were: "*We've rekindled the romance of our youth, and my love for her continued to grow deeper every day.*" Do you remember the story of Jacob and Rachel? Laban, representing the law, told Jacob that if he wanted to be married to Rachel he would have to work seven years for her. Genesis 29:20 reveals a heart of true love: "**So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.**" Have you ever said "I do" to the love of Jesus? He's done all the work so we don't have to. If not, why not? I not now, when? If you've been drifting, it's time to rekindle your relationship.

- Make sure your life bears fruit.** The last part of verse 4 declares our purpose as believers: "**in order that we might bear fruit to God.**" This literally means "*we do bring forth fruit unto God.*" The product of true faith is always fruit. We have died to the law and now belong to the Lamb *so that* we might be fruit bearers. John 15:8: "**This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**" Pastor Jeff reminded us last week that if we say we have faith then there better be some fruit.

If you want to know what this fruit should look like in our lives see Galatians 5:22-23. One pastor refers to these verses as the nine children of the Christian, resulting from our marriage to the Lord, not the law: "**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.**" Our fruit should be evident in our character, our conduct and in the converts that come to Christ through our witness. It should be seen in our attitudes, our actions and in our offspring. Here's a question. If your life is a garden, what kind of fruit do people find there?

- Don't go back to the law.** As believers we're going to have to fight against the performance mentality all the time. We need to remember what that got us before we were believers and determine to not live under legalistic rules and regulations. Look at verse 5: ***"For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death."*** The word "aroused" means to be awakened to those overwhelming impulses to think and do evil.

I had another experience this week with my car when I smelled gasoline after I'd driven it. Actually, I smelled it for a couple days before I crawled underneath the car to see the problem. Sure enough, gasoline was dripping out of the fuel line, creating a huge puddle of highly-explosive gas, just waiting to ignite and incinerate me. I immediately called for a tow truck and sent it off to a mechanic. I'm just thankful that nothing happened because I had been driving it for a couple days like that. Friend, don't go back to living under the law. It's dangerous and explosive and will only bear fruit for death.

Paul asks a penetrating question in Galatians 3:3: ***"Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"***

Incidentally, Galatians 5:19-21 tells us that if we live by the law and serve the flesh we will grow a different kind of fruit:

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."

- Serve in the power of the Spirit.** We have been set free in order to serve. Look at Romans 7:6: ***"But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code."***

That leads to a couple questions. **Are you serving the Savior or are you just sitting back? Have you discovered the new way of the Spirit or are you still doing things the old way? Do you find serving exciting or is it excruciating because you're trying to impress God and others?** I haven't mentioned much about this being Father's Day but I do want to make a tie-in here. I received a phone call from a woman about a month ago. She was really burdened by the fact that many men are not serving. She made this statement that really stuck with me: *"If people see men serving they'll know that it really matters."* And that got me thinking. We *do* have a lot of men serving. If you're a man and you're striving to make a difference through serving, would you please stand right now?

To summarize, Paul is essentially repeating what he spelled out in Romans 6:14: ***"For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."*** One writer says: *"Law implies that God requires me to do something for Him; deliverance from law implies that He exempts me from doing it, and that in grace He does it Himself."*

True release comes from a relationship with Jesus, not from rules.

I don't have to be paralyzed or perform for Dr. Easley or for the Almighty. The funny thing is that the only time I met him was a year ago when he was wearing khakis and a t-shirt as he unloaded cars to help students move in. He was a servant. Friend, Jesus is a servant and you are now under grace, not under the law.

Accepting a relationship with Jesus is more important than adherence to rules. But first we must die. Jesus said in Matthew 10:39: ***"...Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*** It ultimately comes down to this: *It's not performance according to some principles but pleasing a Person that matters most.* Christianity is not a religion of "do's and don'ts" but a relationship where we say "I do" to Jesus Christ.

I love the words to this hymn called "Free from the Law."

**Free from the law, O happy condition,
Jesus has bled and there is remission,
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.
Once for all, O sinner, receive it,
Once for all, O brother, believe it;**

Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,

Christ hath redeemed us once for all.

Several years ago Ruth Bell Graham proposed her own epitaph to be written on her tombstone: *"End of construction. Thank you for your patience."* I like that because it shows that we're all in process...and that we need to be patient with each other until God finishes His work.

A relationship with Jesus is more important than rules or rituals. And the best way to grow as a believer is to be in relationship with others. Here at PBC we're following a simple process. Step one is for you to participate and engage in our Sunday services. Step two is to join a small group. And step three is to serve. If you're attending on Sundays, your next move is to join a group. If you're in a small group then your next step is to start serving.

We'd like to shine the spotlight on the impact of small groups here at PBC by allowing you to hear from Ben and Jennifer Schneider.

1. How long have you attended PBC? What brought you here?

2. How has your small group helped you grow spiritually?

2. How has your group helped you in other ways?

Romans 7:7-13 The Slippery Slope of Sin - 6/24/07

[Sermon opens with a mime. Woman approaches a chair set up on stage with a sign on it that says, *"Do not touch."* She reads the sign and starts to walk away but then comes back to the chair, looks around to see if anyone is watching and then touches it. Unfortunately, her hand sticks to the chair. When she tries with great effort to remove her hand, her other hand gets stuck. In the process of trying to free her hands she ends up sitting in the chair and now her entire body is stuck to the chair. She tries hard to break free but in exasperation gives up. Just then a man walks up on the stage, notices her predicament, and points her to the screen where a picture of Jesus on the cross appears. As she looks, she starts to pray and then is freed from the chair. She stands up and is filled with joy as she skips off the stage]

There's something about a command that make us want to break it, isn't there? As we learned last week, *true release comes from a relationship with Jesus, not from rules.* But that leads to a question. If we're not under the Law anymore, does that mean the commandments are bad? What purpose do God's precepts have? Our passage this morning will help us see that God's Law provides three things...

1. The Law illuminates sin (Ro 7:7).

Look at Ro 7:7: ***"What shall we say, then? Is the Law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the Law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the Law had not said, 'Do not covet.'"***

Once again Paul anticipates a question from his readers and then quickly answers it. We see the same phrase ***"What shall we say, then?"*** in Ro 3:5, 4:1 and Ro 6:15. Specifically he verbalizes what some may be thinking. If we have died to the Law as Ro 7:4 says, and since the Law causes our passions to be inflamed (verse 6), then maybe the Law itself is sin. And once again he answers abruptly with the phrase, ***"Certainly not!"*** This literally means, *"God forbid. Banish the thought from your mind!"*

We're then given the first purpose of the Law from this passage. The Law reveals, or illuminates, sin. Like a straightedge, when we compare ourselves to it, we see how crooked we are. Or, like a mirror, the Law shows us what we're really like. James 1:23-24:

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."

An old Chinese proverb says: *"To an ugly man, every mirror is an enemy."* The mirror is not the problem; it's my ugly mug. As Lynette found out, the Law shows us how sinful we really are. Turn back to Romans 3:20:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the Law; rather, through the Law we become conscious of sin.

Paul then gives an example of how the Law illuminates our sin by using the 10th Commandment, which is a prohibition against coveting. By just quoting an abbreviated version of this command, his readers would have filled in the rest from Exodus 20:17:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Nelson's Bible Dictionary defines coveting as "an intense desire to possess something (or someone) that belongs to another person." It means "to desire greatly, to lust after that which cannot be legitimately ours." Let's consider for a moment why Paul chose this particular prohibition.

The 10th Commandment stands for all the rest.

By quoting a portion of the final commandment, Paul is saying that this one summarizes all the others.

Coveting is a root sin which is often the cause of other sins.

If we could peel back our motives when we sin, a spirit of coveting is often behind what we do. One could argue that coveting is the root sin of Eve in Genesis 3:6 when she viewed the forbidden fruit as "...**pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom...**" In Colossians 3:5, Paul equates coveting (or greed) with idolatry. In Joshua 7:21, Achan explains why he sinned by taking forbidden plunder: "**I coveted them and took them.**"

This commandment deals with inner attitudes.

This is the only one of the 10 that just deals with heart attitudes. Sin begins in the heart and one can covet without anyone knowing it. Jesus taught the same thing in Matthew 5:21-28. While some of us can say that we haven't broken some of the commands that deal with outward actions, every one of us has sinned inwardly.

He probably thought he kept the other nine.

The first command about having no other gods. *No problem.* No idols. *None.* Don't take God's name in vain. *Clean on that.* Keep the Sabbath. *Always.* Honor your father and mother. *Yep.* Don't murder. *Wouldn't think of it.* Don't commit adultery. *Never have, never will.* Don't steal. *No sticky fingers here.* Don't bear false witness. *I'm a truth-teller.* But then he comes to number ten. Oops. Ouch. Oh-oh. Busted. *"I'm greedy all the time. I want stuff that others have."*

Coveting can consume us.

Jesus warns against greed and the thinking that we always need more than we already have in Luke 12:15: "**Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.**" I think it's fair to say that we live in a consumer culture built on coveting. We need to fight against this by putting into place the words of 1 Timothy 6:6 "**But godliness with contentment is great gain.**"

Elisa Morgan, the former president of MOPS International (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers), shares this insight into how a child views the world. It's called the Toddler's Creed:

If I want it, **it's mine.**

If I give it to you and change my mind later, **it's mine.**

If I can take it away from you, **it's mine.**

If I had it a little while ago, **it's mine.**

If **it's mine**, it will never belong to anyone else, no matter what.

If we are building something together all pieces **are mine.**

If it looks like mine, **it's mine.**

I wonder how many of us are following "The Toddler's Creed?" First, the Law illuminates sin by showing us the depth of our depravity. Second, the Law ignites sin.

2. The Law ignites sin (Ro 7:8-9).

Because the Law is good, it shows that we are bad. The Law illuminates the evil lurking in our lives and at the same time, it also stimulates sin. We saw that with Lynette when she observed the "Do Not Touch" sign. If the sign were not there, she probably would not have touched the chair. Somehow just seeing the sign ignited within her the desire to do that which is forbidden. There's something within us that makes us want "to do" when the sign says "don't." I'm told a hotel on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico in Galveston, Texas put this notice in each room: "*No Fishing from the Balcony.*" Yet, every day, hotel guests threw in their lines to the water below. The management decided to try a different approach and so they removed all the signs. The fishing stopped immediately. The sign had ignited sin.

I heard about one woman who objected to her church reciting the 10 Commandments because "*they put too many ideas into people's heads.*" In a sense, she's right. Let's listen to Ro 7:8-9 as I emphasize some key words to help us see how the Law ignites sin in our lives:

But sin, seizing the opportunity [a rushing in, an occasion or starting point for an expedition. Also used militarily as a "base of operations" where ambushes are launched] **afforded by the commandment,**

produced [caused – emphatic] ***in me every kind*** [all, without exception] ***of covetous desire. For apart from Law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from Law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life*** [revived] ***and I died.***

Think with me about Israel's history. It was only *after* they received the commandment to not make any idols (Exodus 20:4) that Aaron made a golden calf for them to worship (Exodus 32). The prohibition somehow led to the evil practice.

The phrase "sprang to life" reminds us of Genesis 4:7 where Cain is warned to do the right thing before sin takes him down:

Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.

Sin preys on people and looks for every opportunity to obliterate us. Ray Stedman writes that this evil force "*is in every one of us, waiting only for the right circumstance in order to spring into being.*" How else do you explain the mob of people who beat a passenger in a car to death in Texas and another mob that beat a driver in Milwaukee this week? One witness said, "*The attackers just flew in from everywhere.*" Sin sprang into action and ignited everyone involved, with terrible consequences. Forbidden fruit may taste sweet but it has some bitter consequences. Incidentally, when sin "springs to life" in us, it should humble us, mortify us, shock us, and draw us to the Savior.

3. The Law incinerates us (Ro 7:10-13).

The Law illuminates sin, it ignites sin and finally, it incinerates us. I chose a strong word on purpose because Ro 7:10-13 are very jarring:

I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

The Law tells us how to live and then condemns us for not living up to it. This addresses those Jews who believed that the Mosaic Law had life-giving power – the Law doesn't extinguish sin; it ignites it. Law-living then, and even now, leads to death.

Leviticus 18:5 tells us that we "***may live if we do God's commands.***" The problem is that none of us can keep the commands and so they end up killing us. The Law would have given life had it been perfectly obeyed but it is impossible to do so as declared in Romans 3:23:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

James 2:10 reminds us: "***For whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.***"

Paul is saying that before the Law let him have it, he thought he had it all. But when the Law came, it ignited his passions and caused sin to spring to life. Before all this happened he thought he was alive, but sin had sucked the very life out of him.

The word "***deceive***" means to beguile thoroughly and to seduce wholly by leading someone astray or making them lose their way. Let's think of some ways that sin deceives us. Have you ever heard "sin" say these words to you? We could call these "Sin's Ten Deceptions."

1. "You're not as sinful as the Bible says you are. In fact, you are really a good person."
2. "What God says is unreasonable and oppressive." (Genesis 3:5)
3. "This isn't really sin, anyway. You're not angry; just frustrated. It's not adultery; it's just a relationship. You're not lying; you're just stretching the truth."
4. "Go ahead and do it. No one will ever know."
5. "Everyone's doing it."
6. "You can't stop this sin or break this addiction because you've been doing it so long."
7. "This will satisfy, fulfill and make you happy."
8. "You won't get caught."
9. "God will forgive you anyway."
10. Then, after sinning, we hear these words: "You've really messed up. God won't forgive you now."

Don't underestimate the deceitfulness of sin. As someone has said, "*If you hang around the creek long enough, you're eventually going to slide in.*" That's why I called this message "The Slippery Slope of Sin." Hebrews 3:13 warns us about the hardening that

can come as a result of sin's deceitfulness:

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

That means that if I'm not encouraging you, I could be contributing to the hardening of your own heart. Sin deceives and according to James 1:15 it also leads to death:

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

We come now to the answer that is raised by the question in Romans 7:7: ***"Is the Law sin?"*** Look at verse 12: ***"So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."*** The problem is not with the Law; the problem is with Law-breakers like us. The Law is:

- Holy.** God's Law is set apart and full of purity, majesty and glory because God the Giver of the Law is holy. *The Law is holy but cannot make us holy.*
- Righteous.** God's Law is impartial, fair, and never wrong. *The Law is righteous but cannot make us righteous.*
- Good.** It tells us the way to live and tells us when we fail to live that way. *The Law is good but can never make us good.*

This verse is summed up in Psalm 19:7-9:

The Law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.

In that sense, there's nothing wrong with the Law because it shows our deep depravity and our need for the Savior. Look at Ro 7:13:

Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful."

There's something within us that resists the phrase ***"utterly sinful"*** but it literally means, *"Exceedingly evil and superabundantly sinful."* Paul uses the worst word he can think of (sin) and then puts a strong adjective in front of it. Sin deceives, it defiles and finally it destroys. The Law illuminates, it ignites, and it incinerates.

Let me illustrate from my own life. When I was about 8 or 9 my family came down here to the flatlands of Illinois from the Promiseland to visit my mom's old college roommate. I don't remember exactly what town it was but it was in northern Illinois somewhere. At that time of my life I was fascinated with kitchen matches and had been warned several times to not play with them. My mom's friend had a couple sons my age and so we hung out while they exchanged college memories. To my delight I quickly found out they were fascinated with fire as well so we snuck some kitchen matches from the kitchen and headed out to a forest preserve.

As we walked we lit matches using every conceivable surface. We lit them off the ground, off our teeth, and even off the buttons on our shirts. When we'd light a match it would *illuminate* everything. When we got into the forest, we had gotten braver (or more stupid) and began throwing lit matches into the long dry grass and watched everything *ignite*. We thought this was fun as we'd laugh and try to stomp the flames out. Unfortunately, the wind whipped up and started a raging inferno, *incinerating* everything in its path. We did the brave thing and ran like mad; stopping to tell someone that the forest was on fire.

As we headed back to my buddies' house, we heard the fire trucks racing toward the forest preserve. We were trying to figure out how we could avoid telling our parents and I knew *I* was incinerated at that point because my mom would be able to tell that I had done something wrong. Sure enough, as soon as we walked in, she asked what I had done. I broke down and told her. I still remember her making me call the fire department to tell them that we did it. That was not easy to do but I don't play with matches anymore.

We were on a slippery slope. I had been told to not mess around with matches but I did it anyway. At first the match *illuminated* my deliberate disobedience and then it *ignited* a fire I couldn't put out and finally my sin *incinerated* a forest. Sin is like that.

Application

1. Its important to call sin "sin." I listened to a sermon recently by Andy Stanley in which he made the point that most of us would

rather use the word “mistake” instead of “sin” when we mess up:

If everything I do wrong can be dumbed down to where it's just a mistake, that makes me **amistaker**, which means I don't have sin. If I don't have sin, I'm not a **sinner**. If I'm not a sinner, I don't have any need for a **Savior**. If you're just a mistaker, then all you have to do is do better...Until you embrace the fact that you're a sinner, you're not open to embracing the fact that God sent you a Savior” (“It's No Mistake,” as heard on Preaching Today Audio, Issue 286).

Here's an action step. The next time you sin, don't tell God or someone else that you're sorry and hope they just forget about it. Instead say, *“I sinned. Please forgive me.”*

2. Preach Law to the proud and grace to the humble. We must give the bad news before someone will be interested in the good news. Too often we picture Jesus as the poor Savior just waiting longingly outside the door of our lives. Or, we imagine Him as the one who is there just to bring us happiness and health and wealth. We do a huge dishonor to God and a big disservice to people when we present Jesus this way. The “gospel of the good life” promises to deliver all that we desire, which is ultimately an appeal to our covetousness anyway.

Did you hear what Lou Piniella, the manager of the Chicago Cubs, said in response to a question about why the Cubs have not had a hot streak this summer? Listen to this: *“I think we all need to go to church and put more in the collection box”* (“The Pantagraph,” 6/22/07). I don't think that will help because God already has the Packers as His team but if the Cubbies want to donate to the Family Life Center that would be fine. You see, Jesus is not simply our “need-meeter” who comes to the rescue when we perform for Him. To borrow the title of one of Francine River's books, He is our “sin-eater.” It was Oswald Chambers who said: *“Conviction of sin brings a man to his hopeless, helpless condition; until he gets there the Cross of Christ has no meaning for him.”*

One of the best ways to convince someone of their need for the Savior is by helping them see their utter sinfulness. You can do that by taking your friend to the 10 Commandments and asking this question: *“How are you doing at keeping these?”* Greg Steir suggests that we need to use the “hammer of the Law” before we can introduce someone to the “healer of their soul.” We need to admit our brokenness before we can be put back together. We must see our lostness before we will be attracted to the Lord. If we don't see our need, we'll walk away.

Jesus did this with the Rich Young Ruler in Luke 18. This wealthy man wanted to know how he could obtain eternal life. Jesus took him to the five horizontal commandments in Lk 18:20:

You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.’” The man stuck his chest out and said, ***“All these I have kept since I was a boy.”*** Jesus then went deeper and drew out an application from the Commandment #1: ***“You shall have no other gods before me”*** when he said these stinging words to this man who had money as his master: ***You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”***

The Bible says that instead of confessing his sin, he just became very sad and walked away from the Savior. He was not willing to admit that he was a sinner and so he had no need for the Savior.

3. Confess that you are a sinner and receive the Savior.

Greg Steir says that we have two big problems. First, one sin is enough to condemn us to hell. Second, our good deeds can't make up for our bad ones. We're in trouble, aren't we?

[Sit in chair and show how sin makes us stuck. Look to Savior for salvation and then drop to knees in prayer]

Closing

A pastor from Michigan once related the following incident to a large audience in St. Louis:

A young, talented and tender-hearted actress was passing along the street of a large city. Seeing a pale, sick girl lying upon a couch just within the half-open door of a beautiful dwelling, she entered, with the thought that by her pleasant conversation she might cheer the young invalid. The sick girl was a devoted Christian, and her words, her patience, her submission and heaven-lit countenance, so demonstrated the spirit of her religion that the actress was led to give some earnest thought to the claims of Christianity, and was thoroughly converted, and became a true follower of Christ.

She told her father, the leader of the theater troupe, of her conversion, and of her desire to abandon the stage, stating that she could not live a consistent Christian life and follow her life on the stage because her

performances were provocative. Her father was astonished beyond measure, and told his daughter that their living would be lost to them and their business ruined, if she persisted in her resolution.

Loving her father dearly, she was shaken somewhat in her purpose, and partially consented to fill the published engagement to be met in a few days. She was the star of the troupe, and a general favorite. Every preparation was made for the play in which she was to appear. The evening came and the father rejoiced that he had won back his daughter, and that their living was not to be lost. The hour arrived; a large audience had assembled. The curtain rose, and the young actress stepped forward firmly amid the applause of the multitude. A light beamed from her beautiful face and amid the breathless silence of the audience, she repeated these words:

**My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer, my Saviour art Thou;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.**

That was all she said. She had given all the follies of her sin to the Savior. In the place of Law-living and Law-breaking she was now committed to loving her Lord, no matter the consequence. Leaving her audience in tears, she retired from the stage, never to appear on it again. And through her influence, her father was converted, and many others as well.

Let's stand and sing that song called "My Jesus I Love Thee."

Missing Romans 7:14-25 Why We Do What We Don't Want to Do

Romans 8:1 How to Do What God Wants You to Do - 7/15/07

Three ministers went fishing one day, all friends who pastored different churches in the same town. While they were fishing they began confessing their sins to one another. The first pastor said, "Do you know what my big sin is? It's drinking. I know it's wrong, but every Friday night I drive to a city where no one knows me and go to a bar and get drunk." The second pastor said, "Well fellas, to be honest with you, I've got a big sin too...mine is gambling." Finally it was the third pastor's turn: "Guys, I probably should have gone first because my big sin is gossip...and I can't wait to get back to town!"

As we've been roaming through the first seven chapters of the Book of Romans, God has used his Word to expose each of us as desperately depraved sinners. At the risk of over-promising and under-delivering, our text today from Romans 8 could be the most life-changing section of Scripture you will ever encounter. I'm going to ask you to lock in like never before, to listen attentively, and to allow God's Word to go down deep within you because this is truly great news.

Romans 8 is Great!

Many people have said that Romans 8 is their favorite chapter in the Bible. Commentators describe this chapter as the "mountain peak" of Scripture and as a triumphant "hymn of hope." Douglas Moo refers to it as "The inner sanctuary within the cathedral of Christian faith." Let me list some reasons why I think so many people have benefited so much from these verses.

1. Assurance is emphasized.

In what has been called "a rhapsody on assurance," this chapter begins with "Therefore there is now no condemnation..." and ends with "nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." It starts with no condemnation and closes with no separation, and in between you find no defeat. The believer's standing is safe, secure and settled.

2. The Holy Spirit is prominent.

The third member of the Trinity is mentioned no less than 19 times in this chapter, almost once every two verses. Having said that, this chapter is not so much *about* the Holy Spirit, as it is on what the Spirit *does* on behalf of the believer. The Holy Spirit is involved in our salvation (8:1-2) and in our sanctification (8:3-4). He gives life and peace, guides us, empowers us, helps us, prays for us and assures us of our adoption into God's family.

It's interesting to notice that the personal pronoun "I" that is so prominent in chapter 7 largely disappears in Romans 8 because the Holy Spirit becomes the dominant person. He is not a possession to hold on to but a Person to love and obey. As we will learn the coming weeks, God never intended for us to live the Christian life on our own but through the power of the Spirit.

3. This chapter contains the essence of Christianity.

Because of what Christ did on the cross, taking the condemnation that is rightfully ours, those who have put their faith in Him will never be condemned. Jesus completely and permanently paid the debt of sin and the penalty of the law. Look with me at the words of Jesus in John 3:17-18:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

The gospel of "no condemnation" is being spread in 5-Day-Clubs in Livingston County to over 130 children so far this summer – approximately 35 have indicated they've made a decision for Christ, in Miami through Kyle Robson, in the Dominican Republic through Emily Bill, in Uganda in a couple weeks through Lindsay Carley, in Kenya right now through Kathy Marley, Linda Carley and Katie Vietti – the latest report is that over 1,000 people have come to Christ and already five new churches have been started! And, beginning this next weekend, our students will be sharing about the Savior in New York City.

BTW, I will be posting updates on my blog as I get them. Simply go to pontiacbible.org and click on " Blogging with Pastor Brian " on the left side of the homepage.

4. This chapter is astounding and overwhelming.

The truths here are both attractive and yet elusive for many of us. We want this to be true and yet for many of us we don't really believe it because we know how unworthy we are. Some of you are convinced that God has condemned you and that you are spiritually disqualified because of what you've done.

Breaking it Down

I heard this week that some new words have been added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. One of my favorites is *ginormous*, which combines the words "gigantic" with "enormous." Without a doubt, Romans 8:1 is "ginormous." We're going to repeat this verse several times this morning so that by the time we're done, we'll have it memorized. Some of you have shut down already because you think you have a mental memorization block. Our new members learn five verses so we can learn one together this morning. You can do it.

We must do it because if we can get this verse into our heads, into our hearts and then live it out through our hands, we will never be the same! Once we have it memorized we will be able to draw on it for the rest of our lives.

Let's say Romans 8:1 together:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Let's break it down so we can get it down by looking at *why*, *when*, *what*, and *who*.

Why: ***"Therefore there is..."***

The word **"therefore"** serves to tie the proceeding seven chapters with chapter 8 by serving as a link to everything that Paul has established. In the original this is very emphatic, indicating that what he is about to say is extremely important. It can be translated this way: *"So, then, consequently."* I've picked just one verse from each of the first seven chapters to remind us where we've been...

Romans 1:18: ***"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."***

Romans 2:5: ***"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed."***

Romans 3:12: ***"All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."***

Romans 4:13: ***"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith."***

Romans 5:18: ***"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men."***

Romans 6:11: ***"In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."***

Romans 7:24: ***“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”***

Let’s work on that first phrase together: ***“Therefore, there is…”*** Let’s say it again.

When: ***“Now…”***

For the born-again believer there is assurance that there will be no judgment to come in the future but I want you to notice that we can and should experience this assurance right *now* in the present. Therefore there is *today* no condemnation. If you are redeemed then *right now*, at this very moment you are secure. One pastor put it this way: *“No condemnation means there is neither judgment from God on me, nor annoyance with God with respect to me—neither on the last day nor today!”*

Now we’ll add just one word to the phrase we’ve already learned: ***“Therefore, there is now…”*** Say it with me.

What: ***“No condemnation…”***

Interestingly, in the original word construction in Greek, the first word is not “therefore” but rather the word ***“no.”*** This makes it very strong. In addition, Paul chose a strong negation to make the point that there is absolutely nothing by way of condemnation for the Christian. Here’s a literal translation: *“Not even one, therefore now…”* We could say it like this: *“Not even one will ever be condemned to hell who is in Christ Jesus.”* God now commends and doesn’t condemn the Christian – not even one, not even one bit.

The word ***“condemn”*** comes from two Greek words; one which means “down” and the other which means “to judge.” Literally it means to “judge down” and was used of the Roman emperor as he sat on a throne when prisoners were brought before him. As he heard their cases he would either “judge down” or “judge up.” I wonder if that’s where we get the “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” expression. Friend, if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus as your sacrificial substitute, the Almighty Judge gives you a “thumbs up.”

God won’t “judge down” because He sent Christ to “come down.” The judgment we deserved settled on the Savior and now God’s blessings “rain down” on us. God has a gavel of grace for the believer as He pronounces this verdict: *“No condemnation – you are now a saint, not a sinner; you are not unrighteous because I have declared you righteous.”*

Paul is really picking up the truth that he stated in Romans 5:1:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Jesus said it this way in John 5:24:

I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

God’s judgment will not come down now or ever for the believer. Those in Christ will not be condemned because Jesus was condemned in their stead; there is no punishment because Christ bore the punishment.

Here’s an important truth to remember. When God says “no condemnation” it’s not based upon our performance but on our position. God declares it to be so because of the finished work of Christ on our behalf. He doesn’t revoke it when we rebel or suddenly seethe with anger towards us when we sin. We have peace with God and we are not condemned.

Think with me about the implications of this statement by Pastor Steve Brown: *“How would you behave if you knew that your behavior was not the deciding factor when it comes to God’s acceptance of you?”*

Having said that, let’s think about what this *doesn’t mean*. Paul is not saying that there’s no cause for our condemnation. There are plenty of reasons for us to be condemned. If you’re not convinced, just reread the first seven chapters of Romans. Or just look at the sins you committed this week alone and you know that God has cause to condemn you. He’s also not saying that there’s no *failure* for the follower of Christ because we all fail. He’s also not saying that saints don’t *struggle* or *stumble*, because we do.

Ray Pritchard offers this perspective: *“When Jesus saved you, he didn’t say he would take away all your problems. No, but he did say this. In your problems, there is no condemnation. In your struggles there is no condemnation. In your going astray there is no condemnation.”*

The commentator Matthew Henry adds these golden words:

He does not say, *‘There is no accusation against them,’* for this there is; but the accusation is thrown out, and the indictment quashed. He does not say, *‘There is nothing in them that deserves condemnation,’* for this

there is, and they see it, and own it, and mourn over it, and condemn themselves for it; but it shall not be their ruin.

He does not say, 'There is no cross, no affliction to them or no displeasure in the affliction,' for this there may be; but no condemnation. They may be chastened of the Lord, but not condemned with the world...They are in Christ Jesus, as in their city of refuge, and so are protected from the avenger of blood. He is their Advocate...In Christ God does not only not condemn them, but is well pleased with them."

One of my favorite hymns is "And Can it be that I Should Gain?" by **Charles Wesley**. The last verse could have come right from Romans 8...

No condemnation now I dread;

Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;

Alive in Him, my living Head,

And clothed in righteousness divine,

Bold I approach th'eternal throne,

And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

OK, let's add the phrase "no condemnation" to the first part of the verse. Ready? Let's say it together: "**Therefore there is now no condemnation...**" Let's say it again.

Who: "**For those who are in Christ Jesus.**"

This promise of no condemnation is available for all but applied only to those who are in Christ Jesus.

It's not automatic just because you're an American or just because you go to church or just because you've given some money or done some cool things for others. It's only for those who are "**in Christ Jesus.**" This is one of Paul's favorite phrases, using "**in Christ**" 164 different times. To be a Christian is to be in Christ. Turn over to Romans 16:7:

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

The only way you can be declared righteous is to be in Christ. The only way to have your sins forgiven is to be in Christ. Listen to Philippians 3:9:

And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Because we are "in Christ," His righteousness is credited to us. Because Jesus is free from condemnation, so are we because we are in Him. Remember too that there are not different degrees of being in Christ. If you are a born again believer you are no less in Christ than Billy Graham is. It doesn't matter how mature or immature you are in the faith; whether you are ordinary or ornery, tough or tender. You are either in Christ or you are not according to 1 Corinthians 15:22:

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

It's like Noah and the Ark. When God told Noah to build the ark he told him very clearly that he was going to send judgment on the earth and the only way to escape it was to be *in* the ark when the floods came.

Genesis 7:15-16: ***Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark...Then the Lord shut him in.***

Those in the ark were safe; those who were outside were condemned. And once the door was shut, it guaranteed safety and security for those inside but it was too late for anyone else to enter. Don't wait any longer!

That means that all of what we've been saying so far is applicable only to those who are "**in Christ Jesus.**" The Bible is very clear. You are either "in Adam" and doomed to condemnation or you are "in Christ" and destined for commendation. You are in the light or in the darkness. You are a child of God or a child of the devil. And if you're in Christ, when God looks at you, He sees Jesus Christ and credits you with all that is said about His Son and you will never be condemned. If you are in Christ, then what happened to Him happened to you.

The words of **John Piper** capture this better than I can:

All of God's condemning wrath and all of his omnipotent opposition to us in our sin has been replaced by almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance. In other words, if you are in Christ Jesus all of God's action toward you is almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance. It is not mixed. It is not as though some days He is against you with wrath – and those days are bad days – while other days He is for you with love – and those days are good days. That is emphatically not the case and not the way to think about it. It may seem that way. But that is precisely why we need the truth of God's revelation in His word. Most of the time in this world of pleasure and pain things are not what they seem. To understand what things are really like and what is really happening we need to put on the lens of God's Word...in Christ Jesus God is always for you. Always! This is where Paul is going in Romans 8. He gets there in Ro 8:31 and says, "What shall we say to all these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" ([No Condemnation in Christ Jesus, Part 2](#))

Personalizing the Promise

Let's face it. Some of us think this is too good to be true. In a sin-soaked world filled with sickness and disappointment and pain and agony, how can this be possible? In fact, this is so difficult to believe, that some of you have secretly changed this verse to read something like this: ***"Therefore there is now some or a lot of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

If you have accepted Christ God is not angry with you, regardless of what you have done. He loves you and cherishes you. He's giving you a thumbs-up because you matter to Him. While we may celebrate this Scripture and be able to memorize it, I know that many of you struggle to personally put it into practice so let's get real specific.

I'm going to make a statement that will reflect what some people think and I want all of us to respond with the promise of Romans 8:1: ***"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

- If you were raised in a religious environment that has caused you to be filled with guilt and shame even today we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

- If you're struggling with sin and your failures cause you to fall short, may I remind you that these words come right after Romans 7:19: ***"For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep on doing."*** Listen to this message from God, fellow sinner:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

- If your memories of what you did in the past are paralyzing you, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

- If your memories of what someone else did to you in the past are haunting you and eroding your self-image, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

- If you're struggling with sickness and have begun to think that God is somehow paying you back for your sins, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Having said that, 1 Corinthians 11:30 does indicate that some have gotten sick, and some even died, as a result of taking communion in an unworthy manner: ***"That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep."***

- If you see your problems as punishment from God, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Note: God does discipline us but it's because He loves us as we're reminded in Hebrews 12:7-11. There is no condemnation but there may be some consequences. There is no doom for the believer, but there is often discipline.

- If you find yourself thinking that God is angry with you and out to get you, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

If someone around you is condemning you and putting you down and you think you are worthless, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If your relationships always seem to rupture and you feel like no one cares, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If your children are breaking your heart and you feel like it's all your fault, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If you find yourself falling continuously short when you compare yourself with other Christians, we say to you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

If Satan is accusing and condemning you as he will because he is the accuser, tell him that he has nothing on you:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

One pastor said this:

No matter how many times you may have failed God, failed yourself and failed your family you are forgiven. No matter how bad you may have failed you can be sure that, if you are trusting in Christ, there is no condemnation for you.

I love what **Charles Spurgeon** had to say when preaching on this passage:

Oh, for faith to lay hold on this! Oh, for an overpowering faith that shall get the victory over doubts and fears, and make us enjoy the liberty with which Christ makes men free! You that believe in Christ, go to your beds this night and say, 'If I die in my bed, I cannot be condemned!' Should you wake the next morning, go into the world and say, 'I am not condemned!' When the devil howls at you, tell him, 'You may accuse, but I am not condemned!' And if sometimes your sins rise, say, 'I know you, but you are all gone forever. I am not condemned!'

Tony Campolo writes about a friend of his who has an adorable four-year-old daughter who is very bright and talkative. One night there was a violent thunderstorm with lightning that shook the house and caused everyone to tremble. His friend ran up the stairs to his daughter's room to assure her that everything would be alright. When he opened the door he found his daughter standing on the window sill with her arms and legs spread out on the glass. He shouted to her, "What are you doing?" She turned away from the flashing lightning and happily responded, "I think God is trying to take my picture!"

If you are in Christ revel in the fact that God is crazy about you. If you are outside of Christ you are condemned already and judgment is still in front of you. Come to Him now. Run to Him for safety. Let's say our verse together one more time: "***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***"

We're going to close this morning with a song called, [Behold the Lord \(sung by Robin Mark\)](#). If you need to get some things right with Him use this time to do so.

There is no condemnation now for those

Who put their trust in You alone

We worship You oh Son of God

There is no separation from His love

No pow'r on earth or heights above

Can take us from You Son of God

Romans 8:2-11 Living the Spirit-controlled Life - 7/22/07

Last week we learned that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I decided to preach on just one point because I wanted us to get it into our heads and hearts so we will never forget. Let's see if we can quote Romans 8:1: "***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***"

In the message we looked at the *why, when, what* and *who*. Today our emphasis will be on *how* to live all this out from Romans 8:2-11. Before we tackle this text, let's identify six faulty ways to live the Christian life. Three of these are not original with me.

Faulty Ways to Live Our Faith

1. Cliché Christianity. Believe it or not, this past week was *Sports Cliché Week*. I came across the eleven most overused sports phrases of all time and thought it might be fun to see how well you know some of them. I'll say the first part of these clichés and you shout out how they end.

- Take it one game at a time.*
- Records are made to be broken.* We hear a lot of this surrounding Barry Bonds.
- This team has overcome a lot of adversity.*
- They control their own destiny.*

It strikes me that we default to many Christian clichés as well. Some have sarcastically referred to this practice as "Jesus jargon." These overused phrases convey little meaning because we hear them way too often. Unfortunately, many of us just repeat the expected vocabulary without really thinking about what the words mean. As a result, they lose their impact. Here are some that come to mind:

- Just have faith.*
- God touched me.*
- Let go and let God.*
- God told me.*

Here's the danger. You and I can say the right sayings and yet our hearts can be far from God. And, since most Christians use these common clichés, it's easy to fall into a superficial spirituality. On top of that, we can fool others and even ourselves simply by saying the right words. But none of this fools God as the first part of Isaiah 29:13 reminds us:

These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me

2. Right Rules.

Some of you are trying to live the Christian life by a set of rules: "*Do this, don't do that!*" The problem of living by rules is that it can lead to legalism. On top of that, according to Colossians 2:22-23, it doesn't work anyway:

These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

God is not impressed either as the second part of Isaiah 29:13 says:

Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.

3. Formulaic Faith.

Some of us are trying to live our faith by following formulas. These formulas are everywhere: *Three Avenues to Answered Prayer, Four Steps to Spiritual Success* and *Five Ways to Walk in the Spirit*. There are at least two problems with formulaic faith. First, it can lead to mechanical Christianity. Second, it doesn't work very often.

4. Performance Posture.

Way too many of us are trying to please God by our performance and some of us think that He will only accept us if we make ourselves acceptable. As the early chapters of the Book of Romans make clear, we will always fall short. If you're struggling in this regard, see previous sermon.

5. Extra Experiences.

Some people try to live the Christian life by seeking deeply moving, life-changing, earth-shattering, emotional experiences with God. The problem is that experiences don't last because we must eventually come off the mountain top and resume life in the valley. And, if you seek experiences, you'll yo-yo in your faith, going up and down depending on the experiences you have. While God uses conferences, camps, mission trips, moving movies, and dynamic speakers, they alone can't sustain our faith.

6. Coasting Christianity.

Some of you have settled into a mediocre, lukewarm Christian life. You might be a coasting Christian because you think Christianity is too difficult.

Do any of these alternatives describe you? Let me say that there is some truth in each one. Most of the clichés we use *represent* real truth. Rules *can* be good. Formulas *can* be helpful. God *is* pleased when we obey Him. Ecstatic experiences with the Almighty *can* be life-changing. And finally, Christianity *is* too difficult – if you try to live it without the Holy Spirit's power. The life of faith *is* impossible without the empowering and filling of the Holy Spirit. If you're looking for a secret to spirituality, look no further than the Holy Spirit.

How Then Should We Live?

If many of us default to one or more of these faulty ways to live out our faith, *how* then should we be living? Our passage today gives us three ways. Note: this is not a formula but rather a framework for living the Spirit-controlled life.

1. Focus on what God has done. Romans 8:2-4 spell out what God has already done for us. We have been given...

- Freedom.** Look at Ro 8:2: ***“Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”***

The word “because” tells us the reason why believers have no condemnation – we are set free from the domination of sin and delivered from death through Christ Jesus. The Spirit gives freedom so that we no longer have to sin. 2 Corinthians 3:17: ***“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”*** That means if you sin, you choose to do so, not because you have to live that way any longer. As Jesus victoriously declared in John 8:32, true followers of Christ are free: ***“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*** Just in case we didn't catch it the first time, he repeats this idea four verses later in John 8:36: ***“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”***

Warren Wiersbe adds, *“Freedom does not mean I am able to do whatever I want to do. That's the worst kind of bondage. Freedom means I have been set free to become all that God wants me to be, to achieve all that God wants me to achieve, to enjoy all that God wants me to enjoy.”*

I am not condemned for my sin and I'm not constrained to sin. I'm also not charged with my sin.

- Forgiveness.** Verse 3 teaches that God knew the Law was unable to save us and so out of love, He sent His own Son as a sin offering, condemning sin in us: ***“For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.”*** ”

That means you and I can never be condemned for our sins because the price has already been paid for that which condemned us. Notice that God condemned the sin, not the sinner because He sent the Savior to be our sin offering. What the Law could not do, the Lamb could.

- Fulfillment.** Amazingly, because Jesus is our sin offering, all of God's righteous requirements have been fully fulfilled in us. We see this in verse 4: ***“In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”***

We no longer have to be dominated by sin; we're different because the Holy Spirit is in our lives. I love Zechariah 4:6: ***“‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”***

Essentially, we must live out who we are in Christ by focusing on what God has done. In his book called, “Victory Over the Darkness,” Neil Anderson states the following: *“Understanding your identity in Christ is absolutely essential to your success at living the victorious Christian life.”* I was talking with someone this week and we both realized that the key to victory is to focus on who we are in Christ. Allow these truths to pour over you right now.

I am accepted because...

- I am God's child ~ John 1:12
- I have been justified ~ Romans 5:1
- I have been bought with a price, and I belong to God ~ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- I have been chosen by God and adopted as His child ~ Ephesians 1:3-8
- I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins ~ Colossians 1:13-14
- I have direct access to the throne of grace through Jesus Christ ~ Hebrews 4:14-16

I am secure because...

- I am free from condemnation ~ Romans 8:1-2
- I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances ~ Romans 8:28
- I cannot be separated from the love of God ~ Romans 8:31-39
- I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me ~ Philippians 1:6
- I am a citizen of Heaven ~ Philippians 3:20
- I am born of God, and the evil one cannot touch me ~ 1 John 5:18

I am significant because...

- I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit ~ John 15:16
- I am God's temple** ~ 1 Corinthians 3:16
- I am a minister of reconciliation for God ~ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
- I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm ~ Ephesians 2:6
- I am God's workmanship ~ Ephesians 2:10
- I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me ~ Philippians 4:1

The first thing we must do if we're serious about living the Spirit-controlled life is to focus on what God has already done. Secondly, we have to get hold of our thoughts before they get hold of us.

2. Think about what you think about.

Look at Ro 8:5-8, noticing all the times the word "mind" is used:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

The word "mind" refers to disposition or attitude and is in the present tense. That means that non-Christians are habitually disposed to destructive thoughts; while those who live according to the Spirit have their minds controlled by the Spirit.

First used in the field of computer science, the phrase "Garbage In, Garbage Out," really expresses a biblical principle. When we allow garbage into our minds, garbage will come out. If we allow godly thoughts in, godly behavior follows. Proverbs 23:7KJV in the says,

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...

That means that we are what we think. In his book called, "As a Man Thinketh," James Allen writes: "A man cannot directly choose his circumstances, but he can choose his thoughts, and so indirectly, yet surely, shape his circumstances."

We see this in the contrast between the way the army of Israel approached the giant named Goliath and the way David did in 1 Samuel 17. The soldiers allowed false thoughts and fear to fill their minds and as a result in verse 24, they "**all ran away in great fear**" while David, who focused his mind on God's power, "**ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him**" in verse 48. At the risk of using a cliché, your outlook often does determine your outcome. Or more precisely, your input determines your output because every thought carries with it a spiritual charge. Our thoughts either feed the flesh which leads to death or they feed the Spirit which

leads to life and peace.

Right now you have a series of thoughts flowing through your mind (some of you are wondering when the sermon will end). In fact, your thoughts are flowing faster than the Vermillion was this week after all the rain. Unfortunately, too many of us just allow stuff to come in without thinking about what we allow ourselves to think about. We're sloppy in this regard, just allowing whatever to come into our minds. Let me give you some action steps.

Recognize that you're in a war.

What you allow yourself to think about will be a life-long struggle. As one person has said, *"Each of us, in effect, is a walking civil war."* Check out Galatians 5:17: ***"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 do not do what you want."***

As Ray Pritchard writes in his new book *Stealth Attack*, Satan does not fight fair so we better be prepared. Incidentally, the study guide for this book is now posted on our website and can be downloaded for free (www.pontiacbible.org).

Capture each thought and analyze it.

Satan has declared war on you and the battlefield is in the mind. That's why Paul tells us to be vigilant in 2 Corinthians 10:5: ***"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."***

Don't let *any* thought in without capturing it first. If it's a good one, let it enter; if not, demolish it with the truth of God's Word. In the film "A Beautiful Mind," John Nash is brilliant but he hears destructive voices in his mind. These irrational thoughts are very real to him and play on his darkest fears. He eventually realizes that he can't listen to them as he turns to his friend and says: *"I'm not that different from you. We all hear voices. We just have to decide which ones we're going to listen to."*

Fill your mind with good things.

Do you know that you will start thinking about what you are exposed to the most? That's why studies are now linking violence on TV, movies and video games with violent behavior. It's true that we need to watch what we watch.

Philippians 4:8 tells us what we're to think about: ***"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things."***

I was talking to someone this week who told me that he *has to* have his radio set on a Christian station because if he doesn't his mind will fill up with destructive thoughts. That leads to a question. **What are you listening to?**

Hebrews 3:1: ***"Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus."*** This is a good prayer to pray: *"Lord, saturate my thoughts with truth, and let your Word in me abide; then thinking on the pure and good, may my whole life be edified."*

Talk tough to yourself.

This may sound strange but it's actually quite helpful to audibly attack error in your thinking. I know someone who says words like this out loud, *"This thinking is wrong. It's from the pit of hell. I refuse to entertain those thoughts."* This goes back to the word "set" in verse 5 as it refers to a "fixed mindset."

We see this in Colossians 3:2: ***"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."*** A mind set on the flesh is death but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. That's exactly what Isaiah 26:3 in the New Living Translation proclaims: ***"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you!"***

In other words, we must let the mind of the Master be the Master of our minds as Philippians 2:5 says: ***"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."***

It's difficult to discipline our minds but we must do so. Lanny Bassham, is an Olympic gold medalist in shooting the small-bore rifle. Listen to how he trained himself to hit the bulls-eye as told to *Sports Illustrated*:

"Our sport is controlled non-movement. We are shooting from 50 meters--over half a football field--at a bull's eye three-quarters the size of a dime. If the angle of error at the point of the barrel is more than .005 of a

millimeter (that is five one-thousandths), you drop into the next circle and lose a point. So we have to learn how to make everything stop. I stop my breathing. I stop my digestion by not eating for 12 hours before the competition. I train by running to keep my pulse around 60, so I have a full second between beats... You do all of this and you have the technical control. But you have to have some years of experience in reading conditions: the wind, the mirage. Then you have the other 80% of the problem—focusing the mind” (Sports Illustrated, 8/2/76).

Friend, how are you doing at focusing your mind? First, let’s focus on what God has done. Second, let’s think about what we think about. Third, and we’re just going to introduce this point and pick it up next week, we must submit to the Spirit’s control.

3. Submit to the Spirit’s control.

Romans 8:9-11:

You, however, [he’s making an emphatic distinction here between unbelievers in verse 8 and believers by addressing them personally] **are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.** [This literally means, “To be at home within you.”] **And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”**

- The Holy Spirit is alive within each Christian.** If you don’t have the Spirit, then you don’t have spiritual life. That means every believer is home to the Holy Spirit. This denotes a “settled permanent penetrative influence.” You don’t need to ask Him to come in because He enters at conversion, you don’t need a “second blessing” or worry that He’s ever going to leave. I love how Ezekiel 37:14: **“I will put my Spirit in you and you will live”** is fulfilled by the words of Jesus in John 14:16-17: **“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”**

Galatians 4:6 describes the intimate relationship between the Holy Spirit within us and God the Father: **“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”**

- The Holy Spirit desires to have control in each Christian’s life.** Since the Holy Spirit lives within believers, you and I must give Him control of our lives. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: **“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”**

The issue is not getting more of the Holy Spirit but allowing Him to have more of us. When we received Christ, we received all of God we will ever get. As born again believers, we don’t need to receive the Holy Spirit; we need to respond to the Holy Spirit whom we have already received.

- The Holy Spirit promises future resurrection for the believer.** Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, believers will be raised from the grave and will receive new bodies. The Holy Spirit within is like a down payment on God’s future deliverance.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52: **“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”**

Let’s summarize. First, focus on what God has done. Second, think about what you think about. And third, submit to the Spirit’s control. Galatians 5:16: **“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”** Another translation puts it this way: **“Keep in step with the Spirit...”** The key is to keep in step with the Spirit, not lagging behind and not racing ahead.

With You All the Way

In the book called *“With You All the Way”* by Max Lucado, three knights are given a test to see which one is worthy of marrying the king’s daughter. Their challenge is to make it through a dangerous and deadly forest filled with creatures called “Hopenots,” small, sly creatures with yellow eyes. Hopenots were not strong but they were very clever. The first knight to make it thought the forest would marry the princess.

The king's son explains the challenge to the three knights, telling them that each of them could take along one companion. When they wondered how they would ever find the castle he told them they must listen to the song that the king would play three times a day on his flute: *"Follow his song and you will find the castle."* The son then pulled an ivory flute from his sack and explained that only he and his father had these kinds of flutes. He put the instrument to his lips and played a soft, sweet song.

The son then gave a closing caution: *"Consider the danger of Hemlock and wisely choose the one who will be with you on your journey."* And so they did. The next morning the three knights mounted their horses and entered Hemlock. One was known for his strength. One was known for his speed. The third knight was known for his wisdom. Beside each rode their chosen companion.

The days of waiting for those in the castle passed slowly as they all wondered which knight would win the princess. Three times a day the king sent his song soaring into the trees of Hemlock. After many days and countless songs, a watchman spotted two figures stumbling out of the forest. The king gave orders for the man to be dressed as a prince and not to tell anyone who he was because he wanted to reveal the winner at that night's banquet.

That evening a joyful spirit filled the banquet hall. At every table the people tried to guess which knight had survived Hemlock Forest and the Hopenots. Finally, the moment came to present the winner. The people became quiet as the king began to play the flute and they turned to see who would enter. Many thought it would be Carlisle, the strongest. Others felt it would be Alon, the swiftest. But it was neither. The knight who survived the journey was Cassidon, the wisest.

When the king asked about his journey, Cassidon replied: *"The Hopenots were crafty. They attacked, but we fought back...but what nearly destroyed us, though, was something far worse...they imitated...each time the song of your flute would enter the forest, a hundred flutes would begin to play. All around us we heard music—songs from every direction."* The king asked the question that was on everyone's lips: *"Then how did you hear my song?"* *"I chose the right companion,"* he answered as he motioned for his fellow traveler to enter. The people gasped. It was the king's son. In his hand he carried the flute.

"I knew there was only one who could play your song exactly like you," Cassidon explained. *There was no one else I would have trusted to be with me all the way. So I asked him to travel with me. As we journeyed, he played your song. I learned it so well that though a thousand false flutes tried to hide your music, I could hear your song above them all. It was with me all the way."* And with that, the celebration began.

Last week we learned that God has given us a "thumbs up" because there is no condemnation. Now we learn that we've been given the companionship of the Holy Spirit...and He's with us all the way. Don't settle for cheap imitations. Listen to His song and let the celebration begin.

Romans 8:12-17 Allowing God's Spirit to Lead You - 7/29/07

Just as Paul and Grace Becker have been led to a different ministry in Mexico, so too, the Holy Spirit leads His people today in ways that will bring Christ glory and expand the Father's kingdom.

Our students returned late last night from their mission trip to New York City and have given testimony to how the Holy Spirit did His work *in* them, and *through* them this past week. We'll hear from these students, our 5-Day Club missionaries and Emily Bill as she tells us what God did in the Dominican Republic two weeks from today. Then, on August 26th, we'll hear from our Kenya team and from Lindsay Carley as she shares what she experienced in Uganda. We're also hoping that Kyle Robson, who served in Miami, will be able to join us this summer.

Pastor Jeff asked each of the students to write out what they learned this past week and then he sent their responses to me so I could post them on the blog. Here are some that really jumped out at me...

- God has taught me that I'm beautiful no matter what anyone tells me.*
- I have been more brave by going to talk to people I have never met before.*
- Don't stereotype people...get to know them.*
- First impressions are often wrong. Everyone is made in God's image and is important to Him and therefore to us.*
- The Holy Spirit is doing something amazing in me this week. Pray that I will continue to keep my eyes, ears and heart open to hear what He wants me to hear and do what God is calling me to do.*
- When the Holy Spirit moves—He really moves!*

Aren't you glad that the Holy Spirit still moves in *and* among His people today? He's going to do that right now as we look to His Holy and inerrant Word because He will illuminate that which He also inspired. Let me read 1 Corinthians 2:12 and then let's pray:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

Two weeks ago we learned that there is no condemnation for the Christ-follower. Last week we rejoiced in the fact that we have been given the companionship of the Holy Spirit. As we continue in our sweet study of Romans 8, we come again to the little word **“therefore,”** this time in verse 12. This is a clue that Paul is now moving from instruction to exhortation; from what God has done *for* us to what is expected *from* us. As a result of having no condemnation and having the companionship of the Holy Spirit, Paul is going to describe our *debt*, our *delight* and our *destiny*. Let’s look first at our debt.

Our Debt

You and have been given so much, haven’t we? With all that we’ve received comes some responsibility. Check out Ro 8:12-13:

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation-but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

Paul uses the word “brothers,” which literally means “from the same womb” to remind us of the closeness that Christians have with each other because we are in the same family. The word “obligation” refers to one who owes another and is under duty to live a certain way. We have a moral compulsion as Christians and we’re obligated to the Almighty in at least two ways.

1. Don’t live like you used to.

If you’re a born again believer, you are now someone you never were before as 2 Corinthians 5:17 says: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”** Too many of us fall back into flesh-living instead of faith-living. Friends, you and I owe the flesh nothing because it has never done us anything good. In fact, we feed the flesh way too much already! Producing either self-indulgence or self-righteousness, living for the flesh leads only to death. I came across this acrostic for the word **F.L.E.S.H.** that is helpful to remember: **F**ollowing **L**ong **E**stablished **S**inful **H**abits.

2. Put disobedience to death.

Dr. Charles Ryrie has called Romans 8:13 the most important single verse on the spiritual life. Some translations use the word “mortify” which means “to kill.” We must avoid being passive about sin in our lives. **“Putting to death the misdeeds of the body”** refers to **“slaughtering sin”** in your life. This same word is used in Romans 8:36: **“...We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

John Owen challenges the believer to **“be killing sin or it will be killing you.”** This is similar to what we emphasized last week: **“Think about what you think about”** in order to capture our thoughts to make them obedient to Christ. Too many of us cater to the flesh when God tells us to crucify it.

There are two aspects of putting the misdeeds of the body to death that appear at first glance to be contradictory.

- Positionally it has already been done.** Galatians 5:24: **“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.**
- Experientially we must do it.** Colossians 3:5: **“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”**

Let me see if I can explain this. We must apply by faith what God has already done in fact. This goes back to what we learned in Romans 6:11: **“Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”** By faith we count our position as true in our actual condition. This is in the present tense which means we must do so continually, habitually and actively.

Here’s another caution. While we are told to slaughter sin, notice carefully that we’re to do this **“by the Spirit.”** It’s not a matter of me alone doing this nor can I just sit back and wait for the Holy Spirit to do it. It’s not an either/or but rather a both/and. It’s a beautiful balance: I must do it *by* the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit chooses to do it through *me*. These are complimentary, not contradictory truths.

We see this in Philippians 2:12-13:

continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

I must do it...but it’s God who works in me to do it. He has His role and I have my responsibility. We could say it this way: *I cannot do it without the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit will not do it without me.*

What does this mean practically? Let me suggest some ways to slaughter sin in your life.

- Recognize how sin works** (James 1:14-15).
- Identify your spiritual 'soft spots'** (Jeremiah 17:9).
- Confess and repent when you sin** (Psalm 32).
- Turn from sin within the first five seconds of the temptation** (Proverbs 4:15).
- Don't deal with sin on a superficial level; get to the heart** (Jeremiah 6:14).
- Starve sin by making no provision for it** (Romans 13:14).
- Place hedges between yourself and sin** (Proverbs 5:8).
- Look for the way of escape** (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- Fill your mind with good things** (Philippians 4:8).
- Submit to the Holy Spirit** (Zechariah 4:6) **and be filled daily** (Ephesians 5:18).

Jesus paid a debt He did not owe and we owe a debt we can never fully repay...but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

Our Delight

We have a definite obligation to God for all that He has done for us. Next, in verses 14-17a, Paul describes some privileges that are ours. We move now from duty to delight. Proverbs 8:30: ***"I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence."*** This is the heart of the good news in the Book of Romans.

1. The Holy Spirit leads us.

Delight #1 is found in verse 14: ***"Because those who are led by the Spirit of God..."*** Aren't you glad that we don't have to stumble around and wonder what we should do or the direction we should take? God has given us the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. The Greek word translated "led" means "to show the way, or to guide."

While the Holy Spirit certainly leads us in very specific and personalized ways, first and foremost He has changed the trajectory of our entire lives and leads us in such a way that we follow the path of the Lord. Listen to these words from Psalm 143:10: ***"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."*** The Holy Spirit is always at work controlling, comforting, or convicting us. And we are either grieving Him or pleasing Him.

2. We are loved as God's children.

Our second delight is spelled out in the last part of verse 14: ***"...are sons of God."*** I read this week that some parents in New Zealand named their son "4real" because they were impressed with the reality of his birth. This distinctive name was eventually blocked by the courts because New Zealand law forbids the use of numbers when naming babies. This name is certainly better than the bizarre one chosen by two sets of American parents who have named their sons "ESPN."

Friend, if you have received Jesus Christ, John 1:12 says that you are a child of God. He calls you "son" or "daughter" and no court can ever take that away from you. I love Isaiah 43:1: ***"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."*** As one of God's children, you are His. And Isaiah 49:16 says that God has engraved you on the palm of his hand. 2 Corinthians 6:18: ***"I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*** If you wonder how God feels about you and what kind of name he calls you, check out 1 John 3:1: ***"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"***

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, after falling on hard times, the wayward boy had been practicing his speech in the hopes that he could be hired on as a field hand in his father's business. The father would have nothing to do with this because his boy was not a servant...he was his son. Listen to these wonderful words from Luke 15:21-24:

The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

If you are a son or daughter of God, He celebrates you.

3. We have freedom, not fear.

We can delight that the Holy Spirit leads us and that we are children of God. The third delight is that we no longer have to live in fear as seen in verse 15: **“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear...”** Servants need to fear but sons and daughters of the King have freedom.

Friend, what are you afraid of right now? If you are a child of God there is nothing to fear because the Holy Spirit is with you and in you. Hebrews 2:15 says that you and I no longer have to fear death: **“And free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** In the place of fear God has given us freedom as 2 Timothy 1:7 says: **“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”** (KJV).

4. We enjoy an intimate relationship with the Father.

The second half of verse 15 contains some pretty amazing truth – Delight #4 is that we are adopted into God’s family and we can call God our daddy: **“...But you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”**

- We’re adopted into God’s family.** Pastor Dick is preaching next week and is going to develop the whole idea of our adoption into God’s family so let me just make a contemporary application. Since God is a God of adoption, shouldn’t we consider adoption? In a new nationwide campaign called “Voice of the Orphan” (www.voiceoftheorphan.org), ministries like Focus on the Family, Family Life Today and Shaohanna’s Hope are working together to help believers put James 1:27 into practice: **“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”**
- We can call the Almighty “Abba.”** Because born again believers are adopted into God’s Family, one of our delights is to cry out **“Abba, Father.”** The word “cry” means to “call aloud, to shriek.” We have the amazing privilege of calling the awesome, majestic, all-powerful God of the universe “Abba,” which is an untranslated Aramaic word that means “daddy.”
- This term of endearment speaks of an intimate relationship and was used by Jesus when He cried out in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36: **“‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’”** This is a good model for us in that we approach our “Daddy God” with confidence and yet we commit to do His will, whatever that might be. I love it when our girls call me “daddy” and God loves it when His children do as well.

We have communion with God because of our adoption and we can communicate with Him because He invites us to call him ‘Abba.’ I love what Martin Luther said about this verse: *“This is but a little word, and yet notwithstanding, it comprehendeth all things...Although I be oppressed with anguish and terror on every side, and seem to be forsaken and utterly cast away from thy presence, yet I am thy child, and thou art my Father for Christ’s sake.”* This chorus captures it well:

Near, so very near to God, nearer I could not be.

For in the person of God’s Son, I am as near as He.

Dear, so very dear to God, dearer I could not be.

For in the person of God’s Son, I am as dear as He.

But if you’re like me, there are times when you may wonder if God really does care for you. It’s at those times that the Holy Spirit goes to work in yet another way.

5. The Holy Spirit assures us of this relationship.

Fifthly, we can take delight in the decree of verse 16: **“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”** Notice that phrase, **“The Spirit himself.”** This is very emphatic and it shows us that the Holy Spirit is a Person, not an inanimate object or power or some “Star Wars” kind of force. We are given the objective truth of Scripture that born again believers are in the family of God.

One example is 1 John 5:13:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Go back a few verses to 1 John 5:10 where we see that this is not just something for our heads, but also our hearts:

Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart

According to 1 John 4:13, one of the roles of the Spirit is to give us certainty about our salvation

We know that we live in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives inner testimony with our spirit that we are adopted into God's family and at the end of time He will stand with us and testify before God the Father as to our adoption.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22: ***“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”***

The commentator Barclay points out that this reference to the Spirit testifying builds on a picture from how adoptions worked in Roman culture. When an adoption was finalized, the ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses who would testify as to the legitimacy of the adoption, thus guaranteeing that the one adopted had full rights as a child.

The Holy Spirit confirms our adoption and therefore we can have confidence that we are a “King's Kid.” He gives independent testimony and then he corroborates the testimony of our own spirit. According to Deuteronomy 19:15, a matter can only be decided based on the testimony of at least two witnesses. As one pastor put it: our human spirit says, *“I am a child of God, ABBA FATHER!”* The Holy Spirit says, *“Yes, she is a child of God, ABBA FATHER!”* And out of the mouths of two witnesses, it is settled.

The nineteenth-century British pastor Billy Bray (that's good name for a preacher) got saved out of a life of drunkenness and was so overjoyed by God's grace and goodness that he said,

I can't stop praising the Lord. As I go along the street, I lift up one foot, and it seems to say, 'Glory.' And I lift up the other, and it seems to say, 'Amen.' And so they keep on like that all the time I am walking.”

Maybe we should try that.

6. We are named in God's will.

Did you hear that Oprah Winfrey made \$260 million last year? That's nothing compared to Bill Gates, the richest man in the world. Wouldn't you like to be named in their wills? Friends, believers in Jesus Christ have something even better. Our sixth cause for delight is that we are heirs of God according to Ro 8: 17: ***“Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...”***

Beth has told me that when she was growing up her dad would often correct her when she would say that someone who had a lot of money was rich. He would gently remind her that only those who know Christ are truly rich.

- We are heirs of God.** As an heir of God you are in God's will and you share in God's family fortune. Ephesians 1:8: ***“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”***

And 1 Peter 1:4 says that this inheritance is guaranteed: ***“And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you.”***

- We are co-heirs with Christ.** You may know Kent Robson as one of our worship leaders here at PBC. What you might not know is that he is the executive director for project and fund development for OSF Health Care. A couple weeks ago, Kent invited Beth and me to a Balloon Extravaganza in Peoria. We received an invitation in the mail that indicated this was a special VIP event. We went and had a blast. As we looked around we saw a State Senator and a number of other dignitaries and we saw Kent doing his work, keeping everything organized and on schedule. And then it hit me. We were only there because we knew Kent.

Friends, if you know Jesus, then everything that He has is yours! Being a co-heir with Christ means that everything Christ has, we have. But it's only because of our connection to Him.

Don't forget that our duty comes out of our delight. God has given us so much, hasn't He? It would be easy to think that life is just going to be easy now. That leads to our final point – our destiny

Our Destiny

Check out the last part of Ro 8:17:

If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

This theme will be developed in greater detail in the verses that follow but suffice it to say that we must go through grief before we enter glory. We are heirs of God but the full benefits of this will not be poured out on us until eternity.

Our present grief prepares us for future glory. In the meantime, we will share in the sufferings of the Savior. Since Jesus suffered,

we should be prepared to suffer ourselves. Suffering doesn't necessarily mean that something is the matter; rather it is a mark of our sonship.

Philippians 1:29 is a good corrective for us when we wonder why we're going through stress or sickness or mockery or outright persecution:

For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

Acts 14:22 is another passage to hold on to when you have problems – a passage you won't hear a prosperity preacher expound:

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

One student on the New York team learned this lesson this past week: *"God is in control even when we are suffering, at midnight, when our faith is weak and when evil seems to prosper. We have had opportunities to put this into practice."* And here's something that their speaker said that really hits home when we're hurting: *"Every setback is a setup for a step up."*

When the Holy Spirit moves...He really moves! Our students experienced that in an amazing way on Thursday night when they had a foot washing service – it lasted until 12:30 in the morning! Here's a question. Have you experienced the moving of the Holy Spirit?

- Recommit to living out your debt to God.**
- Remember what to delight in.**
- Refocus you mind on your final destiny.**

I want to close by reading the words to the song called, *The Family of God*.

From the door of an orphanage to the house of the King,
No longer an outcast, a new song I sing;
From rags unto riches, from the weak to the strong,
I'm not worthy to be here, but PRAISE GOD! I belong!
I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God,
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His Blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family,
The Family of God

[\(THE FAMILY OF GOD\)](#)

Missing Romans 8:18-25 Back to the Future

Romans 8:26-27 When We Don't Know What to Pray - 8/12/07

On August 1st, a terrible tragedy brought strangers together to pray. I'm reading from the StarTribune.com out of Minneapolis-St. Paul (8/6/07):

Lori Peterson, jogging on the path on West River Parkway, was about 200 feet past the Interstate 35W Bridge Wednesday when she heard an awful noise over the loud music on her iPod. It was like dynamite...creaking metal...She turned and saw a cloud of white-gray dust billow out. Water shot into the air. A road rested in the Mississippi. People opened car doors and walked off the fallen bridge onto land...Peterson put her hand on the trembling shoulder of a teenage girl, who appeared to be a new driver, as she called her mom. Leaving the river, Peterson stopped atop the hill at Gold Medal Park. 'Does anyone want to pray?' she asked. People looked at her like she was nuts. She asked three more times; a girl raised her hand and walked over. More joined. About 15 people circled for a short prayer. As people on cell phones told loved ones they were OK, Peterson ran toward her condo at the Rock Island Lofts. She saw her husband biking toward her. She broke down in tears, and they held each other in the street.

Last week we learned that creation is groaning and Christians are groaning. This world is out of whack and believers are bummed out. Why is that? Because grief and groaning will one day be replaced by glory. But that's still in the future. I like how one person said it: *"I'm not what I ought to be; I'm not what I will be...but thank God I'm not what I used to be!"*

In our passage for today we're going to see that not only is creation groaning, and not only are we groaning for glory, but the Holy Spirit Himself is groaning. Check it out by turning to Romans 8:26-27:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

To get this passage into one sentence, hold on to this truth: *"You're not alone when you're in the groan zone."* Have you ever been in the groan zone? It's when you sigh more than you speak, when your inner agony is so deep that can't even express it, when you cry and ask, *"Why?"* The families of those coal miners in Utah have been groaning since Monday. Perhaps you're there right now. I'd like everyone to look at me. I'm not going to embarrass you but if you're in the groan zone, would you just drop your eyes to the floor? Let's pray right now and ask the Holy Spirit to do His work...

Are you ready to dig in? Paul begins, ***"In the same way, the Spirit helps us..."*** This word "help" means to "take hold at our side; to receive help from one who bears our load." One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to be our *paraclete* in Greek, or helper. Jesus said it this way in John 14:16-17:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."

This title Counselor can also be translated as Comforter. The Holy Spirit helps by counseling and comforting and convicting (see John 16:8) because He's with us, right next to us, and He is *in* us.

When the Spirit Helps Us

You're not alone when you're in the groan zone. In our passage we see *when* the Holy Spirit helps us.

1. When we're weak and weary.

The Spirit who is holy helps us ***"in our weakness."*** This word literally means "without strength" and speaks of being incapacitated. I'm really glad to know this, aren't you? Some of us think that we have to be strong in order for God to use us. Actually, God goes to work when we're weak as 2 Corinthians 12:10 says: ***"For when I am weak, then I am strong."*** Hebrews 4:15 tells us that the Son sympathizes with us when we feel feeble:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses

Several weeks ago I had a day in which the ugliness of sin seemed to be everywhere. As I listened to some stories about how sin and Satan were devastating lives, a strong abhorrence for sin started to rise within me. Not just what sin does to others, but what I harbor in my own heart. Later that day, I found out that someone in one of my former churches had committed suicide. I was devastated. As I slumped in my chair tears filled my eyes and I felt like I couldn't move. When I went home that night I told Beth that I hate what sin does and I told her that I was drained. As the night went on I sensed the Holy Spirit helping me in my point of weakness and weariness.

2. When we're perplexed about what to pray for.

The Holy Spirit also helps us when ***"We do not know what we ought to pray for."*** I think that's why some people hesitated to pray right after the bridge collapsed. Have you ever been at a total loss about what to pray for? Sometimes all we can get out is some sighing and a lot of crying as Psalm 5:1 says: ***"Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing."*** The good thing is that this is good enough for God according to Psalm 38:9:

All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.

Part of our weakness is our pitiful prayers. Most of us struggle with *quantity* (we don't pray enough) and with *quality* (we don't know how to pray). And so sometimes we try to make our prayers sound perfect. I think God is much less impressed with our "perfect prayers" than we are. Psalm 34:18 says that God is ***"is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"***

Psalm 10:17: ***"You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry."***

Prayers muttered in broken sentences reflecting a broken heart are very precious to God.

Do you remember the story Jesus told about the self-righteous Pharisee who went to the temple and pontificated as he prayed? Luke 18:11 actually says that he prayed *about himself*.

I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."

And then the tax collector, standing far off, not even looking up, muttered this prayer for mercy

"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Jesus tells us that the man who asked for mercy went home justified while the one who was self-righteous was left just praying to himself.

There have been many times in the ministry when I have been at a total loss about what to pray for. I'll never forget how paralyzed and perplexed I felt when I was asked to do the funeral for two children who were murdered by their father almost five years ago. Walking into their bedrooms and seeing their unopened Christmas presents was almost unbearable. As I tried to put the message together for their funeral, I could barely move my fingers on the keyboard. Pastor Jeff was a big help that day as were some other pastor friends, but the biggest help came from the Holy Spirit as he took my pitiful prayers and turned them into a message of comfort for the family. Why does He do this? Because *we're not alone when we're in the groan zone*.

What the Holy Spirit Does

The second half of verse 26 tells us *what* the Holy Spirit does and *how* he does it. Let's look first at what He does: ***"But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us."*** Do you hear the emphasis here? In contrast to our paltry prayers the ***"Spirit Himself"*** prays for us. The word ***"intercede"*** means to "speak in behalf of, to appeal and plead for." It was used of rescuing someone in trouble who has no resources to escape. Stop and ponder that for a moment. The third member of the Trinity prays and pleads on our behalf, appealing to the Almighty. Doesn't that just blow your mind?

But wait. It gets even better. Do you know that there's someone else interceding on your behalf right now? We not only have the Spirit interceding in our heart; we also have the Son interceding in heaven. Jump ahead to verse 34: ***"Christ Jesus, who died more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."*** Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus is interceding all the time for us: ***"Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."*** And 1 John 2:1 asserts that we have an Advocate who intercedes on our behalf: ***"But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense-Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."*** Our Defender makes up for any deficiencies in our requests.

Friends, we have two perfect prayer partners interceding for us at all times! That means that *you're not alone when you're in the groan zone*.

How the Holy Spirit Intercedes

The last part of verse 26 tells us *how* the Holy Spirit intercedes for us: ***"with groans that words cannot express."*** I find it so comforting that the Comforter groans with me as I deal with all the garbage in my life. The Holy Spirit joins with creation and with Christians in deep, yet inaudible sighing. God's Spirit groans and they are experienced as our groanings as together we await the fulfillment of the glorious words found in Revelation 22:3: ***"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him."*** Our sighing will cease and will be replaced by our serving. John Piper says that these groanings are based on two things: First, a deep desire and ache of heart that Christ be magnified in our lives; and second, a weakness that leaves us baffled and unknowing as to how this is going to happen.

It's so intense that words are inadequate to express it. Here are some passages that mention groaning:

We groan with hardship.

Exodus 2:24: ***"God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant..."***

We groan with grief.

Psalms 6:6: ***"I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears."***

I was with a family on Friday night as they groaned with grief after hearing the news of their son's death.

We groan with sickness.

Psalm 31:10: ***“My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.”***

I was very moved at the Relay for Life on Friday night as cancer survivors made a lap around the track while the Madrigal singers sang songs of hope. Several of those who went around the track are members here at PBC.

We groan with heartache.

Psalm 38:8: ***“I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.”***

We groan because of unconfessed sin.

Psalm 32:3: ***“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.”***

We groan as we grow old.

Proverbs 5:11: ***“At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent.”***

We groan for glory.

2 Corinthians 5:2, 4: ***“Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling...For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened...”***

Remember this: *You're not alone when you're in the groan zone!*

Are you still with me? It gets even better. Look at Ro 8:27:

And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”

1. God the Father knows our motives.

Isn't it tough to really understand our motives? I can be doing something with good motives and right in the middle of it; my motives get all messed up. I take great comfort knowing that God knows what's in my heart (sometimes I find discomfort with this realization). The word for **“search”** means to make a thorough investigation. That's what the rescue teams have been doing this week as they searched for those missing miners. This is in the present tense, indicating that this is God's continual activity. He never stops or takes a break.

1 Chronicles 28:9: ***“...For the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts.”***

Psalm 44:21: ***“...He knows the secrets of the heart.”***

Jeremiah 20:12 says that God does not just take a cursory glance at our motives: ***“O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart...”***

2. God the Father knows the mind of the Spirit.

Since the Father knows what's in our hearts, he certainly knows the mind of the Spirit. In fact, there is complete unity within the Trinity – there is no division between Father, Son and Spirit. They always work together, and since the Holy Spirit is working within us, what He groans is what God the Father hears and responds to.

3. God the Holy Spirit helps us pray according to God's will.

I wonder how many of my prayers are really according to my will and not according to God's will. 1 John 5:14:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

While we should be careful to make sure we are praying according to God's will, I'm glad that the Holy Spirit weeds out those prayers that are not in line with God's will. The Spirit of God knows my needs better than I do and so He pleads to the Father, raising my desires to a higher and holier place, accomplishing what is good for me and extending the Father's glory.

An illustration from church history is helpful here. Augustine, one of the early church leaders, had been a very wicked man in his youth. His godly mother, Monica, had a heavy burden for her son. When she learned that he was leaving home and headed to Italy, she prayed that God would not let him go because she feared that he would fall into deeper sin there. God allowed Augustine to go to Italy and it was there that he was gloriously converted. God didn't answer her specific request because the Holy Spirit had redirected her request to line up with God's will – which was what she wanted anyway.

The Holy Spirit takes our frail, feeble and faulty prayers and translates them to the Father so that they are acceptable and in harmony with His holy will. I really like the way Charles Spurgeon captures this: *"The Holy Spirit's intercessions have in them such a blessed blending of all that is good that they come up as a sweet perfume before the Lord... That prayer which came from heaven will certainly go back to heaven. If the Holy Ghost prompts it, the Father must and will accept it, for it is not possible that He should put a slight upon the ever blessed and adorable Spirit."* We catch a glimpse here of the incredible community and communication that takes place within the Trinity.

Comforting Words

I started this message by asking those who are in the groan zone to look down. May I now ask you to look up? Look up and see all that God has done for groaners like you and groaners like me. John Piper suggests some ways that this passage can provide comfort to Christians.

- 1. Be encouraged that you are not expected to know the will of God in every respect.**
- 2. Be encouraged that in your perplexity and groaning, you are not being watched, you are being understood.**
- 3. Be encouraged that God's work for you is not limited to what you can understand and express with words.**
- 4. Be encouraged that in your weakness and sickness and loss and hardship and danger the Spirit of God is praying for you and not against you.**
- 5. Be encouraged that God the Father hears the prayers of the Spirit for you.**

"When you feel very weak, because of suffering or decay or sickness or futility or persecution or failed plans or baffling decisions, don't despair, as if God is angry with you or at your inability to know what to do or what to pray. At that very moment, experience the wordless groanings of your heart as groanings for the glory of Christ. And trust the Spirit of God to intercede for you about the specifics. Trust him, that because he is praying for you, your Father will bring about decisions and circumstances that will magnify Christ in the best way – in the very midst of your ignorance and groaning." (www.desiringgod.org)

Prayer is like our bridge to God and it will never come down or collapse because the Holy Spirit is interceding for us with groans that cannot be expressed. Our summer missionaries have certainly learned this truth: *You're not alone when you're in the groan zone.* And the Holy Spirit does more than just pray for us – He sends us out with power to be His representatives to a lost and dying world. Listen to Acts 1:8:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

We start where we are (in our community – 5 Day Clubs) and then head to the continents (Dominican Republic, Kenya, and Uganda). We're also told to go to our country (Judea and Samaria – that's what our students did in New York City). This team, as well as our other teams, learned the truth that God will always do more than we can ever ask or imagine. Let's hear from our New York team right now...

Romans 8:28-30 The Promises of Predestination - 8/19/07

How many of you have memories of swimming in the Humiston Pool? Summer has gone by so fast, hasn't it? Some have started school already and for others summer ends tomorrow. Ken Fulkerson's mom Gladys wrote a poem that reflects what many of us are thinking.

The days of summer

Are swiftly passing by
Let's have another picnic
And eat some chocolate pie
Let's go down to the old swimming hole
And jump from the limb of a tree
Or we could play in the park again
Our lives so happy and free
The school bell will be ringing soon
Our fun will soon be o'er
But summer's been a great time
I can only wish for more.

It's significant that we're meeting here at Chautauqua Park this morning. I recently learned that the name Chautauqua originally comes from Lake Chautauqua in New York, where Sunday School teachers would gather annually for a week of Bible study in the late 1800s. This movement grew to include a traveling circuit of preachers (did you know that the evangelist Billy Sunday preached right here in the 1920s?), performers, musicians...and people who blew up Diet Coke bottles with Mentos (just kidding on this last one). At its height in 1924, these week-long programs were held in 12,000 towns with 32 million people in attendance. These events provided opportunities for rest, recreation and religious talks...not to mention refreshment (we're going to keep that part alive with our picnic right after the service).

Teddy Roosevelt was so taken by the original Chautauqua tours, that he once exclaimed, "*The Chautauqua is the most American thing in America.*" As with most movements, the spiritual emphasis was eventually replaced by a secular view of success.

Two of the most popular lecturers were William Jennings Bryan and Russell Conwell, whose lecture "Acres of Diamonds" was delivered six thousand times. The theme was, "*Get rich you man, for money is power and power ought to be in the hands of good people. I say you have no right to be poor.*" With the spread of radio and movies, plus commercialization, the Chautauqua movement ceased to exist.

Fortunately, our very own Vermillion Players are helping to revive this tremendous tradition – John Gaum, who is the president has helped us get ready for this service and is here this morning – John, thanks for all your help! I understand there was a 100-year anniversary celebration right here in 1998 to relive the events that took place in this community.

It's a bit eerie to read how the early organizers described the problems in our country, for they haven't changed much in a hundred years: "*The conditions which surround us best justify our cooperation; we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin.*" This morning I'd like to draw your attention to a passage of Scripture that permeates with promises. It's my prayer that God's Word will revive anyone feeling ruin today.

After John 3:16, Romans 8:28 may be the most treasured passage of Scripture. Let me read it right now – it's printed on the top of your song sheet:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Some of us may feel like this passage has gone by the wayside, much like the Chautauquas of the past. It sounds good but when everything's going bad, it's hard to believe. Sometimes we may feel like the parakeet in Max Lucado's book, "In the Eye of the Storm."

Chippie the parakeet never saw it coming. One second he was peacefully perched in his cage. The next he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. The problems began when Chippie's owner decided to clean Chippie's cage with a vacuum cleaner. She removed the attachment from the end of the hose and stuck it in the cage. The phone rang, and she turned to pick it up. She'd barely said "hello" when "sssopp!" Chippie got sucked in.

The bird owner gasped, put down the phone, turned off the vacuum, and opened the bag. There was Chippie -- still alive, but stunned. Since the bird was covered with dust and soot, she grabbed him and raced to the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the running water. Then realizing that Chippie was

soaked and shivering, she did what any compassionate bird owner would do...she reached for the hair dryer and blasted the pet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days after the trauma, the reporter who'd initially written about the event contacted Chippie's owner to see how the bird was recovering. "Well," she replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore -- he just sits and stares."

From the looks of things, it looks like we have some Chippies in Chautauqua today. Let's admit that we have some problems with Romans 8:28.

1. It's been misused.

Like many other Christian clichés, this verse has been thrown in the face of those who are suffering.

2. It's been misquoted.

This verse is often taken out of context and key words are left out. I've heard it put like this: *"Everything will work out in the end"* or *"This tragedy is a good thing."* These words are not only hollow; they are hurtful to someone who is already hurting.

3. It's been misunderstood.

My goal today is to help each of us fully understand what God is saying to us so that we can stop staring and start singing again. This morning my outline is very simple.

I want us to look at God's promise, His purpose, and finally the process He takes us through.

Here's the entire sermon in one sentence: *"God's good for us is not our comfortability, but our conformity to Christ."*

God's Promise

The first thing we see is a promise. Someone has said that Romans 8:28 is a "soft pillow for a tired heart." Let's look at this amazing verse phrase-by-phrase.

"And..." This connecting word shows that the truth from the verses that come before is continued here. As we learned last week we are never alone when we're in the groan zone. In the midst of sighing and suffering the Holy Spirit intercedes for us.

"...we know that..." This is a word for assurance. Notice it doesn't say, "we hope" or "we wish" but rather "we know." How can we have this kind of assurance when our experiences have been so excruciating? We know not by looking at events but by knowing God and His Word. There are a lot of questions we can't answer but this we know – that God is at work.

Friend, if you don't believe in God's sovereignty you're going to have a hard time with suffering. Check this out: *Everything is either allowed by God or brought about by Him.* If you aren't settled about the doctrine of God's sovereignty, you need to settle it right now. Here's the truth in a nutshell: *"He's God and you're not!"* Impress Isaiah 55:8 upon your heart:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD."

"...in all things..." Not only can we have assurance, did you catch how absolute this is? Not "some thing" or "most things" but "in all things." There are no exceptions, no footnotes, and no caveats. That means all the bad and the sad, during times of poverty and prosperity, and in seasons of success or suffering. The word "in" reminds us that we can know these truths when we're *in* the groan zone.

"...God works..." God is always at work, whether we see Him or not. He is sovereign, either causing all things, or allowing all things to happen. Beth pointed out John 5:17 to me some time ago and I've never forgotten it:

My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."

"...for the good..." Most of us define "good" differently than God does. We like to feel good, to have good money, to have good health, to have a good job, a good house, and to be in a good relationship. In short, we think the "good life" means a better set of circumstances, certainly better than we have right now.

But according to Ecclesiastes 6:12, we can't really know what is good for us:

For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow?"

God certainly knows what is good for us because He's a good God. God is not saying that all things are good but that he works His

ways and His will together to accomplish His good. With that in mind, even problems can be profitable. Why? Because *God's good for us is not our comfortability, but our conformity to Christ.*

Everything put together is good. The individual ingredients in a cake mix are not necessarily good to eat on their own – flour, sugar, baking soda, eggs, oil – but when they're mixed together the taste is definitely good (it looks like there are several delectable desserts already here for the picnic – I saw Pastor Dick sampling some before the service).

You might be tasting just one nasty ingredient right now but God is at work mixing everything, folding everything together to accomplish His good for us. We might not always immediately understand the good that God is accomplishing...but He is working His will, in a way that gives Him glory and brings us ultimate good.

"...of those who love Him..." This is a phrase that is synonymous with believers. What that means is that this promise is only true for those who are truly saved.

1 Corinthians 2:9: ***"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."***

God's Purpose

The last part of verse 28 spells out that God has a purpose behind His plan: ***"...who have been called according to His purpose."*** This thought is also expressed in Psalm 57:2: ***"I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills [his purpose] for me."***

he word "purpose" means to set something before oneself. What that really means is that there are no accidents in God's economy.

That reminds me of the cowboy who applied for an insurance policy. The agent asked, *"Have you ever had any accidents?"* After reflecting for a moment, the applicant responded: *"Nope, but a bronco did kick in two of my ribs last summer, and a couple years ago a rattlesnake bit me on the ankle."* *"Wouldn't you call those accidents?"* asked the puzzled agent. *"Naw,"* the cowboy said, *"They did it on purpose!"*

God's ultimate purpose is not to save me, or to meet my needs. His ultimate purpose is to bring glory to Himself by conforming me to the image of his Son. We see that in the middle of verse 29: ***"...to be conformed to the likeness of His Son..."*** If God's glory is the goal, then *His good for us is not our comfortability, but our conformity to Christ.* That means He is more committed to our holiness than to our happiness.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says that He is making the saved like His Son: ***"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."***

Whatever you're wrestling with today, remember that God's plan is bigger than your problem. I love the wit of Charles Spurgeon who once said, *"I'm glad God chose me before He saw me, because if He had waited until He saw me, He might now have wanted me."*

As Pastor Jeff helped us see, God has unleashed a powerful chain reaction that reveals His purpose.

God's Process

In order to accomplish this purpose of bringing glory to Himself, God designed a process that is found in verses 29-30: ***"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."***

This passage explains Romans 8:28 and is what makes it true. Go back to verse 28 where Paul uses the word ***"know."*** How does he know with such certainty? Because of this chain reaction of salvation. It's a process that commences in heaven and culminates in heaven. Once God starts it, it will be completed because salvation from beginning to end is the work of God.

And, it never needs to be repeated, nor can it be (if I try to drop another Mento in this Diet Coke bottle nothing will happen). We see this in the use of five key words, like links in a chain. These parallel clauses are closely connected.

1. God chose us.

This is the word "foreknew." Before you and I were even born, God knew us as Jeremiah 1:5 says: ***"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..."*** This is a corrective for us when we are tempted to say that we chose God. This is absurd because God has taken the initiative in the chain reaction of regeneration.

2. God changes us.

Foreknowledge determines *who* God's children will be; predestination determines *what* God's children will be. Remember Chippie? God is chipping away at us to conform us into the image of Christ, not to make us comfortable. Don't get all hung up on the word "predestined."

In this context it means that God has decided beforehand where you are going to end up. Your destination has been decided because God has determined that one day you will be like the Lord. If you are a believer you have been predestined to go to heaven. You've also been predestined to be like Jesus when you get there.

3. God calls us.

The next link in the chain is the word "call" which means invited and was originally used of those who received invitations to a banquet.

God has given a general "call" to everyone and then a specific call to those who will respond. This specific call is an irresistible inward pull of the Holy Spirit as He woos and wins you to Jesus Christ. Theologians refer to it as the effectual call. Let me put it in terms that I can understand. If you're a Christian, then you're called; if you're not a Christian, then you need to respond to His call.

Dr. Harry Ironside used to tell the story of an older man who testified in a service how God saved him from a life of sin. He told how God found him at a terrible place, saved him, cleaned him up, forgave him and gave him a brand-new life.

After the service was over, a legalistic brother said,

Well, you gave a wonderful testimony and gave glory to God but you left something out. You didn't talk about your part of salvation. Don't you know that salvation is part us and part God?" The man responded quickly: "You're so right, my dear brother. I did leave my part out. My part was to run away from God as fast as I could. God's part was to run after me until He caught me.

4. God cleanses us.

We've been studying the word "justified" throughout the Book of Romans. It essentially means "to declare righteous." All of the righteousness of Jesus Christ is credited to our accounts while we are still sinners. We are considered clean.

5. God completes us.

The word "glorified" means to be clothed with the glory that God himself has. This is still future but I want to point out that each of these words is in the past tense. That means that it is so certain that it's as if it's happened already. God's purpose is to bring us all the way to glory. Our glorification is guaranteed as Philippians 1:6 makes clear:

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

God's purpose is wrapped up in this process – and that's why we can believe the promise of Romans 8:28. J. Vernon McGee used to explain it this way. If God foreknew 100 people, then he predestined 100. If God predestined 100, he called 100. If God called 100, he justified 100. If God justified 100, then he glorified 100. It's not as if God starts out with 100 and loses some in the process. It's not as if he foreknew 100, then he predestines 80, then he calls 60, then he justifies 40 and only has about 20 left to take to heaven. No. The number is exactly the same throughout. There's no slippage and no one gets off the bus.

That means you and I can hold on when we're hurting because glory is on the way. 1 Peter 5:10:

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Illustrations

"God's good for us is not our comfortability, but our conformity to Christ." God weaves His ways for His glory and for our good. The truth of Romans 8:28 is illustrated in the lives of many biblical characters.

- Joseph.** Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused, mistreated by Potiphar, and suffered greatly. And yet he could say to his brothers in Genesis 50:20: ***"You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."***
- Jonah.** Jonah is a negative illustration. He came to expect "good" from God which in his definition was pleasure and comfort and the destruction of his enemies. God was good to Jonah by using pagan sailors, a big fish, a plant, and even a worm to accomplish his ultimate purpose of saving the Ninevites – and teaching Jonah a lesson.

- Job.** Job was a righteous man who experienced incredible suffering. The teaching of this book is that every event in our lives cannot be viewed as the result of some act on our part. Job's friends tried to link suffering with sin and prosperity with piety. Job learned that there is a plan and a purpose but the particulars may be unexplainable in this life.
- Jesus.** Perhaps the greatest illustration of Romans 8:28 is found in the life of Jesus himself. Many awful things were done to Him – he was denied, betrayed, falsely accused, wrongly tried, found guilty, beaten, spit upon, mocked, and finally crucified. But God brought incredible good out of this atrocious act as Acts 2:23 states: ***“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing him to the cross.”*** Note the sweet balance between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. Humans did something horrible but God used what they did to carry out His plan of salvation.

As we wrap up, I see some lessons that we can learn before we head over to the picnic.

Application

1. Surrender and be saved.

The promise of Romans 8:28 is exclusively for those who answer the call of God and accept Christ as Savior and Lord. In other words, there is no limit to “all things” but there is a limit with regard to those whom the “all things” applies. Let me skip ahead a few chapters to Romans 10:9-10:

That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

2. If you are saved, be assured that your salvation is secure.

What God commenced, He will complete. You have His Word on that.

3. View your problems with a long-term perspective.

Nothing can happen to you in this life, not one single event or an accumulation of events that can change your future glory.

4. Seek God’s development in your distress, not just His deliverance.

Can you find a better promise than Romans 8:28? It’s better that all things should work for my good than all things should be as I would wish to have them. One person has put this way: *“All things might work for my pleasure and yet might all work my ruin. If all things do not always please me, they will always benefit me. This is the best promise of life.”*

God’s good for us is not our comfortability,

but our conformity to Christ

Professor **E. C. Caldwell** ended his lecture many years ago with these words:

Tomorrow I will be teaching on Romans 8 so tonight I want you to pay special attention to verse 28. Notice what this verse truly says and what it doesn’t say.” Then he added, “One final word before I dismiss you – whatever happens in the years to come, remember: Romans 8:28 will always hold true.”

That same day Dr. Caldwell and his wife were involved in a terrible crash with a train. She was killed instantly and he was crippled permanently.

Months later, Professor Caldwell returned to class, and his students clearly remembered his last words. A hush came over the room as he began his lecture. *“Romans 8:28,”* he said, *“still holds true. One day we shall see God’s good, even in this.”*

Because Romans 8:28-30 is true, we don’t have to just sit and stare like Chippie...we can be chipper and sing again. In light of that, I’m going to ask the music team to come back up so we can sing “All Things Work Together” one more time. As they make their way back up here I’d like us to stand and read this passage together as a statement of faith.

Romans 8:31-37 Conquering Christians - 8/26/07

5-year-old Johnny was in the kitchen as his mother made supper. She asked him to go into the pantry and get her a can of tomato soup, but he didn’t want to go in alone: *“It’s dark in there and I’m scared.”* She asked again, and he gave the same answer. She smiled and said, *“It’s OK – Jesus will be in there with you.”* Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw that it was dark and started to leave...and then an idea came to him and he asked this question: *“Jesus, if you’re in*

there, would you hand me a can of tomato soup?"

Life is filled with questions, isn't it? Some questions make us laugh while others make us scratch our heads. Here are a few that I've come across...

- Why do we press harder on a remote when we know the batteries are going dead?*
- Why doesn't glue stick to the bottle?*
- Is there ever a day when mattresses are not on sale?*
- Why do we constantly return to the refrigerator with hopes that something new to eat will have materialized?*
- Why do we continue to pay \$1.39 for a bottle of Aquafina water when the Pepsi Company has admitted that it uses public drinking water as its source (a lot of these bottles are filled with water from my hometown)?*
- Why did over 17 million people watch High School Musical 2 on August 17th when it celebrates school getting out while students around the country were getting ready for the start of school?*

On top of these really deep questions, you may have some questions about Pontiac Bible Church. If you're new here you may wonder what the next step is for you. Here's a pathway for you to follow. Start with *Sundays* and then plug into a *small group*. After joining a group, then look for somewhere to *serve*. We believe that this will help you connect with Jesus and it will equip you to become a growing and faithful follower. We also have a new member's class beginning September 9th.

Some of you may have some questions about our Sunday morning worship services. We're beginning a new series called "Worship Matters" two weeks from today to help answer some of those questions. Incidentally, I've been intrigued by the questions that Jesus asked in the Gospels and so we're going to focus on some of His questions in October and November.

As we come to the end of Romans 8, we're faced with a crescendo of questions. See if you can spot them as we read Ro 8:31-37:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

What Shall We Say?

While most of these questions are rhetorical, they are no less real. In fact, Paul is using this method to get us to pause and ponder these amazing truths. He's also doing something else that is not real evident in English. Instead of using connecting words, he's utilizing a Q&A format in a rapid fire manner, moving quickly from one question to the next.

The first question really helps frame the entire passage. As a preacher Paul has been giving a lot of information in the first eight chapters of Romans. Now, in these closing verses he's moving from information to application to transformation: ***"What, then, shall we say in response to this?"*** I think he's tying everything about justification, sanctification and glorification together and is likely returning to the theme of "no condemnation" from Romans 8:1. But in the context, he's linking what immediately came before. Let me just summarize the last two weeks.

- We are never alone when we're in the groan zone.*
What, then, shall we say in response to this?
- God's good for us is not our comfortability, but our conformity to Christ.*
What, then, shall we say in response to this?

Two thoughts come to mind in response to this question: *What shall we say?* First of all, "Nothing." Have you ever received a totally undeserved gift and you couldn't even find words to express how grateful you are? That's happened to our family just recently. In light of all that God has done, what really can we say?

My second response to the question, *"What shall we say?"* is the word "Everything." I should be filled with praise and should never stop thanking God for all that He has done. We should also give him everything that we have, including our very lives. We had a creative planning meeting this past week to put some ideas together for our upcoming "Worship Matters" series. We started by putting the word "worship" on a piece of paper and then we wrote down whatever came to mind. As we were sharing our thoughts

we all stopped when Dean Ridder said this, *“Worship is all that I have for all He is.”* That’s deep.

Based on what we’ve learned, how should we then live? Like water cascading over a waterfall, these questions serve to celebrate our security in Christ. I want you to notice that these questions are personal (“who”), not impersonal (“what”). For our purposes this morning, I’m going to summarize the five FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) I see in this passage and respond with a corresponding FAP (Faithfully Answered Promise) for each one.

FAQ #1: Who Opposes Us?

FAP #1: God Protects Us!

This first question is found in Ro 8:31:

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

The meaning is not so much “if” but is rather “since” or “because.” It literally reads this way: *“Because God for us, who against us?”* Since God is for us, what difference does it make who is against us? Others may intimidate us, but we have the Almighty on our side. I was pretty small in elementary school and would get picked on by some of the bigger boys. I learned quickly that if I hung out with a guy named Dave Theider, the rest of the guys would leave me alone. Why was that? Because Dave was the BMOC (big man on campus).

Friend, with God on your side, there is nothing that anyone else can do to you.

Psalm 118:6: *“The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”*

Paul is not suggesting that we have no opposition because we all have adversaries. The point he is making is that every opponent is puny compared to how big God is. Don’t you think many of us judge whether God is for us by how events or circumstances turn out? If something goes bad, some of us immediately think that God is against us and when things go well, we think He’s for us. If you’re a born again believer, God is *always* for you, no matter what happens.

In order to make this promise more personal, I’d like you to insert your name into this verse right now: *“God is for .”* Let’s try that together. I’ll say the first three words and then you shout out your name to complete the sentence.

When you feel like someone or something is against you, remember that God is for you. God is your proponent and He is bigger than any opponent you may be facing. In the midst of opposition, claim the first FAP that God is for you and that He protects you.

FAQ #2: Who Withholds From Us?

FAP #2: God Provides for Us!

The second frequently asked question is posited in Ro 8:32:

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

The gift of God’s Son is the promise and pledge that He not only protects us – He also provides for us. Notice the word *“own.”* This emphasizes the Father’s possession of His Son, who He freely gave up to die on the Cross. He gave him *“for us all”* which means that Jesus died in our place, for our benefit.

This argument is from the greater to the lesser. Since God did not hesitate to give His greatest gift, certainly He will give us lesser gifts. It would be like a dad building a full-length basketball court for his son and then refusing to give him a basketball to use. 2 Peter 1:3 is one of my favorite verses:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

I want to share an amazing opportunity that the Lord has opened up. Recently I was asked to serve as a chaplain for a football game that will be held this Saturday. I was eager to do this because it will give me an opportunity to interact with up to 50 guys who I might not normally hang out with. As I started praying about this, the Lord impressed upon me an idea to give out copies of Super Bowl Champion Coach Tony Dungy’s new book called, *Quiet Strength* to each of the participants. The Elders and Deacons made arrangements for me to purchase these books (another church may be joining with us in this endeavor). But before I could do this, I needed to check with the guy in charge of the event to see if it would be OK. When I asked him, he said *“Absolutely. This is exactly what I want you to do.”* And then he asked me to not only pray before and after the game, but to also give a 20-25 minute talk to the guys! I keep thinking about this verse as I pray about what to say on Saturday –

God graciously gives us all things!

God protects and He provides. That leads to the third question and answer.

FAQ #3: Who Accuses Us?

FAP #3: God Purifies Us!

Check out Ro 8:33:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Galatians 5:15 states that Christians often ***“bite and devour”*** each other. Some of you are experiencing that right now. In addition, many of you hear the accusing anthem of guilt and shame that plays in your own mind on a daily basis. On top of that, we know from Revelation 12:10 that Satan, whose name means “Slanderer,” brings charges against Christians ***“before our God day and night.”***

Satan brings every flaw, every sin, and every shortcoming up before God all the time. But none of it sticks because we have been justified, or declared righteous. God knows what we’ve done and even agrees with the charges but he has forgiven all Christ-followers. We are pure before Him.

FAQ #4: Who Condemns Us?

FAP #4: Jesus Prays for Us!

God protects us, He provides for us, and He purifies us. We see in Ro 8:34 that Jesus also prays for us:

Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

Our sins deserve condemnation but Christ now commends us. Check out this short course on Christology, based on four deep truths:

- Because of His crucifixion: ***“Christ Jesus, who died...”*** The cross of Christ is the basis for our confidence.
 - Because of His resurrection: ***“...more than that, who was raised to life...”*** The resurrection is proof that God the Father accepted the payment of His Son, who conquered sin and death.
 - Because of His ascension: ***“...is at the right hand of God...”*** This is the place of exaltation and honor.
- 1 Peter 3:22 says that Jesus ***“has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”***
- Because of His intercession: ***“...and is also interceding for us.”*** He is like our divine defense attorney.

Hebrews 7:25: ***“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”***

In the midst of accusation and condemnation, we have an Advocate who is interceding for us. I love what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery in John 8:10-11:

Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’

We learned a couple weeks ago that we have the Holy Spirit interceding in our hearts (see Ro 8:26) and we have the Son interceding in Heaven. The perfect one is praying for those He has purified.

Isaiah 54:17: ***‘No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me,’ declares the LORD.”***

We’re protected, provided for, purified and prayed for. There’s one more promise...

FAQ #5: Who Separates Us?

FAP #5: Jesus Preserves Us!

Friends, Ro 8:35-36 tell us that nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ because He preserves us:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

To “separate” means to place a wedge between and was also used as a synonym for “amputate.” There is absolutely nothing that can get in the way of the Lord loving us. We will never be cut off from Christ, no matter what we go through. Paul could personally attest to this as he faced profound persecution in his life (see 2 Corinthians 6:4-10; 11:23-29).

We all face trouble within and hardship without. None of this can separate us from the Savior. Nothing can break the bond between us and God. Those who are persecuted for their faith will never be severed from the love of Christ. We've been praying for some friends in the Middle East this summer and they report this week that the threats are increasing. They certainly are ***“facing death all day long.”***

Seven years later, many of the Romans who heard these words would see them come true in their own lives as the Emperor Nero threw Christians to the lions and burned believers at the stake. Death does not separate us from God. I read of someone who did not want the usual dates of when he was born and when he died on his tombstone. Instead he wanted his tombstone to have three dates:

“Born:_____;

Born Again_____:

Transferred_____!

One pastor captured this well:

The only things that trouble can take away from you are the things that don't ultimately matter. The things that really matter, trouble cannot touch.

Uber-Conquerors

I understand that one of the cool words today is “uber.” This comes from German and means “above” or “over” and is used to communicate something that is “intensely super” much like the Green Bay Packers. In verse 37 Paul declares that we should be doing more than just surviving, we should be thriving; we're called to not just cope, we're called to be conquerors: ***“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*** We need five words “we are more than conquerors” to translate what is just one word in Greek. It carries the idea of being a “super-conqueror.”

Wasn't it cool hearing from Michael and Robin Wahls last week when they shared how a man named Mohammed has come to Christ and is now living out his faith in the midst of great persecution? We received a recent report regarding 41 believers who are jailed in another part of the world. They are “uber-conquering Christians.” While they have been in jail, four other inmates have come to know the Lord! These new believers have since been released and are now sharing their faith with their friends and relatives. During the trial, the jailed believers were able to quote John 14:6 and explain the gospel in open court! I love the concluding statement of faith at the bottom of the email from our missionaries Roger and Maggie Bruehl: *“God is answering your prayers! Please continue! This is a great time to be alive and be involved!”*

Let me point out something. For many of us Americans we think of victory in terms of winning. We tend to look at the successful, the beautiful and the wealthy as winners. The context however is that God uses apparent defeat to produce ultimate victory as He accomplishes His purposes through our problems. That means you can be an “uber-conqueror” even when you're dealing with health issues, relational ruptures, financial trouble, stress on the job and whatever persecution you are experiencing because of your faith. The key is to think less about the power of things over you and more about the power of Christ within you.

Let me go over the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) and the FAPs (Faithfully Answered Promises) again quickly so they go down deep in our hearts. Savor the security you have because of what the Savior has accomplished.

FAQ #1: Who Opposes Us? FAP #1: God Protects Us!

FAQ #2: Who Withholds From Us? FAP #2: God Provides for Us!

FAQ #3: Who Accuses Us? FAP #3: God Purifies Us!

FAQ #4: Who Condemns Us? FAP #4: Jesus Prays for Us!

FAQ #5: Who Separates Us? FAP #5: Jesus Preserves Us!

I close with one more question...and it's a big one. It's actually *the* question. Have you accepted Christ? If you haven't and if you

don't, God will be against you. Don't delay a decision. Receive Jesus Christ into your life right now.

We want to end this service by hearing how our Africa teams experienced the conquering power of Christ this summer. We'll hear first from the Kenya team: Linda Carley, Kathy Marley and Katie Vietti. Lindsay Carley served in Uganda, and because she is back in college, we'll watch a multimedia presentation of her trip.

Romans 8:33-39 The Certainty of No Separation: Lessons from a Lockdown - 9/2/06

Pontiac made not only the national headlines this week, we even became international news. We could have been named in the same sentence as Columbine or Virginia Tech but thankfully a tragedy was averted. It was a close call but it was also a wake-up call. But if past events are any indication the wake-up will be short-lived.

As you know by now, Pontiac Township High School was on a lockdown for three and a half hours this past Tuesday morning as a result of officials finding six handguns on campus. Because this has rocked our community I want to focus on some "Lessons from a Lockdown" so that we don't miss what God wants to teach us.

Note: Because information on this incident is in "flux," my purpose is to focus on what we can learn – not to discuss the specific details of what happened. I'll leave that to the proper authorities.

We're starting with the message and then we'll praise God through song. We'll end our morning by spending time around the table.

1. Living in a small town doesn't mean you are safe.

I heard one person say, *"So much for innocence in Pontiac."* Several have said something like this: *"I never thought this could happen here."* This incident has taught us that whether you live in Pontiac or in a surrounding community, our problems are very real – and sometimes very raw. On Tuesday, when information was still hard to come by, our youngest daughter Megan, when referring to Lydia, who is in high school, said this: *"Lydia might not have come home today."*

We are not insulated, and certainly not isolated, from those things that plague larger communities. Why is that? Because as we have learned in Romans 3:12: **"...There is no one who does good, not even one."** While this is a good community, we also live in a sin-soaked society.

As I attended the various briefings, press conferences and parent meetings, I found within myself a strong tie to this community. To say it another way, I'm proud to live in Livingston County and Pontiac in particular. This community has pulled together when we could have fallen apart. It remains to be seen how we will move forward from this but I'm optimistic about the opportunity. During the parent meeting on Wednesday night at the high school one parent raised his hand and said something like this: *"If you're looking for volunteers to serve as hall monitors, put me on the top of the list."*

2. One person can make a difference.

The student who had the courage to do what was right and tell the Resource Officer that he had observed some guns deserves to be commended. He is a hero. He did what was right, not what was easy. My other hero in this incident is Officer Bill Reynolds who responded immediately by instituting a "Code Red." Because Bill has spent time beforehand building relationships with the students, this young man felt comfortable coming to him.

Along with Officer Reynolds, I was impressed with Chief Dale Newsome and the other officers who responded to this incident. They would tell you that they just did what they were trained to do but I think we need to thank every officer we see. I'm serious about this. When you see an officer this week I encourage you to greet him or her and say, *"I attend Pontiac Bible Church and I just want to say thanks for what you do."*

I am also very grateful for Superintendent Leo Johnson, Principal Jon Kilgore and LAVC Director Amy Smith for the way they handled the situation. The teachers provided stability and safety for our students in their classrooms and continue to shepherd them through this (Please stand if you are a teacher or on staff at any school – this would include home school parents as well). I'm also thankful for our local media as they worked diligently to get the right information out as quickly as possible.

And I'm extremely grateful for the caliber of the clergy in this community. There were over 10 pastors outside the school on Tuesday morning, mingling with parents. Pontiac Bible Church and First Lutheran Church provided lemonade and water. On Wednesday morning, around 15 pastors were available to meet with students on campus. This was an amazing opportunity to provide prayer and a listening ear for students and staff.

Friend, don't ever think that you don't matter. Speak up. Stand up. Step up. The message of Mordecai to Esther in Esther 4:14 is

true for each of us:

And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

You are where you are for a purpose.

3. People pray when problems occur.

Reading the fear on many faces as we stood outside the school on Tuesday morning and sensing the prompting of the Holy Spirit, I asked everyone to gather in a circle so we could pray. Almost everyone joined in. During the day on Wednesday when I was at the school, the Spirit prompted me again and I asked the administration for permission for us to pray after the parent meeting that night. A number of parents gathered down front for a time of earnest prayer.

Psalm 121:2-3: "...Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and earth."

Our entire country turned to the Lord after 9/11. Our challenge now is to make sure that we don't turn away from Him when this incident fades from our memory. Here's an application. Whenever you discover that someone is having problems, simply offer to pray with them. They might not always say yes but they will always be thankful that you asked.

4. It's time for parents to be parents.

At one of the parent meetings I attended, one parent said that he's partly to blame for what happened because he needs to do a better job knowing what his own child is doing. If you're a parent, make sure your child knows that you love him or her. Part of loving is disciplining.

Hebrews 12:11: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

And part of building discipline into their lives is teaching kids about right and wrong, and about the importance of standing up and speaking out.

Fellow parents, this is a wake-up call for us. Don't be afraid to tell your child "no" and make sure you are putting them in position to say "yes" to Jesus. In a strange way, our nephews who attend huge schools in the Chicago area have learned lessons from what happened here. Let's make sure we learn those same lessons. Let me give a caution here. Be careful about blaming other parents for what their kids may have done. I can't imagine the pain these particular parents are experiencing right now. Let's look for ways to reach out.

5. Support the Student Ministry.

Pastor Jeff and his dedicated platoon of leaders are leading a ministry that really matters. What a joy it was for me to watch him mingle with the students on Wednesday at PTHS as he called many of them by name. Our student ministry right now is poised for some great things and there's only one thing holding it back. Do you know what it is? They need more leaders and more parents to be involved so they can "go wide" this year. There's a "parent's night" scheduled for next Sunday night.

There is a significant need on Wednesday nights in the Junior High ministry. Please consider joining this team so that these students can be trained to live out loud on their campuses. We have a wide open door for ministry in this community. Let's make sure we walk through it. Let me say it this way: *Student ministry is imperative, it's not optional.* By the way, "See You at the Pole" will be held on September 26th. I'm praying that the whole front of the school will be filled with students who will be praying for their campus. There's also a Moms in Touch group that meets every Thursday morning at the First Christian Church.

1 Timothy 4:12 is a challenge to our youth, but it begins with a challenge to adults:

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."

Let's make sure we are not looking down on teens or marginalizing them just because they're young.

Instead, let's seek to understand them, to love them, and to learn from them. Remember, they are not the future of the church... they *are* the church.

6. Reject rumors.

As the events of Tuesday were unfolding, dozens of rumors began circulating. Some of these seemed very credible but have since been debunked. Unfortunately, even after the truth comes out some people want to hold on to a rumor. Why is that?

Proverbs 26:22: ***“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.”***

Be careful about allowing a rumor to ruminate in your heart. The Living Bible puts it this way: ***“What dainty morsels rumors are. They are eaten with great relish.”*** That means that gossip is usually fun and interesting because it appeals to our desire for information and details. The danger is that when we feed on gossip we’ll always crave more.

Be even more careful about passing hearsay along. One good way to handle this is to not hang around with someone who gorges on gossip.

Proverbs 20:19: ***“A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.”***

And do what you can to quash rumors when you hear them. As an example of this, I heard a younger child declare to a number of other students that there was a “shooting” at the high school. I immediately corrected that misinformation.

That reminds me of the person who was gossiping to his friend about someone in the church. When the friend asked a question to get more of the juicy details, his buddy replied,

I’ve already told you more than I know!

7. We are only safe when we seek refuge in God.

We live in a world with constant threats and uncertainty. And now it’s come to Pontiac. There’s no place to hide that is safe anymore except when we find our refuge in Jesus. What are you focused on? If you focus on the threat, you’ll be anxious. Run to the One who will never let you down. Choose to not go to that frenzied place. Before our prayer time on Wednesday night I read these verses from Psalm 46:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea... ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.’ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

I realize that the information that has come out now is different than the fears that were flying around earlier in the week, but I think one of the lessons is this: *Are you ready to die?* It’s good for us to ponder our death because it helps us focus on what we’re living for. If you have not received Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior do it today (see John 1:12).

Meditate on these words from Romans 8:38-39 when life feels unstable and you wonder what’s going to happen next:

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How comforting to know that there is nothing that can sever our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Notice that Paul is personally persuaded and completely convinced about this. The words ***“neither”*** and ***“nor”*** are absolute negatives and can be translated “not even anything.” Paul then lists some things that will never be able to separate us from the love of God.

- Death.** For the believer, death is the doorway to heaven and its sting has been removed by the Savior (see 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Death is mentioned first because if the love of Christ can sustain us through death, there is nothing else left to fear.
- Life.** For some of us, life seems more challenging than death. That may be exactly how many of our students felt this week. There’s nothing that can happen while we are alive, no matter how difficult or scary that can separate us from the love of Christ.
- Angels.** No matter how strong, they cannot sever us from the Savior.
- Demons.** 1 John 4:4: ***“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”***
- The present.** There’s nothing that is happening right now that can move you out of the arms of Jesus.
- The future.** And there’s nothing you will face in the future that will fracture your relationship with Him.
- Powers.** Every power in the world is subservient to the power of Almighty God.
- Height.** You can never go higher than God.

Depth. No matter how deep the valley is; God is there.

Anything else in all creation. Paul adds this just to make sure he didn't miss anything. While it's tough to feel safe in today's society, if you know Jesus your relationship with Him is completely safe.

God's love for us is unconditional and sacrificial, and is fully expressed in the death of His Son on our behalf. Let me point out that Romans 8 begins with "**no condemnation**" and it ends with "**no separation.**" It doesn't get any better than that!

8. It's time for the church to be the church.

Are you more lukewarm than hot? The words of Jesus in Revelation 3:15-16 are very abrupt and arresting:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

May God move us out of our mediocrity and lift us from our lethargic lives. Refuse to be a "Chameleon Christian" or a "Pew Potato." Live your faith authentically and make sure you are surrendered completely to the Savior.

Let's get supremely serious about our faith and about sharing it with others. As I was mingling with parents on Tuesday I introduced myself to another dad and found out that he is searching for God and has some questions about the Bible. I was able to share a few things with him, invited him to church, and then sent him some material.

Let's redouble our efforts to live out our mission as a church by *connecting people to Jesus and equipping them to be growing and faithful followers.*

Let's look for the good that God will bring out of this. God weaves His ways for His awesome glory and for our ultimate good.

Romans 8:28: "***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***

I'm excited to think about what good God is going to bring from this.

Let me also be quick to say that God would still be good even if something worse had happened. People are scared. They have questions. It's time for us to get our eyes off of ourselves and ask God to help us see people like He does.

Let's ask Christ to give us compassion for the lost sheep in this community. I love what is said about Jesus in Mark 6:34:

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Let's be compassionate and caring...just as Christ is. Let's make sure that everyone is not only welcome at our table but also receives an invitation to join us. Wouldn't it be great if Pontiac would be known as a community that learned these "Lessons from a Lockdown" and that Pontiac Bible Church would take the lead? That would be a headline we could all be proud of.