

Expositional Sermons

**The Highest Peak**

SERMONS ON ROMANS 8

A. W. POWERS

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**PREFACE**

When my friend Adam asked me to write the preface to his new book on Romans 8, I said yes immediately because it’s my favorite chapter in all of Scripture as it is for countless others who know and love our Savior. Who could ever begin to plumb its depths or adequately search out its treasures? Those of us who have had the joy of preaching through Romans have arrived at the eighth chapter with excitement, anticipation, and a whole lot of relief! And there’s a reason for this. The Apostle uses a lot of inspired ink in the previous chapters to kill us all, spiritually! He makes it crystal clear that, apart from Christ, we are all separated from God, sinful to the very core of our being, yes, even “conceived in sin,” as David wrote in the Old Testament, from which Paul often quoted.

Unfortunately, we don’t hear these Biblical, historic truths sounded forth enough from the pulpits of our land. How often do we hear the depravity of the race preached, as Paul lays it out in chapter 1? Or, that the Tarsus theologian pins the universal indictment on every single person. It could get discouraging! Then, chapter 8 introduces us to the magnum opus of our salvation. Pastor Adam did a masterful job from the SonRise pulpit with his expository messages through Romans 8, upon which this book is based. I’m glad to be able to recommend it highly to you the reader.

On January 6th, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed Congress on the state of the war in Europe. Much of what he said that day has been forgotten. But at the close of his address, he said that he looked forward “to a world, founded upon four essential human freedoms.” He named them the “freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.” These words are mostly still remembered from the address, even though their ideals have not yet been realized anywhere on our planet. Romans 8 is truly the Christian’s “declaration of freedom,” for in it, Paul declares the great spiritual freedoms we enjoy because of our union with Christ. Any study of this chapter shows the emphasis placed on the Holy Spirit, Who is mentioned 19 times…and “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Someone called this beloved chapter “the brightest jewel in the treasure chest of the Word of God.” I concur. As a lover of our Christian heritage, my prayer is that you are blessed, changed and profoundly impacted by this glorious chapter’s truths as so many have been down through the centuries. To study the book of Romans and specifically Romans 8, is to walk in the footsteps, not only of the apostle Paul, but of such theological and pastoral giants as St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Robert Haldane, Charles Hodge, Martin Lloyd Jones, and many others.

Will we ever fully comprehend the magnitude of what we read in chapter 8? Probably not this side of heaven. There is no way our little minds can comprehend the love of God perfectly. But that did not stop his Son from coming; aren’t you glad? “If God is for us who can be against us?” (verse 31). God IS for you believer! Not “maybe” or “has been” or “was” or “would be”…but IS. He is for you today at this very minute, as you read this sentence, so there's no need to wait in line, or come back later. He could not be closer than he is at this very second. Amazing grace, to be sure. His loyal-love won't increase if you are better nor lessen if you are worse. He is for you!

“Can anything separate you from the love of Christ?” (verse 35). The answer of course is…“No, nothing can,” as Paul goes on to answer his own question with one of the most comforting statements in all of Scripture. So stake your future on the triumphant words of Paul, “I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (verses 38-39).

Rest assured that the riches of Romans 8 are not reserved for a select few Christians but for all of us who are united to Christ by faith and indwelt by his Spirit. Enjoy the Lord always, believer, and be encouraged by the words of hope, assurance and future blessedness in this book.

Dr. Brad Davis, D.Min

**1**

# A MOST IMPORTANT VERSE

*Romans 8:1*

***Introduction***

What an honor it has been for me to have led you these past many months through the first seven chapters of Paul’s letter to the Romans. We’ve seen much and rejoiced over much in these chapters. But today marks a very special day. Today we arrive at Romans chapter 8. Some have called this chapter “the inner sanctuary of the Christian faith,” “the tree of life in the midst of the Garden of Eden,” and even “the highest peak in Paul’s beautiful mountain range that is Romans.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Simply put, “Romans 8 is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Beginning in v. 1 with no condemnation and ending in v. 39 with no separation, Romans 8 covers the whole of the Christian life, from our hostility toward God as sinners to our redemption in Christ that made us saints—from justification to glorification. “From the suffering of this present life to the peace of the life to come, Romans 8 is a grand and gracious reminder, from God to us, of how the gospel truly does bring us all the way home!”[[3]](#footnote-3) “But is it right for us to hold such a high view of this chapter?”[[4]](#footnote-4) Sure, many have said exalted things about these 39 verses, but are they right to do so? I mean, shouldn’t we hold the whole Bible this high and view all of Scripture as the inner sanctuary of the Christian faith? Doesn’t all of Scripture shine out with the brightness of the glory of God? Indeed, it does. But, while all of Scripture is a treasure chest of glory to us, we cannot deny that certain chapters, and certain books even, have always stood out distinctly to believers through the ages. Think of our bodies: a toe is just as much a part of the body as the face, but do they arrest our attention equally? While no one is going to say our toes are useless, we do say the face stands out more prominently on our bodies. Even so, as long as we remain balanced in our handling of Scripture and it doesn’t lead us to neglect the rest of Scripture, I think we can say, and are right to say, that Romans 8 is truly one of the most moving and soul-stirring chapters in the Bible.

As we draw near it, there is one introductory remark I’d like to make. While there are many incredible and remarkable statements made in Romans 8, would you be surprised to hear that there is nothing new in the whole chapter?[[5]](#footnote-5) Romans 8 contains no new truth. What it does do is expand and apply many truths that have only been hinted at or briefly mentioned before in Romans, especially in chapter 5—truths about how we should think about ourselves and what we should know to be true of us as Christians. This, in and of itself, is worth noting because we too often tire of old things, thinking only new things dazzle us or shine brightly. Romans 8 displays just the opposite! The most moving and powerful chapter in the Bible is filled with nothing novel, nothing original, and nothing innovative. No, it’s the old gospel story that fills these verses that is opened up to us here and driven home to the heart. Paul simply states what is now true of the Christian in v. 1, and then spends the next 38 verses explaining how gloriously true v. 1 really is!

Well, I think we can get to it now. Look with me at the first verse, Romans 8:1: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Let’s slowly move through the three main phrases here before us.

***Therefore***

The initial thrust in the *English Standard Version* (ESV) translation of Roman 8:1 is *therefore.* And of course, we know what this word means. It reminds us that Paul is drawing conclusions; he’s said something and is now going to be applying that something to us. Well, what has Paul said? In chapters 1-7 he’s shown us our holy God, sinful man, the wrath to come, a perfect Savior, Christ crucified for us, Christ risen for us, justification by faith alone, and sanctification by faith alone![[6]](#footnote-6) In other words, Paul has shown us in chapters 1-7 the essence of our faith. And after all of this he now says in v. 1, “There is therefore….” It’s like Paul has been building and building and building, laying a firm foundation for us in chapters 1-7. And as soon as chapter 8 begins with “There is therefore…” he starts to craft a house we can live in that sits fixed and forever firm on this foundation.

I’m so glad for this word therefore*,* especially since it comes right after chapter 7. Chapter 7 closes in vv. 15-25 with one of the clearest displays of our struggle with sin in Scripture. “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate…I know that nothing good dwells in me…For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out…Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”Then comes the great thereforestatement of chapter 8:1, telling us of our standing with this great Savior. I almost wish v. 1 was really the last verse in chapter 7, because it’s the proper conclusion of it. A friend once told Charles Spurgeon, “I have finally gotten out of Romans 7 and into Romans 8,” to which Spurgeon replied, “Nonsense! There is no getting out of one into the other, for they are one. The field is not divided by hedge or ditch. I thank God with all my heart that since my conversion I have never known what it is to be out of Romans 7, nor have I known what it is to be out of Romans 8. The whole passage has been my experience.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Church, can we not say the same? Indeed, we can. Yes, we know our sin: the struggle of not understanding our actions, doing what is evil, not doing what is good, seeing Christ as Savior, throwing ourselves on him and him alone, and then finding him to be who he is—powerful to save us to the uttermost! So powerful that now a new banner stands over us, all our days never to be removed: no condemnation. Praise God!

This brings us to our next phrase in v. 1.

***No Condemnation***

“There is therefore now no condemnation ….”

I’m a firm believer that you don’t need to know ancient Greek to truly understand the Bible. The English is very adequate to show us the glory of God in the pages of Scripture. But I want to briefly take you into the language and modern translations to show you something.

The *King James Version* (KJV) has words more than the rest. The KJV of v. 1 ends with the phrase, “…who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” This phrase is also in the *New King James Version* (NKJV), but it isn’t in other translations because in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts we have of Romans, this phrase is not in there. Which means this is likely a later addition from someone other than Paul. So, it’s wise to leave it out of v. 1. But notice it does pop up again in every translation of v. 4.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Now let’s look at the Greek. It might be strange to translate it word for word into English because the word order doesn’t make sense, but if we do that we read: *No therefore now condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.* Though that sentence is very rough English, do you notice the difference between the ESV and the Greek? While the ESV begins with *There is therefore*, what does the Greek begin with? The word *No****.*** Why does all of this matter? It shows us that Paul is so eager to tell us there’s no condemnation any longer, that he moves the emphatic negative, the no, right to the front of the verse for emphasis.

So what does no condemnation mean? Well, let’s first ask what does condemnation mean? It’s a fairly common word, even though it’s a word most don’t use very often. The word itself can be used in a few different ways. In a small sense we can say to condemn is to express disapproval for something: we don’t like this or that, him or her, or them. That’s condemning in a small sense. Going a bit further, we could say to condemn is to declare something unfit for use, such as a house that has been condemned. This is a bit more direct in its usage. But going still further I think the word condemn is normally used to bring a larger negative sense into view. In this larger sense, we can say to condemn is to pass judgment on someone or to sentence someone to a particular punishment, normally death. This definition immediately places the word in a legal setting where we get the image of a judge and jury making the decision to bring an innocent or guilty verdict to bear on those who are accused of breaking the law. I do think Paul has this legal setting in mind when he uses this word. And that Paul places the word noin front of the word therefore is simply astounding. He means to teach us how Christians now relate to God, the just Judge over all things. Even though all the evidence is abundantly clear that we’re sinners and should face the eternal inferno of God’s wrath forever, Paul says that’s not the case—that this is no longer true of us. Now there’s no condemnation for us. Instead there’s salvation, redemption, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification.

Think on this in light of what Paul has taught us so far in Romans. Since the day Adam disobeyed God, death spread to and reigned over all men. The same proved true in Noah’s day and in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s day. Then God redeemed his people out of Egypt and gave them his Law on Mt. Sinai, and the Law imposed its commands on Israel—commands about how they were to live before God and alongside their neighbors. Commands, that if kept, brought blessing and righteousness, but if broken, brought curse and condemnation. What did Israel do? They failed to keep the Law and by failing to keep it, they experienced the curses of the covenant, and therefore lived under the banner of condemnation. What then happened? If condemnation loomed over God’s people, what happened to change that? Did they straighten up? Did they work harder at obeying? No. Simply put, Jesus happened. God’s very Son came to us. His was a life lived in perfect obedience to the Law and yet dying the death of a lawbreaker to free and purchase and redeem all those who come to him in faith. In other words, by the time we get to Romans 8:1 and hear Paul say, *there is therefore now no condemnation*, we know why he can make such an astounding statement. The Christian doesn’t experience condemnation before God because Christ the Son of God was condemned by God, for us! Jesus received our guilty verdict and our sentence. He represented us on the cross where all of God’s condemnation, displeasure, and omnipotent wrath against sin was spent.[[9]](#footnote-9) This is what Paul meant in chapter 3 when he says in vv. 25-26 that Jesus was put forward by God as a propitiation in his blood. To propitiate is to appease or to satisfy wrath—meaning, the moment the Son of God died on the cross, the Father’s anger against sin was quenched—not just for a time, but for all time. Paul rejoices in this fact at the end of Romans 8, in vv. 33-34, when he says, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

Church, because Christ was condemned the verdict is now in for every Christian—not guilty! No condemnation! Hear that as it is. It isn’t just that we’re not condemned at the cross, it’s no condemnation today. It isn’t just that one day in the end we’ll no longer be condemned for our sin, it’s no condemnation already. It isn’t just that we’re not under condemnation now, only to have it return if we go back into sin again, it’s no condemnation forever. Condemnation doesn’t exist for us. It’s gone, and it can never return![[10]](#footnote-10) Is this not the great rejection of the serpent’s lie in Genesis 3:4b? “You will not surely die.”That was an empty threat, intended to deceive. Romans 8:1 is the true remedy to man’s ruin, intended to bring absolute assurance to the soul.

But, who receives such a gift? Everyone universally? No. Look to our last heading. The gift of no condemnation is only for those in Christ.

***In Christ***

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

I’ll be brief here, as we’ve lingered on this often in the past 7 chapters. Church, not everyone can say they are no longer under condemnation. No, Paul is not a universalist. It’s not as if God is sitting on top of a great mountain on which people can choose whatever road they want because all roads lead to God in the end. No, that’s not Paul, that’s not Bible, that’s not Christianity. Some are in Christ and some are not. And only those in Christ experience Christ taking their condemnation for them on the cross. It would be just as true to reverse Romans 8:1 for those outside of Christ, saying there is therefore condemnation to all those who are not in Christ.[[11]](#footnote-11) So, where are you? Are you in Christ and under grace? Or are you outside of Christ and under condemnation? If you’re outside of Christ, I know no truth more alarming than this, that condemnation still stands over you. And yet, if you’re in Christ, I know no truth more amazing than this, that no condemnation is ever our boast before God.

Well, that’s Romans 8:1. Let’s now ask one more question. Why does Romans 8:1 matter?12 Four answers to that question could be given.

***Freedom from Guilt***

Do you realize what happened in Romans 7-8 here before us? The same lips that made an honest confession of sin in chapter 7 made this bold declaration of no condemnation in chapter 8. See that? You must be able to do this, too. Many Christians simply conclude they’re not Christians when they sin or struggle. Were you saved by your goodness? No. Why then do you think you now stand in Christ by your own goodness? Are you Roman Catholic? What God tells us about us is truer than what we tell ourselves about ourselves. Yes, we should feel the weight of our sin. Yes, we should repent and turn from sin. But we should also turn toward Romans 8:1 and feel its warm embrace. Take off the gloves of guilt and stop trying to *Mike Tyson* yourself to death and rest in grace.

***Freedom to Love***

Suppose you’re disappointed, I mean big-time disappointed in life and find yourself saying that this isn’t what you signed up for. Whether this is true of your own self, your marriage, your children, your job, or whatever, Romans 8:1 can free you to love others as you ought. How? Because it’s the reminder that you’re a sinner, deserving of God’s wrath, and yet because of Jesus you now swim in a sea of grace. Since God so loved you, you can find the strength to love others as well.

***Freedom to Live***

There’s a lot of pressure to be this or that today. We ask if it is still cool to wear pants like this nowadays; if people are still taking briefcases or a fancy bag to work; if it is still ok to wear crocs in public; what kind of car should we be driving; and what are the cool churches singing and teaching these days. At the bottom of all these questions is this desire to be seen as with-it and not out of touch. Church, the tide of cultural approval is ever coming and going. To be ruled by it is to be tossed about in the sea of image management. Don’t be ruled by this. Be free. If you’re in Christ, your Father in heaven loves you and will never stop loving you. His approval, his smile, are 10,000 times more important than the world’s. Live free in him.

***Freedom to Obey***

Because all these things and more are true, because there’s no condemnation for us, and because we’re forever home in Christ, we can be free to take risks, to do hard things, and to live boldly for Christ in this world. Christ did not die for you to free you to indulge in sin and live comfortably in this world. No, his gospel enables us to run swift in his grace, knowing nothing can condemn and nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. We are now free to obey, and in obeying God, we’ll find him to be to us what he is—strong.

**2**

# THE WHAT - THE HOW - THE WHY

*Romans 8:1-4*

***Introduction***

Last week we began working our way through one of the greatest chapters in the Bible, Romans 8. Beginning in v. 1 with no condemnation and ending in v. 39 with no separation, Romans 8 covers the whole of the Christian life. And last week we just lingered over v. 1 as is fitting for us to do because you could make the argument that v. 1 is the greatest verse in this greatest chapter of the Bible that is Romans 8. Today we press on, looking at the context in v. 1 which comes to us in vv. 1-4. In these opening four verses we find out three things: what God did, how God did it, and why God did it. Let’s begin in vv. 1-2.

***What God Did (verses 1-2)***

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

Verse 1 contains, as we saw last week, three choice phrases that launch our souls heavenward. The first phrase is *therefore*, which displays how Paul is now drawing conclusions and applying what he’s already told us in Romans 1-7. The second phrase is *no condemnation*, which displays a courtroom legal setting where God the Father, the just Judge over all things, passes the verdict of not guilty on us because Jesus was condemned for us. The third phrase is *in Christ*, which displays not a kind of universalism where all people will be saved in the end, but that those who receive the great gift of no condemnation are only those who come to Christ in faith. We then drew out four applications of the possible trillion that flow out of v. 1: freedom from guilt, freedom to love, freedom to live, and freedom to obey.

Now that’s what we dug into last week in v. 1. In a true sense we used the magnifying glass method, zeroing in on and laboring to see and be stunned by the truth God has given to us there. Now let’s back up a bit and take v. 1 in its proper context, vv. 1-4. Notice what word begins v. 2? *For*, which means what we’re about to read in these next few verses gives us the reasoning why v. 1 is true. If you back up further and look at vv. 1-8, you can see how verse 4 and 8 are the only verses that don’t begin with the word *for.* All the rest do, which shows us how Paul builds and builds all these verses on top of one another to make his teaching clear to us.

This is where I’d like to make a correction on something I’ve told you before. I can do that, right? It might seem like a small matter, but as your pastor I too am growing in my knowledge and understanding of God’s Word. If we find ourselves somewhere out of line with Scripture we must assume we’re wrong, God’s right, and thus we should be the ones to adjust. Well, when we were going through Romans 6-7, I said every time Paul uses the word *law* in Romans he is referring to the Mosaic Law, the Ten Commandments. Well, that’s not quite correct. There are a few times when this is not the case. Verse 2 is one such example where the word law is used in a different sense. Paul uses it twice in v. 2, and each time he’s not referring to the Mosaic Law but is using the word to mean something like a “general principle or general work of.”[[12]](#footnote-12) See it in v. 2, “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” Law is being used here as a kind of generic term describing what the Spirit of life does to us and what sin and death do to us.

Now we can ask a bigger question: what does v. 2 mean and how does it expand on v. 1? Verse 1 told us the great declaration, that for those who are in Christ there is now no condemnation. Well, what did God do to make that happen? Enter v. 2. We were set free. How? Once we were under the power of sin and death, but we’ve been set free by the Spirit of life. This is what v. 2 means. It shows the inner working, or behind the scenes of v. 1. Verse 2 then, is another description of the gospel, of our being set free in Christ. But notice it, this is one of the first moments in Romans where Paul speaks of the gospel’s power to save in relation to the Holy Spirit. It’s been hinted at before in 2:29 where it says true circumcision is a “…matter of the heart, by the Spirit…” and in 5:5 where it says “…God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit…” and hinted at again in 7:6 where it says we now “…serve in the new way of the Spirit….” But now, clearly and powerfully, Paul says it is the Spirit of life, or the Holy Spirit, that frees us from sin and death. Church, see it and rejoice in it. The moment we believe in Jesus we’re united to Jesus; we go from being *in Adam* to being *in Christ*. The moment we become in Christ the Holy Spirit begins to dwell in us and do certain things to us. What things? The Spirit frees us from sin and death (that’s v. 2) and frees us from condemnation (that’s v. 1). And we can be assured that once the Spirit does this in us, he’ll keep on working in us so that these things increase in us, until the moment we’re with the Lord in glory. This is how v. 2 expands on v. 1. Verse 1 states what is now true of us and v. 2 shows us what God did to make that true of us.

We’ll dig more into the Spirit in v. 4. For now, let’s move on to our second heading where we see…

***How God Did It (verse 3)***

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh….”

I know I just confessed to my exaggeration of the word law, but here in verses 3 and 4 we do come back to Paul using the word law to refer to Moses or the Ten Commandments again. The context makes this clear. As soon as v. 3 begins there is a contrast being shown to us—what God did versus what the law could not do. What was the law trying to do? Look at the start of v. 4. The law was trying to fulfill the *righteous requirement.* Why could the law not do this and why could God do it? Paul says the law was weakened by the flesh, or because of the weakness of our flesh it was unable to do this. Remember, God said if the law was kept fully his people would’ve earned a perfect righteousness, but they couldn’t keep the demands of the law because of their sin.[[13]](#footnote-13) But see the contrast now—what the law couldn’t do, God did! This contrasting phrase is really the whole gospel in a nutshell. What the law could not do, God did; what our goodness can never achieve, God did achieve; what our morality could never achieve, God did achieve; what our behavior could never achieve, God did achieve. We can’t, but God can, and God did. That’s the gospel.[[14]](#footnote-14)

But how did God do it? By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. See the wordplay here?[[15]](#footnote-15) The law was weakened by the flesh, yet God condemned sin in the flesh by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. Paul is so careful about his words here. He could’ve said God sent Christ *in sinful flesh,* but that would mean Jesus was a sinner, which we know isn’t true from other parts of Scripture. Paul could’ve said God sent Christ *in the likeness of flesh*, but that would mean Jesus only appeared to be human, which we know isn’t true from other parts of Scripture. Paul carefully avoids these errors. Instead Paul says God sent Christ *in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin*, teaching us that the Son of God truly took on human flesh like us, without becoming a sinner like us, in order to handle the problem, the penalty, and the power of sin for us.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Just a few days ago, I was glad to find myself in a surprise evangelistic encounter. Don’t you love when God sets up moments like this? I had certain plans in mind and clearly God had plans too. And so, as I’m walking out of a local coffee shop I hear, ”*Adam, why did Jesus come?”* I turned to see the stubborn man I’ve shared the gospel with many times before saying this to me, and for a moment I just stood there unsure of what to make of his words. He saw my happy confusion and said again, *“Why did Jesus come? I’ll tell you, Adam, he came to announce that the kingdom of God is within you. Hear that? The kingdom of God is within you. Do you believe that, Adam?”* I said I did not*,* to which he said, *“Right, like you’ve told me, you don’t think anything good is in us, do you?”* I said, *“Right, sin is within us. Jesus came to save us from sin.”* This back and forth went on for a bit until he grew a bit hostile with me. I reminded him of what I had told him many times before and went on my way. Did you notice what he was saying though? To him Jesus’ coming had nothing to do with sin. Rather, Jesus just came to announce that the Kingdom of God is already within us. This is how the world thinks about Jesus. He didn’t come for sin, no; leave that talk behind. Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God, to reconcile Jew and Gentile, to show how life is really meant to be lived, to teach us what love truly is, and on and on and on. Church, if we speak like this and say the coming of the Son of God had nothing to do with sin, we’re wrong. It was to deal with sin that he came in the likeness of sinful flesh, for sin, to condemn sin in the flesh! Many indeed speak of Jesus like this, without any reference to sin. Be reminded, there is no relevance of Christ’s coming into the world apart from the problem of sin.[[17]](#footnote-17) But we know why people so avoid this, right? Because to say such things implies that you must admit that sin is real, that something is wrong with the world, that something is wrong with you, that you can’t fix yourself, and that Jesus had to intervene in our world in order to deal with us and our sin. Once again we see that unless we see and own our sin, we’ll never know how God so loved the world.

We’ve seen what God did and how God did it, so to end look at v. 4. where we see…

***Why God Did It (verse 4)***

“…in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

In vv. 1-3 we’ve seen both the Father and the Son at work. The Father loved the world by sending the Son into the world for sin. Here in v. 4 we see the purpose all of this work not only aims at, but the purpose it actually achieves. And in this purpose we arrive at the work of the Spirit.

Verse 4 begins, no surprise, by picking up where v. 3 left off. Remember God did what the law couldn’t do. We would be righteous if we were able to keep the law, but due to the weakness of our flesh we could not, so God did what the law couldn’t do. He sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, for sin, condemning sin in his flesh on the cross. Why? To make us righteous. To gift us with the very righteousness Jesus earned for himself in his perfect life. That’s what the start of v. 4 means.

But then see where Paul goes with the rest of v. 4. God so worked by sending his Son for sin in order that we’d be made righteous and become those who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. This is simply massive, do not miss this. Paul means the purpose of God’s work in Christ to deal with sin is to free sinners from the power of sin and death, to enable them to keep the law from the heart by walking in step with the Spirit, to live according to the Spirit, to live under the influence of the Spirit, and to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why God has done what he’s done—to save us and put his Spirit within us.

This text calls us out. All of us in this world have a bent about us, a prideful independent streak entrenched within us that makes us think we can simply do whatever we want. Do you see how the gospel saves us from that? Or do you still run your life the way you want? Do you still live life on your terms? God didn’t send his Son for sin, to free us from sin, and to fill us with his Spirit so that we’re encouraged all the more to keep on doing whatever we want to do, no. God sent his Son for us and put his Spirit within us so that we’d walk in his ways, not in our ways.

This is who you are. So Church, be who you are. God has loved us. God has sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin for us. And God has sent his Spirit to reside within us. And the Holy Spirit so works within us that we no longer walk according to our own understanding, but according to God’s. What does it look like to walk according to the Spirit? That, Lord willing, will be answered next as we look into vv. 5-8.

**3**

# FLESH AND SPIRIT

*Romans 8:5-11*

***Introduction***

Last week as I concluded the sermon, I asked a question but didn’t answer it. The question was, what does it look like to walk according to the Holy Spirit? I asked this question because our text last week, Romans 8:1-4, took us there. As that text ends we find Paul saying we are those who do not “…walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Which led to our question about what it means to walk according to the Spirit. The answer to this question is not short, but it will begin to be answered for us

today, as we keep on following Paul as he slowly and carefully takes his time unfolding the nature of the Spirit’s work in us from vv. 5-7. Which means, Romans 8:5-17 is perhaps the richest and most saturated teaching on the Holy Spirit and the Christian life in all of Romans.

For us today, we’ll look at the beginning of Paul’s answer in vv. 5-11 where he shows us the great and vast difference between living according to the flesh and living according to the Spirit.

***Two Mindsets (verses 5-6)***

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.”

You might think Paul is teaching that there are only two ways Christians can live, one resembling death, and one resembling life and peace. He speaks like this because he really wants us to choose the right way and turn away from the wrong way. But this isn’t what Paul is teaching us here. Rather, Paul is teaching us that there has only ever been two positions mankind can be in. Sure, how we live matters, as we’ll see very soon, but what’s in view here is our position before God.[[18]](#footnote-18) In vv. 5-6, we’re either those in the flesh (unconverted/lost) or those in the Spirit (converted/saved).

Look at how Paul shows us this. He uses the phrase *set their minds on* four times in vv. 5-6 to indicate the difference between those who are in the flesh and those who are in the Spirit. Though it’s four words in English, it’s only one word in Greek, *phroneo*. While this word does have much to do with our thought life, it’s the phrase that has a much broader scope in view. It includes all the makeup of our soul—our thoughts and reasoning, our hearts and affections, our speech and motives, our intentions and passions, and our desires, actions, and behavior.[[19]](#footnote-19) Naturally then, because the whole person is in view in this phrase, we see there is a firm link between one’s mindset and one’s life. Those who have set their minds on the flesh live in line with the flesh, while those who have set their minds on the Spirit live in line with the Spirit. This all-encompassing reality would then lead us to say, for those who are unconverted—who set their minds on the flesh—this is not just them occasionally thinking about the things of the flesh. No, it’s them thinking of the things of the flesh most of all, over all. So much so that the things of the flesh are the things they’ve been mastered by, and are the things they’ve come to truly desire and love above all else. That’s alarming for sure. But see the other side here. For those who are converted—who set their minds on the Spirit—this is not just them occasionally thinking about the things of the Spirit. No, it’s them thinking of the things of the Spirit most of all, over all. So much so that the things of the Spirit are the things they’ve been mastered by, and are the things they’ve come to truly desire and love above all else.[[20]](#footnote-20) How wonderful is that? Paul’s boiling it down for us here, saying that there are only two kinds of people in the world: those controlled and directed by the flesh and those governed and led by the Spirit.[[21]](#footnote-21) We get all that from v. 5.

To expand on this in v. 6 Paul then makes the results of both of these positions clear. Those who have their minds set on the flesh will experience death. And those who have their minds set on the Spirit will experience life and peace. These terms too, are *broad scope* terms. Death not only awaits those who set their minds on the flesh in the future, but death reigns over their whole lives, even here and now. Or as Romans 5-6 taught us, those in Adam are under death and captive to it. And the opposite is just as true. Life and peace not only await those who set their minds on the Spirit in the future, but life and peace reign over their whole lives, even here and now. Or as Romans 5-6 taught us, those in Christ were once under death but are now under grace.

These then, are the two categories that all mankind throughout all of history fits into. But Paul doesn’t just want to state these things to us. He wants to unfold them to us, to open them up to us, and to so explain them to us so that we respond in the manner we ought to: with disgust and loathing toward the flesh, and with love and affection toward the Spirit. That is what he does next. He begins first with the flesh in vv. 7-8, showing us what it means to set the mind on the flesh.

***Setting the Mind on the Flesh (verses 7-8)***

“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

As v. 7 begins, we once again find the phrase, *the mind that is set on*. Remember, this is not referring to just mental activity but to the whole of one’s soul or the all-encompassing bent of one’s life and position before God. So, the language of vv. 7-8 refers to those who are not Christians, those who are unconverted. See then the sad state of all who are outside of Christ. All non-Christians have a mindset or a heart posture or bent that doesn’t just ignore God, that isn’t just against God, but that is hostile to God. The word *hostile* is key to notice. It indicates much more than mere disagreement. Hostile is not a word speaking of passive neutrality. It’s an active word. A word that gives us the image of someone aggressively engaged in attacking another. Church, this is the posture and position of all those led by the flesh and not led by the Spirit. An unbeliever might seem or even might say they don’t care about the things of God. They might even display a generosity or kindness in a worldly manner. But what does Paul say? They’re rebels against the King of kings. They have as much desire for God as a lion has toward a bowl of kale. Everything about God—his nature, his ways, his law, his Word, and his church—is alien to their nature. They know the law of God. It’s been written on the hearts of all men and lives in the conscience; but they hate it, repress it, and refuse to submit to it as Romans 1 taught us. Therefore, they don’t desire to please God, they cannot please God, and they are not pleasing to God.

Pause for a moment. How do you hear this? Do you agree with it? Or do you deny this and say mankind isn’t as bad as this makes us out to be? If that’s you, be warned. If you disagree with this you’ll also find yourself disagreeing with Scripture in many other places. In those moments we must remember that we’re sinners and God is perfect which then ought to lead us to conclude that we’re the ones who are wrong, while God is always right. But maybe that’s not your issue. Maybe you do agree with this, but you view a passage like this as being just for those who commit really *sinful* sins; like drug addicts, prostitutes, murderers, child abusers, and those serving life sentences. This is a passage just for them, right? Surely, it’s not for my nice neighbors or co-workers, right? Wrong. One who ignores God and runs after success in their work is just as much dominated by the flesh as those who ignore God and commit adultery.[[22]](#footnote-22) Whatever sin is in view, it’s just the symptom of a deeper heart problem. Whether the sin is moral, ethical, political, cultural, social, theological, or spiritual, everyone who lives according to the flesh is outside of Christ, devoid of the Spirit, and is hostile to God. Nothing more terrible can be imagined.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Now it’s probably not surprising for me to tell you this, but our culture hates that the Bible speaks like this. Every time something like this happens in Scripture, many people ignore it, others reject it, some even twist it to make it mean the exact opposite of what it means. Church, we must be clear on this. At the last judgment, God won’t send sins to hell, he’ll send sinners to hell.[[24]](#footnote-24) This is the meaning of spiritual death. This is what it is to set the mind on the flesh.

Now, having exposed to us the horror of sinful man, let’s keep on following Paul as he reveals to us the beauty of redeemed man.

***Setting the Mind on the Spirit (verses 9-11)***

While everything we said about those who’ve set their minds on the flesh was devastating and dreadful, we turn to those who’ve set their minds on the Spirit. Everything we’ll say about them, us, is delightful and wonderful. We should feel the shift here. Paul doesn’t pass through the evil of the flesh-ruled man and then say that Christians are not like that. He says far more about us. I wholeheartedly agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones when he says, “God forbid that we should give the world the impression that we are mere negations, that we are simply a people who…do not do this and that. What a travesty of Christianity that is, especially in light of all the glorious positives that the New Testament puts before us.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Listen Church, to the glorious positives God has to say about us in vv. 9-11. “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

Look at v. 9. Paul does believe what he said about the state of those in the flesh in vv. 7-8, but as v. 9 begins, he believes better things, higher things, of these Christians in Rome. Sure, they struggle with sin and need to grow in holiness and mature toward a greater Christlikeness, but Paul is clear. He doesn’t believe they’re in the flesh but believes they’re in the Spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in them. Perhaps he adds the word *if* to encourage his readers then, and us here today, to examine and ask ourselves if the Spirit is truly in us. After all, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ. Yes, that’s true, and if upon examination of ourselves we find we’re devoid of the Spirit and in the flesh, we should flee to Christ and be saved! But see it, the opposite is also true. Yes, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But anyone who does have the Spirit of Christ does belong to him. This thought quickly leads to Paul’s encouragement in v. 10, “But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” Anyone surprised at how v. 10 begins? I thought we were discussing the Holy Spirit? Now in v. 10 he explicitly mentions *if Christ is in you*. What’s going on here? Has Paul gotten confused? Has he made a blunder? No. This is not a Trinitarian error or even a blurring of the roles here between the Persons of the Trinity. Rather, what’s being highlighted in v. 10 is the intimacy of the relationship that exists between the Son and the Spirit in those who believe.[[26]](#footnote-26) In other words, the Son of God and the Spirit of God are so closely connected when it comes to communicating the benefits of salvation to those who believe, that Paul can move back and forth between Son and Spirit seamlessly in vv. 9-10.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Keep going in v. 10 though. What’s the point of this? *If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness*. This is another Romans 7 kind of statement. Though we’re still bound to these fallen, mortal, earthly bodies that are decaying day by day, there’s a different story to see on the inside. Deadness may surround us, but Holy Spirit life abounds within us. Why? Because of righteousness? Yes, the righteousness of Christ reckoned to our account when we were saved leads to life blooming within by the Spirit. If we didn’t get that, Paul repeats this same beautiful reality in different words in v. 11. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

Verse 11 is just like v. 10; it begins with a surprise. While v. 9 says the Spirit of God dwells in us, and while v. 10 says Christ is in us now, v. 11 says the Spirit of the Father is in us. You see that? “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you….” This is undeniably a reference to the Father, but the focus here is on the Spirit.[[28]](#footnote-28) So the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of him who raised or the Spirit of the Father. How can this be? Again, this is not a Trinitarian error or a blurring of the Persons within the Trinity. Rather, intimacy is again in view. But this time it’s intimacy between the Father and the Spirit, such close intimacy that the Spirit can truly be called the Spirit of the Father.[[29]](#footnote-29) How glorious to see our triune God united and eager to see redemption accomplished for us and applied to us.

But again, keep going in v. 11. What’s the point of this? If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is in you, “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” Just as the Father raised the Son and filled him with the resurrection might of the Spirit, so too the Father does the same to us. Or we could say that the Spirit’s presence cannot but result in abundant life for the one he dwells in.[[30]](#footnote-30) In v. 10 it was the Spirit thriving while our body was decaying. Now in v. 11, it’s our mortal bodies that will ultimately be transformed. Again, this is all-encompassing. All of us were once controlled by the flesh and were under the rule of death, totally depraved. So too we, from the moment of redemption, are governed and led by the Spirit of God, which in the end, will result in our total transformation, inside and out.

This is what it is to set the mind on the Spirit.

Let’s conclude our time with an illustration. Perhaps this will help drive it home to you.

Here in vv. 5-11, we’ve seen the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, or as Paul says here, those who set their minds on the Spirit and those who set their minds on the flesh. I think the difference between these two kinds of people is like the difference between a fake flower and a real flower.[[31]](#footnote-31) The fake flower has no imperfections—it’s perfect in every way. It probably looks much better than a real flower, though it’s entirely dead and devoid of all life. The real flower though, has imperfections that reflect its own uniqueness. The real flower might even be drooping and losing a few pedals, but it’s really and truly alive. But if you give it water, it’s likely to spring back up and grow healthier and stronger.

Such it is with those in the flesh and those in the Spirit. Those in the flesh might look like they’re thriving and strong, perfect in every way, but they’re dead. While those in the Spirit are fully alive even though they have imperfections and might droop a little. Day by day the Spirit sees to them, nurturing them with resurrection life until the day they blossom fully at Christ’s return.

Church, this passage has reminded us that we cannot have two masters. We cannot be in Adam and in Christ. We cannot be in the flesh and in the Spirit. We’re either under the dominion of sin or the lordship of Christ.[[32]](#footnote-32) Where are you? Who is your master? May it be Christ! And may you be filled with his lifegiving Spirit.

**4**

# PUTTING SIN TO DEATH

*Romans 8:12-13*

***Introduction***

Violence. What comes to mind when you hear that word? Nothing good comes to mind for most of us I’m sure. Perhaps what comes to mind is a person with a fierce strength coming against another with the intent to overpower or destroy. That’s violent. Or maybe it’s a group of people that comes to mind, bent on rioting or wreaking havoc on unsuspecting people. That’s also violent. Perhaps it’s war that comes to mind and the horrible devices we have invented to end the lives of large numbers of people at once. That’s very violent. Perhaps what comes to mind are images of news footage covering devastation after the fact. This also is a kind of violence.

While these images (and many more) are understandable given the world we live in today, they’re all very alarming and negative. Would it surprise you to hear that there is a positive kind of violence? And would it further surprise you to hear that the Bible calls us as Christians to not only embrace but grow in this certain kind of violence? I’m not referring to violence against flesh and blood, no. I’m referring to violence against our sin, a fierce and strong violence against all that would rob us of our delight in Christ. This is the kind of violence God desires of us and calls us to. This is the kind of violence put before us in our text.

But before we get to Romans 8:12-13, remember where we are. We’ve just begun Paul’s rich and robust middle portion of Romans 8 where he unfolds the nature and work of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:5-17. The foundations were laid in vv. 5-11. There, Christians are defined as those who are not of the flesh; meaning we do not live according to the flesh, do not set our minds on the flesh, and are no longer ruled by the things of the flesh. No, we’re those who are in the Spirit, who set our minds on, and live according to the Spirit. The Spirit comes forth from both the Father and the Son, who has filled us, who is nurturing and growing us in his resurrection life and might, and who will keep us to the end. And on that final day the Spirit’s work within us will be complete and the result will be nothing short of total transformation. All of us, soul and body, will be made new. That’s the foundation laid in vv. 5-11.

Allow me to ask a question at this point: how does this great work of the Spirit change my day-to-day life? Answer: we can experience and live in the power of God. Out of the many places Paul could have gone in applying and expanding these things to us, do you see where he goes in vv. 12-13? Because the Spirit is doing this great work in you, you then, put sin to death. That’s where he goes. So, let’s follow his lead and explore this violence of putting sin to death.

Here’s what I want to do in our time together. First, I want to walk through vv. 12-13 and get at the meaning in view to understand what Paul is saying, and to get a grasp of what God is calling us to in this passage. Second, I want to explore what it actually looks like to do the hard work of putting sin to death.

***The Meaning of Verses 12-13***

“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Verse 12 begins with a transition. Like we’ve already seen, Paul laid the firm foundation of the Spirit’s work in us and with us in v. 5-11. As v. 12 begins we find the phrase *so then,* which is another way of saying therefore, which remember, is the clue that Paul is once again drawing conclusions. It’s like he’s telling us because all of this is true, gloriously and absolutely true, about the Holy Spirit and his work in us, this then is how you live. See where he goes: *we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh*. We’ve heard this word debtors before in Romans. Back in Romans 1:14 Paul said because God saved him and called him as an apostle, he was a debtor, or under obligation, to all people. To do what? To give them the gospel. The same word is present here in v. 12 to show us that because the Father and the Son sent the Spirit to powerfully work within us, we are debtors or, we are under obligation. To do what? To not live any longer according to the flesh.

We’ve heard this before in Romans as well. God didn’t save us so that we’d be at peace with our sin, or to welcome us into his family as we are only to leave us as we are. He saved us so that by his Spirit we’d no longer live in sin or according to sin. Sin is no longer our master. And because sin is no longer our master, we’re no longer to obey the flesh, make room for the flesh, or give in to the flesh. Instead, we’re to turn our backs on the flesh and run in the other direction. We have a new Master, the Lord Jesus, and rather than following our old sinful ways we now follow him. If the Spirit is in us, if the Spirit works in us, it is inconsistent to disregard Christ’s leading into holiness by remaining in sin. Or as Matthew Henry says, “Being delivered from so great a death, by so great a ransom, we are greatly indebted to our Deliverer.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

All of v. 12 is then driven home to us in v. 13 in yet another contrast. The first part of v. 13 is nearly identical to what Paul has stated before in chapter 8. If you live according to the flesh you will die. Standing against that, see what we’re called to in the rest of v. 13: “**…**but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” What does this mean? There are deeds we do in the body that are sinful. True, sin is always deeper than deeds. And true, our bodies aren’t sinful. But sin within us can cause us to use our bodies in sinful ways. These are *the deeds of the body* mentioned in v. 13. So, just as we would not allow poison in the food we give to our children, so too, we’re called here to not just let these sinful deeds of the body linger or remain undealt with. No, the call is to put them to death, to slay them, to kill them. How? Not by our own power but by the Spirit. Church, do you believe that our sins will one day just be gone? Do we think holy living just happens by us desiring it, or by accident? It is not so. We must put sin to death. There is no neutrality here; either we’re making war on sin or losing ground in our war on sin.

This contrast in vv. 12-13 needs to be felt and heard as it is, with no softening.[[34]](#footnote-34) If you’re living according to the flesh, not making war on your sin, not putting it to death by the Spirit, and if growing in grace and maturing in holiness and living in the power of the Spirit means nothing to you, then you’re likely showing that you’re false in your profession of faith. Death will rule you now, and death will be your end. But, if you’ve got a violent streak in you against the flesh, causing you to hate your sin, to turn from your sin, leading you to make war on your sin, and putting your sin to death by the Spirit, then you’re likely showing that you truly are united to Christ and true in faith. Life will rule you now, and life will be your end.

In other words, vv. 12-13 teach us that putting sin to death is not the way we get saved; it’s the evidence, or the result that we are saved. This is what vv. 12-13 means, and this war against our sin is what God is calling us to in vv. 12-13.

I think we’ve got a grasp on that and see the clear call before us. Now, let’s move on to ask a further question. What does the hard work of putting sin to death actually look like?

***The Application of Verses 12-13***

When it comes to answering the question of what putting sin to death looks like, there are many answers that could be given. John Owen, an English Puritan, wrote a whole book on v. 13 called *The Mortification of Sin*, mortification being the KJV’s word for putting to death. I commend the work to you; you’ll benefit from it greatly. For now, I’ll just introduce a few general principles to you about what killing sin looks like. We definitely won’t cover everything about killing sin, but Lord willing, we’ll be well on our way.

What does putting sin to death look like? First, it looks *violent.* We’ve talked about this some, but let’s expand it further. There’s a bent to Christians today that gives the impression that we think the greatest commandment is not to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, but that the greatest commandment is simply to be nice. That being agreeable and kind to one another is the virtue above all else. While a large part of this bent is good, nice, and kind, being agreeable is something we can never be toward sin. Ed Welch says it well when he says “…there is a mean streak to authentic self-control…self-control is not for the timid. When we want to grow in it, not only do we nurture an exuberance for Jesus Christ, we also demand of ourselves a hatred for sin…the only possible attitude toward out-of-control desire is a declaration of all-out war…here is something about war that sharpens the senses…you hear a twig snap or the rustling of leaves and you are in attack mode. Someone coughs and you are ready to pull the trigger. Even after days of little or no sleep, war keeps us vigilant.” This is the violence, the war, and the fight God calls us to in v. 13. Not violence against others, but against our own sin. Violence against all that would enslave us to ungodliness. Violence against all that would make us at peace with our sin. Violence against anything that makes righteousness seem strange and worldliness seem normal.

Jesus taught this. In Matthew 11:12 he says, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.” Or hear Matthew 18:8, “And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire.” This figurative language shows us the seriousness and gravity of sin. Christianity is not a settle-down-and-get-comfortable-in this-world-as-you-are type of religion. Christ’s kind of Christianity calls us to an all-out assault on our sin.

But wait, didn’t Paul already tell us that our sin has been dealt with in Christ on the cross? Yes, he has. He told us this all throughout Romans already. Well, why then the call to kill the sin that’s already dead? Because, even though *sin’s penalty* has been removed, and *sin’s power* has been poured out on Christ, *sin’s presence* still plagues us, and so we fight it. This is why the hymn *O For a Thousand Tongues* includes the line, “He breaks the power of cancelled sin, He sets the prisoner free. His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me.” Even cancelled sin still has power over us. But be of good cheer. The only sin we fight is cancelled sin. Doesn’t that encourage you all the more to fight it? All of this means Christians are those who don’t play games with sin, or those who try to keep sin under control, or those who slowly try to wean themselves off of sin. Christians are not those who psychologize sin away, defining it as merely symptoms of our brokenness or woundedness. Christians are those who get as far away from sin as possible, turning away from the things that are sin and things that lead to sin.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Church, putting sin to death looks violent.

What does putting sin to death look like? Second, it looks s*piritual.* By saying it looks spiritual I mean putting sin to death is done by the Spirit. That’s what Paul says in v. 13. But what does it mean to put sin to death by the Spirit? Thankfully Paul has already told us back in vv. 5-6, remember? “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” So how do we by the Spirit, put sin to death? We don’t just turn away from sin. We do that but then we turn toward the things of the Spirit. Where do we find the things of the Spirit? We find them in the Spirit-inspired deposit of truth, the Sacred Scripture. And when we turn to Scripture we find all we need for life and godliness. It’s not called *the Sword of the Spirit* in Ephesians 6 for no reason. Swords are used to kill. So use it. Read it. Pray with it. Linger over it. Marinate your heart in it. Live in line with it. When the Spirit-inspired Scripture rules your life and you live in submission to it, you’ll find yourself living according to the Spirit, setting your mind on the things of the Spirit, walking in step with the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and slaying your sin by the Spirit. We’re to be so full of the Spirit that we’ve simply got no room left for the things of the world.

Church, in this regard, putting sin to death looks spiritual.

What does putting sin to death look like? Third and lastly, it looks *glad-hearted.* When we think about putting sin to death, our go-to thought is to just stop doing this and start doing that. That might help you for a time but eventually it will fail as a strategy to put sin to death. Why? Because we need to aim deeper. We need to aim at the heart. You see, no one sins out of duty. We sin because we want to. We think, in the moment we give in to sin, that sin will be more pleasurable and more satisfying than obedience to God. Thus, we don’t fall into sin, we jump. What does this mean to put sin to death? Again, we aim at the heart, meaning, we kill sinful delights with higher delights. We kill sinful pleasure with greater pleasures. We kill sinful loves with grander loves. Question: in whom is the highest delight, pleasure, and love? In whom can the human heart find all that it’s ever longed for? There’s only one answer: in Jesus Christ. He is better than sin, he is higher than sin, he is greater than sin, he is fairer than sin. Thomas Chalmers put it like this long ago “…the only way to dispossess an old affection is by the expulsive power of a superior affection.” You hear that? The way to expel old sinful affections lingering around in our hearts is to go after a superior affection. When that superior affection comes into the heart, it expels lesser affections and lesser loves. So how do we fight sin and put it to death? Set our sights on Christ. There’s no death of sin without the death of Christ! Only a love for Christ, who he is and what he has done, will sever the root of sin and expel it out of our hearts. So, the deepest and most lasting way to put sin to death is to turn our eyes on Jesus and love him with all our might.

Church, putting sin to death looks glad-hearted.

In the Harry Potter series, at the end of *The Goblet of Fire,* the character Dumbledore says something to Harry that is very relevant to this text. The big villain has just returned and is busy working to bring all the good guys down, and yet, the majority of folks don’t want to believe it. They stick their heads in the sand and pretend like nothing has changed. Dumbledore comes to Harry and says, “The choice before us is now between what is easy and what is right.”

Church, I’d say the same thing to you now. The world, the flesh, and the devil are seeking to devour us. The easy thing to do is deny it and stick your head in the sand. The right thing to do is to stand bravely and put it to death. To quote John Piper: “Until you believe that life is war—that the stakes are your soul—you will probably just play at Christianity with no blood earnestness, no vigilance, no passion and no wartime mindset. If that is where you are this morning, your position is very precarious. The enemy has lulled you into sleep or into a peacetime mentality, as if nothing serious is at stake. And God, in his mercy, has you here this morning, and had this sermon appointed to wake you up, and put you on a wartime footing.”[[36]](#footnote-36)

John Owen, in his famous work, said, “Christ’s blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this and you will die a conqueror, yes! Through the good providence of God, live so to see your lusts dead at your feet!"

**5**

# LED BY THE SPIRIT, Part 1

*Romans 8:14-17*

***Introduction***

“It is not by might or violence, therefore, that Christ rules in the kingdom given him by the Father…his entire prophetic, priestly, and kingly activity he continues to carry on in a spiritual way from his place in heaven. He fights with only spiritual weapons. He is a King of grace and a King of might, but as both he leads his regiment out through the Holy Spirit…By the Spirit Christ gives of himself and his benefits to the church…By the Spirit, Christ instructs, comforts, and leads his church, and dwells in it. And by the same Spirit he convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The eternal victory which Christ will gain over all his enemies will be a triumph of the Holy Spirit.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

This is a quote from the theologian Herman Bavinck. I particularly love this quote because it shows us how Christianity does not exist in mere words or doctrines about God. Don’t hear me wrong, there are many doctrines containing many words about God in the Christian faith that we should be concerned to get right. But we should not miss that if we go about our Christianity ignoring, avoiding, or sidestepping the leading of the Holy Spirit, it isn’t Christianity we’re living out. You see, the Christianity Christ taught us was one where he would leave, ascend to heaven, and send his Spirit to lead us until the moment he returns. So, Church, I ask you today, are you led by the Spirit? What does that mean? What does that look like? These things and more are what’s before us.

I said it recently, and I’ll say it again: we must remember where we are. We’re in the robust middle portion of Romans 8 where Paul unfolds the nature and work of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:5-17. The foundations were laid in vv. 5-11 where Christians are defined as those who are not of the flesh but of the Spirit. Meaning, we don’t live according to the flesh, we don’t set our minds on the flesh, and we’re no longer ruled by the things of the flesh. No, we set our minds on and live according to the Spirit, who comes forth from both the Father and the Son, who has filled us, whois growing us in his resurrection life and might, and whowill keep us to the end. And on that final day the Spirit’s work within us will be complete; the result will be nothing short of total transformation. All of us, soul and body, will be made new. That’s the foundation laid in vv. 5-11.

We then looked at what this leads to in day-to-day life in vv. 12-13 and found that if the Spirit is truly in us, we’ll be putting sin to death by the Spirit. While we should not soften this violent warlike posture commanded of us in vv. 12-13, we must remember that we kill sin not to be justified but because we’ve already been justified. In other words, putting sin to death by the Spirit doesn’t save us, rather, putting sin to death is the evidence that we’ve been truly saved by God. Or we could say, our wartime mindset where we seek to slay sin by the Spirit is now possible only because Romans 8:1 is already true of us. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” With us now living in that reality because of the gospel of grace, we’re free to slay sin as we ought.

***The Application of Verses 14-17***

That’s where we’ve been, in vv. 5-13. Today as we move on to vv. 14-17, Paul tells us more about the Spirit. Specifically, he gives us more realities or characteristics that will be true of us if the Spirit is indeed in us. First, in v. 14, we’ll be led by the Spirit; second, in v. 15, we’ll have a childlike intimacy with the Father rather than a slavish fear; third,in v. 16, the Spirit bears witness in us; fourth, in v. 17, because of the Spirit’s work we know we’re heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ; and fifth, also in v. 17, because of the Spirit’s work in doing all of this, we should expect to suffer with Christ, while we eagerly look forward to being glorified with Christ.

But even though Paul’s continuing on about the Spirit here in vv. 14-17, do you notice that he is also introducing a new theme as well? *Sonship*. This is the truth that we are the children of God. We should notice this. So far, much has been said about us in Romans; about who we are, who we once were outside of Christ, and who we are now in Christ. But for the first time in all of Romans, in these verses we’re called the sons of God. It’s in every verse. In v. 14, all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. In v. 15, because of the Spirit of adoption we’re now intimately connected to the Father. In v. 16, the Spirit bears witness, with a kind of inner persuasion, that we’re indeed the children of God. And in v. 17, if we’re children of God we’re also heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

So, we’ve got two themes present here before us: the work of the Holy Spirit within us, and our sonship, us being the children of God. That these two themes are woven together in vv. 14-17 should show us that instead of seeing these two themes as separate realities, we should see them as united. So, when the Holy Spirit is working within us in his resurrection might, many things will happen to us and within us. One of the things that will happen is that we’ll come to know and enjoy the truth that we are the children of God.

I hope you can see there’s a lot to unpack here. So, Lord willing, we’ll be spending some time in vv. 14-17 to work through it. Let’s begin this week by taking up our magnifying glass to examine v. 14 and then step back to look at vv. 14-17 as a whole.

***The Application of Verse 14***

Romans 8:14, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

Notice how v. 14 begins, “For…’” We’ve seen this in Paul many times up to this point and we’re going to be seeing it again many times after this point. Now, this word *for* doesn’t mean that Paul’s beginning a brand new argument that’s entirely unrelated to what he’s been telling us. Not at all. We know that. Instead, this word means Paul is continuing to pull on the same thread he’s been pulling on for a while. What the word *for* shows us is that Paul is now taking this argument a step further than he’s taken it so far. Or let’s just be really simple and say it like this. Another way we could translate *for* is *because.* See that in vv. 12-14 now “So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live…[because] all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

See how it all connects as one unified whole? Verse 14 is then the basis for vv. 12-13, which means two things. First, it means those who are led by the Spirit of God will be those who put their sin to death by the Spirit of God. Second, it means the evidence that we are the children of God is whether or not we kill our sin.[[38]](#footnote-38) Or think of it like this: the language in v. 13 of our putting sin to death is active language. It’s something we must do, right? The language of v. 14, of us being led by the Spirit, is passive language. It’s something done to us. This means what the Spirit does to us and what we do are complementary. Our activity in putting sin to death is evidence of the Spirit’s activity in us. That’s true, but we can also say the Spirit’s activity in us is the cause of our activity against sin.[[39]](#footnote-39) This, according to Paul in Romans 8, is what it means to be led by the Spirit.

So, this first heading is simply intended to show that v. 14 is a continuation of what Paul has already been telling us in Romans 8. But let’s now lean into this a bit more with our next heading.

***Led by the Spirit***

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” I didn’t grow up in the church, but when God saved me at 20 years old and I came into the church, it didn’t take long to realize that Christians have a certain way of talking about things I didn’t know. Call it *Christianese* or Christian jargon, or whatever you like; I found it quite interesting that people spoke like this. You know these things: when I would travel home for a holiday or a break, people at church would say they would pray for a ‘hedge of protection’ and I would wonder why just a hedge? Could you pray for something a bit sturdier? When people at church would talk about their Bible reading time, they’d refer to it as their ‘quiet time’ and I would wonder: I need quiet every now and then too, is that what you mean? And when someone stopped showing up on Sundays I’d hear people say he or she was ‘backsliding.’ When I heard that the first time I just asked, what does that mean?

Whether it’s one of these sayings or a thousand others, Christian lingo can be dangerous because over time the lingo itself can come to define what we believe and how we live rather than Scripture.[[40]](#footnote-40) You know one of the most famous statements in all of Christianese? *Led by the Spirit.* I’m sure you’ve heard this before. I’m sure many of you have said some of these things before. ‘I’m just feeling so led by the Spirit right now,’ ‘I really need to be led by the Spirit on this,’ or ‘Were you led by the Spirit in that decision,’ or even, ‘I don’t think that’s very Spirit-led.’ What’s usually meant when someone uses this phrase is that they feel they have been guided or directed by the Holy Spirit to go here or there, to take this job and not that job, or to make this life decision rather than that one. It’s as if concrete directions can be received from God by the Holy Spirit in all matters of life.[[41]](#footnote-41) Don’t hear me wrong, I do think there is truth to these ideas, and that we do and should look to the Holy Spirit for guidance in all of life. My concern is that the way we talk about the Holy Spirit himself as a Person, and the way we talk about how the Holy Spirit leads us and guides us, far too often sounds like fortune telling or crystal ball gazing, and gives the impression that the Holy Spirit is a kind of genie. This is mysticism, and we should call it what it is. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially when it comes to how the Holy Spirit is described to us here in Romans 8.

See it. “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Very simply, v. 14 means Christians are those who are led by the Spirit of God. If Paul had said for all who have been baptizedare sons of God, we might be content; for the majority of us here have done that.[[42]](#footnote-42) If Paul had said for all who partake of the Lord’s Supper are sons of God, we might rest easy because we have come to the table many times. If Paul had said that all who are members of the church are sons of God, we might also take ease knowing that church membership is alive and well here among us. But hear it, Church, Paul doesn’t say these things or anything like it. Rather he says, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Which implies the opposite. For all who are not led by the Spirit are not sons of God. Which leads to examination, a looking in the mirror, doesn’t it? Is this true of me? Am I led by the Spirit or am I led by something else? Again v. 14 is very simple. Christians are those who are led by the Spirit of God. This is true, wonderfully true! But is this all we can say about v. 14? Not at all! As encouraging as this is, we can go further.

I hope you didn’t bring a rake with you today but brought a shovel. You see, many times we’re content to just rake around the Scripture as we read it and study it. And by raking around we truly are interacting with Scripture at some level, but we’re just really moving leaves into a pile or moving leaves from one pile to another pile. A shovel does more. A shovel breaks the surface and goes down deep. A shovel digs up earth and uncovers what lies beneath. It takes more effort to dig, but when you dig, you might find gold. So let’s dig into v. 14, shall we?

There’s something being hinted at here that’s rooted in the experience of Old Testament Israel, for those who have ears to hear. Do you hear it? You see, as Paul pens these letters he doesn’t just pick words randomly. No, he’s very purposeful in each word he writes. Think about Paul. Being raised as a Jew and then growing up to become a Pharisee, he would’ve very likely had the entire Old Testament memorized. His whole worldview would’ve been interpreted through the lens of the Old Testament Scriptures. But when he met Jesus on the Damascus road, everything changed for him. The Old Testament he had committed to memory became an entirely different book aiming at an entirely different purpose. All of sudden he knew these Scriptures were not just about the Israelites, of their beginnings and history, but more. Slowly but surely he began to see that in the Old Testament there are patterns, purposes, and people even, who seem to preview or foreshadow greater patterns, purposes, and people. There’s a forward lean to the Old Testament that all seems to find its apex in the Person of Jesus Christ. So, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:20, “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.” And we see Paul preaching like this too. In Acts 28:23 it says Paul testified to the kingdom of God trying to convince his hearers “…about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.”

So, as he’s writing Romans, being carried along by the Divine Author, the Holy Spirit, Paul very often uses the imagery and language of the Old Testament in the New Testament. Verse 14 is one example of this. He uses words here that are also used in Exodus and Deuteronomy to describe how God led his people through the wilderness. God often spoke of how he led his firstborn son (Exodus 4:22) Israel, through the wilderness to their inheritance (Deuteronomy 8:15), so it’s not surprising to hear Paul describe us in the exact same way. Us being those who are led. Us being the sons of God. And us being heirs of God. Paul uses all these themes here in v. 14 to describe us. Now, here’s where the rubber meets the road. If this is indeed what Paul is hinting at by using this language, and I think it is, what does it mean for us? It means that just as God led Israel with his very presence through the barrenness and trials of the wilderness to the promised land, so now God is leading his church by his Spirit through the trials of this fallen world to our inheritance in glory.[[43]](#footnote-43) This is what it means to be led by the Spirit.

This leads to massive implications. If the Old Testament Israelite experience of wandering through the wilderness and arriving at the promised land is rooted in all of what we see here in v. 14, that experience then should illustrate what it means to be led by the Spirit for us now. So, how was Israel led by God’s very presence through the wilderness? As Israel enjoyed God’s very presence with them by day and night through the wilderness, so too the church enjoys God’s very presence by the Spirit through this fallen world. As Israel was provided for in the wilderness with exactly what they needed day by day, so too the church will be provided for in this fallen world with exactly what we need day by day as we walk in step with the Spirit. And as Israel was marked out as God’s chosen and beloved people by his presence going with them and leading them through the wilderness, so too the church is marked out as the children of God by God’s Spirit leading us through this fallen world.

This is then where Paul goes next in v. 14.

***Sons of God***

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Who are the sons of God? Those who are led by the Spirit of God. What does this look like in our day to day life? That’s where Paul goes next in vv. 15-17.

So, having covered the foundation of all of this in v. 14, we’re primed to explore vv. 15-17 next.

**6**

# LED BY THE SPIRIT, Part 2

*Romans 8:14-17*

***Introduction***

As we come to our passage this morning, I almost feel like an attorney or the executor of a will after the death of someone very wealthy. Someone who, before death, carefully and clearly crafted a very gracious will; a will that must now be read to the family members who have no idea of the abundance they’re about to receive. Yet there I am with all the details in my hands before the family who is eagerly awaiting the contents. It’s a fitting image because something of the same idea will happen today as we work through these verses. But this image falls woefully short because wills like these are normally full of material benefits. And while wills like these are full of great gifts, these gifts are temporal not eternal. Jesus, on the other hand, purchased far more lasting blessings for all those who come to him in faith. So, Church, prepare yourself to hear of the great abundance we have in Christ.

But first, briefly, remember that we’re in the robust, middle portion of Romans 8 where Paul unfolds the nature and work of the Holy Spirit in vv. 5-17. We’ve been slowly walking through this passage seeing and savoring much. The foundation was laid in vv. 5-11 where Christians are defined as those who are not of the flesh, but of the Spirit. We then looked at what this actually looks like in day to day life in vv. 12-13, and we found that if we’re truly setting our minds on the Spirit and living according to the Spirit, we will be growing in a certain kind of violence—not violence against flesh and blood, but violence against our sin.

We then zeroed in on v. 14 last week and found Paul magnifying one grand truth: Christians are those who are led by the Spirit. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit? We mentioned two things last week.

First, being led by the Spirit means that we’ll be putting our sin to death. That is the Spirit’s great active work in us, moving us to get busy and active in our work against sin. But we said more as well. Second, by saying in v. 14 that we’re led by the Spirit, that we are the sons of God, and that we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, Paul’s using imagery from the Old Testament Israelite wilderness wandering to describe how God now leads us through this fallen world to our inheritance in glory. So, as it went for Israel, so it goes for the church, but in a far greater manner than of old. As Israel followed God’s lead in guiding them, enjoyed God’s provision for them, and praised God for keeping them, so now we follow God’s lead. We enjoy God’s provision for us, and we praise God for keeping us until the end. All these things God does for us by his Spirit. This, in Romans 8, is also what it means to be led by the Spirit.

That then, is where we’ve been the last three weeks as we’ve walked through vv. 5-14.

For today though, we’ll take a step back and look at the bigger picture of what’s going on in the rest of the verses we’ve not yet covered, vv. 15-17. We did briefly mention that there are two themes given to us here, the first being the realities that will be true of us because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and the second being our sonship, that we are the children of God. These are not separate themes but interwoven themes that have everything to do with one another. So, when we take these two themes together as they’re given to us here, we see grand benefits or great privileges of being the Spirit-filled children of God. Again I ask, what does it mean to be led by the Spirit?

There are four great privileges in our text; we’ll take them as they come.[[44]](#footnote-44)

***Security (verse 15a)***

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear*,* but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons….”

This first great privilege is security. It is all about two opposing spirits we could receive.[[45]](#footnote-45) The *spirit of slavery* or the *Spirit of adoption.* If we receive the spirit of slavery, we fall back into fear. But if we receive the Spirit of adoption, we rejoice in our sonship that we are the sons of God. I find it interesting that in v. 15 the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of adoption. When adoption comes into view, it reminds us of how we became God’s children. No one is ever physically born into a right relationship with God. That we’ve been adopted implies that at one time we were once lost orphans with no hope in our sin, were outside of Christ, and were under condemnation. But when we place our faith in Jesus, our sins are forever forgiven, we’re removed from our position in Adam, we’re united to Christ, and condemnation no longer hangs over us because Christ was condemned for us. We’re welcomed into a family we weren’t naturally born into—the family of God. You see, adoption reveals that we have not always enjoyed our privileged position in Christ as sons of God. Jesus is the only Son who has always enjoyed this privileged position before the Father, and only by grace, through faith in Jesus, can we enter into that as well.

All of this means we are secure.

When we come into the family of God, we don’t receive the spirit of slavery leading us to fall back into fear. That’s what used to rule our lives when we were outside of Christ. Notice that? The language of fear in v. 15 is something that we would fall back into. We once were ruled by fear because sin leads to fear, to judgment, to condemnation, to loss, and to death. But once we come to Christ that fear goes away, and we receive the Spirit of adoption because we’re sons. There’s no need then to fear punishment, to fear loss, or to fear abandonment as if we were something like mere employees of God who haven’t performed our job well and fear getting fired. No, a parent-child relationship isn’t characterized by fear, but by security.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Why is this true? Verse 15 says we’ve been adopted into the family of God, so we now have the status of sons, not slaves. Think of that. Slaves obey out of compulsion; sons obey out of love. Slaves labor under threat; sons labor under delight. Slaves are insecure, fearing their master; sons are secure, knowing and loving their Master. Slaves have no honor in a household; sons are honored.[[47]](#footnote-47) There’s a confidence and a composure about them because wherever they go in the King’s land they know that it all belongs to him, and they rest easy because he’s not only the King, he’s their Father. That God the Father is the King of kings, and that this world is our Father’s world, means everywhere we go in this world, whether near or far, we too can rest easy because all things belong to him. And not only that, we belong to him too.

Hear it, Church, as the spirit of slavery would lead us back to fear, the Spirit of adoption wells up within us a comforting conviction that we are God’s children with all the rights and privileges thereof.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Being led by the Spirit leads to security.

***Intimacy (verse 15b)***

This second privilege really flows out from the first. Because we’re so secure in our privileged position as the sons of God, we therefore enjoy intimacy with God. This is where v. 15 goes as it ends “…by whom we cry,‘Abba!Father!’”

Before we even get to the name *Abba*,do you see we don’t merely say, speak or state this? We cryout! Crying expresses something deeply felt or powerfully experienced. Don’t overreact here. Some Christians make the error of letting their emotions drive them, such that when they don’t feel intensely, their faith nosedives. That’s an error for sure. Thank God our faith doesn’t rest on our emotional frame or capacities. But don’t see that error and go too far in the other direction, believing the greatest way to be a Christian is to rid yourself of all emotion, so you’re never led by them at all. We’re said to be those who cry at the end of v. 15. And that’s very emotive. So, if we don’t ever feel this need to cry out to God, we should ask if we’ve truly been adopted by God.[[49]](#footnote-49)

What do we cry out? *Abba! Father!* This word Abba is an Aramaic term meaning Daddy. It’s a term normally used by little children who are just learning to talk. It was a term never used by the Israelites to address God. No, they even invented words to use for God so they wouldn’t have to use the divine name of God. Yet surprisingly, Jesus often used the name Abba in prayer as he was talking to God.[[50]](#footnote-50) It’s a term of warmth, a term of confidence, and full of a childlike intimacy. Rejecting such an intimate title for our heavenly Father, thinking it’s not high or lofty enough, is not a mark of humility.[[51]](#footnote-51) Rather, embracing it, using it, and loving it is a mark of a true child of God. That God is Abba to us means God is no longer distant to us. God is not merely someone we believe in intellectually, theologically, theoretically, or doctrinally only. God is One we now know. But again, don’t overreact here. I never want to diminish the intimacy with God to be enjoyed here. But I do want to caution you that some have taken this truth and slowly grown into, not a *childlike* faith, but a *childish* faith. Yes, we call God Abba, Father, but this still doesn’t give us the right to enter into God’s presence obnoxiously or arrogantly.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Church, it’s the grown-up who often acts very formal, reserved, and proper. It’s the child who comes rushing in to see his father and grab ahold of him.[[53]](#footnote-53) This childlike posture is what’s in view in this term Abba.

Being led by the Spirit leads to intimacy.

***Assurance (verse 16)***

This third privilege centers around assurance. See how Paul goes there in v. 16, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God….”

This teaches us that the Holy Spirit not only makes us God’s children, it teaches us that the Holy Spirit also makes us awarethat we are God’s children.[[54]](#footnote-54) How great an assurance flows from this? Our final confidence that we’re God’s children doesn’t come from carefully analyzing our obedience or behavior; it does not come from a sweet sense or frame of the soul; nor does it come about as a logical deduction from good theology. No, our assurance comes from the Holy Spirit who bears witness within us to our own spirit, that we’re the children of God. That’s what v. 16 says, simply put.

But, let’s go further and ask, what exactly is this? How does the inner testimony of the Spirit happen? Is it like a secret whisper from God to us that we can hear and no one else can? Or is it louder, something like a voice from heaven? Or is it more like a message from God where he gives us a special revelation that we belong to him? No, many say things like this but I say no, because think Church, what’s not mentioned in any of those options? Scripture. Bottom line, this inner testimony of the Spirit (which is extraordinary in itself!) comes to us in a manner that I think is far more ordinary than many believe. The Holy Spirit does indeed communicate to us (praise God!), but as R.C. Sproul said, the Spirit “…communicates to us by the Word, with the Word, through the Word, and never against the Word.”[[55]](#footnote-55) When we talk about experiencing the ministry of the Spirit, we so often forget that the Holy Spirit inspired the Word for this very purpose. Therefore, we cannot define the Spirit’s bearing witness to our spirit as if it were a thing to be experienced apart from the Spirit-inspired Scripture. So, if we’re going to talk about experiencing the Holy Spirit’s work as described in v. 16, here’s what I’d encourage you to do. Sit down, open your Bible, pray that God would open your eyes to his truth, seek him by digging deep, and enjoy the assurance that floods the heart as the Spirit uses the Word to teach us of our status as sons and not slaves. In this light I think v. 16 is describing exactly the same experience that Romans 5:5 spoke of. Remember it? Our hope does not put us to shame. Why? Because “…God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” This is the Spirit’s work.

Being led by the Spirit leads to assurance.

***Inheritance (verse 17)***

The fourth privilege is almost too great to hear. See this in the start of v. 17, “…and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ….”

So, we’ve seen and rejoiced that we’re sons of God, children of God. Paul goes further. We’re not just children, we’re heirs. In ancient cultures of the world, though a husband and wife had many children, only the first son was the heir. All the children were normally loved, but this first son got the majority of the family estate and was tasked with carrying on the family name. Contrast that pattern with v. 17 here. In the family of God, it isn’t just the oldest son who is the heir, all Christians are heirs.[[56]](#footnote-56) But see it, Paul goes further still, *heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*. Why add that little bit on the end? Two reasons I think.[[57]](#footnote-57) First, by telling us we’re fellow heirs with Christ, we’re reminded that we only inherit God’s blessings and the abundance of his kingdom through Jesus Christ. But second and more, being a fellow heir with Christ means all the children of God enter in jointly with Christ into the inheritance bestowed on him by the Father.[[58]](#footnote-58) Anyone thinking of Hebrews 1? You should be. Hebrews 1:1-2, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things….” Hear it? Christ’s inheritance is all things. What does each child of God get in Christ? All things.

Curious, isn’t it? We so often look to everything but Jesus, hoping to find what our hearts long for. We look to the world, we look to ourselves, we look to presidents and politicians, and a million other things. In the long run we only find disappointment and emptiness. But if we look to Christ, we’ll find him, and with him we’ll find everything else thrown in as well.[[59]](#footnote-59) Not because we’re so great, but because Christ is great.

So, being led by the Spirit leads to an inheritance.

But while we’ve seen the inheritance contains all things, can we get more specific about what this inheritance is? We can, and that’s where v. 17 ends. Look at it, “…provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Are you surprised to hear Paul say our inheritance includes suffering? We love the glory, don’t we? But the suffering? No thanks. But, did we forget what v. 17 already taught us? We’re heirs of God yes, but we’re joint heirs with Christ. Which means, as Christ came into his inheritance, so too we’ll come into ours. How did Christ come into his? Before the exaltation of his resurrection and ascension, there was the humiliation of his being made like us, bearing our sin, dying on the cross, and entering a tomb. Only after this comes the glories he now enjoys. And so too, only after suffering comes the glory we so will enjoy. We come into our inheritance in the same pattern. “There is no sharing in Christ’s glory unless we share in Christ’s sufferings.”[[60]](#footnote-60) We do look forward to glorification, indeed we do. But first, if we’re following Christ and being led by his Spirit, we’ll find ourselves suffering for his name.

But is all this suffering worth it? Look where Paul goes next in v. 18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Church, the best is yet to come!

**7**

# GROANING FOR GLORY

*Romans 8:18-27*

***Introduction***

In Romans 8:1-17, Paul has been beautifully unfolding the great assurance we now enjoy in Christ. He begins this with the most famous verse in 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Why is this true? Because of vv. 2-4. By sending his own Son for us, God did what the law could never do. Meaning through Christ, God fully and finally dealt with sin, while at the same time bringing forgiveness and righteousness to sinners through faith. So, all who trust in Jesus, Paul says in v. 4, now walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh. He then tells us what that means, what that looks like, and what happens to us when we walk by the Spirit. That’s what Paul leans into in vv. 1-17.

Look how vv. 16-17 end. “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” After so many wonders have been stated in vv. 1-17, the mention of suffering might give us a bit of whiplash. Suffering? Wait a minute. I thought we enjoyed a great assurance? I thought we were now the children of God? I thought the Spirit is bringing life to us here and now? Why would Paul bring suffering into this? Doesn’t this contradict, or at least bring into question, the reality that there’s no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus?[[61]](#footnote-61) What do we make of this?

Well, I think this whole chapter (especially vv. 18-27) shows us an apostle who’s eager to remind us that in life the Christian goes the way of our Lord.[[62]](#footnote-62) Jesus went up into glory, but what road did he take? He took the Father’s will that led him to death on a cross. Suffering was a true part of his life, which means suffering will also be a true part of our lives as well. But, though suffering’s real for us, it’s not the final word for us. Paul says as much as our text begins in v. 18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” What does he mean by this? It’s as if a man is sitting before a scale. And on one side of the scale the man puts all his sufferings. He looks at it and sees how very heavy his sufferings have been. But then on the other side of the scale he puts the weight of glory yet to come, and his sufferings that seemed so heavy before now seem to be light as a feather. It’s not that his suffering is light, but that it becomes light when compared to the glory that will one day be revealed.[[63]](#footnote-63)

The big idea is this. So vastly different is our future glory from our present sufferings that it’s not even worth comparing. So, all that’s present and visible for us must be understood in light of what is future and invisible.[[64]](#footnote-64) This is what Paul’s up to in this passage before us. And the vehicle he uses to drive it home to us is the experience of *groaning*. In vv. 19-22, we see the creation groaning; in vv. 23-25 we see the Christian groaning; and in vv. 26-27 we see the Spirit groaning. Let’s take these as they come to us in the text.

***The Creation Groaning (verses 19-22)***

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

During my recent sabbatical our family took lots of trips. One trip I took was a climbing trip to Mt. Rainier in Washington state. Rainier is one of many volcanoes in the northwest, but what marks it out from the rest is that it’s covered by a glacier, and is the tallest volcano standing at 14,500 feet. As we were slowly heading up the mountain, I was struck afresh by the beauty of creation. I kept bouncing back and forth between two desires. One moment I wanted to sing loudly and praise God for the world he’s made. The hymns *How Great Thou Art* and *This Is My Father’s World* were rolling through my mind (mind, not mouth—I had to make oxygen decisions). But the next moment I didn’t want to speak at all, because in comparison to the grandeur of the mountain, I was reminded how unbelievably tiny I am. It was humbling. Many of you have felt this too by looking out at creation. Whether it’s a mountain, a sunset at the beach, or a breezy field of green or gold, creation is simply stunning to behold.

Now remember what v. 19 said, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.” What? All of creation in all its glory is in a state of waiting? Yes. Not only waiting but waiting with an eager longing. And not only waiting with eager longing but waiting eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. Is that referring to us? Yes, it is. So, all creation is longing for, and yearning for, the last Day when the church will finally be revealed to be what the church truly is. Paul’s not saying creation has a soul or is a god or is part of god, like pantheism teaches, but he is saying our redemption from sin is of cosmic significance. Now, we Christians don’t look much like sons and daughters of God here in this life; if we’re honest we look rather ordinary. But on that last Day when God’s work is complete, our true state will be revealed for all creation to see.[[65]](#footnote-65) This is what creation is longing for.

Paul expands on this in v. 20, telling us why creation is longing in the first place. He says creation was *subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope*. Remember Genesis chapter 3? Man’s fall into sin marred everything. One of the consequences of the fall is given to us in Genesis 3:17b when God told Adam and Eve, “…cursed is the ground because of you….” In this moment God’s good creation entered into a state of frustration and as soon as that happened, a longing to be made whole once again began. This theme continues further on into the Old Testament. God often speaks of the consequences of the fall in cosmic terms.[[66]](#footnote-66) So the prophets will sometimes say to Israel, *the land itself mourns over you!* But all along there is a yearning mentioned. So, the prophets also say, “…the mountains and the hills…shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands…” (Isaiah 55:12b).

But notice more in v. 20. Creation didn’t choose to enter into frustration. It was subjected to it, meaning someone else did this. Who was it? Look at v. 20; the one who subjected creation to futility did so *in hope*. Did Adam have *hope* in mind when he ate the fruit? Did Eve? Did the serpent when he tempted them? Not at all. Who then subjected creation to frustration? There’s only one answer: God. What did he intend by all this? Look at v. 21, *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*. It all flows together; do you see it? Since man’s fall into sin marred all things, creation included, what will the redemption of man bring but the restoration of all things? All of creation then looks ahead with hope to what will occur on that last Day, when sin’s very presence will be eradicated, and everything will be set free from the bondage of sin.

What does that mean for creation right now? How should we view the world God has made based on vv. 19-21? Should we view it as a dumpster fire that’s just going to keep burning? No. Look at v. 22. Paul says the whole creation is pregnant. And with labor comes labor pains. Paul uses this image of pregnancy because we know labor pains aren’t in vain; that the pains of labor aren’t worth comparing with the joy that follows when a child is born.[[67]](#footnote-67) So it is with creation. The groaning is real, but the groaning will one day break with the dawn of the final Day.

So, creation is groaning, but not only so. Paul continues in vv. 23-25 describing…

***The Christian Groaning (verses 23-25)***

“And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

It isn’t just creation that’s in a state of waiting and groaning; we’re waiting and groaning and longing as well. Of course, as with creation this isn’t a groaning you can hear. It’s an inward groaning, a steady longing, a kind of posture of the heart that feels like a constant homesickness for heaven. And as creation groans for the revealing of the sons of God, we too groan for our adoption and the redemption of our bodies. But wait, aren’t adoption and redemption things we’ve already received from God? In one sense this is right. The moment we put our faith in Christ we received these things from God. But look closely at v. 23, which says we only have the *firstfruits* of the Spirit. Meaning, while we truly have been adopted by God through the gospel (see vv. 14-15), and while the Spirit is now truly in us and is giving life to our mortal bodies here and now (see v. 11), there’s much more to come in the end. When our adoption in glory is final and these bodies are no longer plagued with the effects of sin and decay, we won’t just have firstfruits then, we’ll have the fullness. We won’t just be nibbling on the appetizer, we’ll be digging in at the feast!

So, as Christians we should not merely consider who we used to be as lost sinners, and who we are now as redeemed saints. We should also consider who we will be in the end as we enter glory to be with the Lord forever.

See what Paul says next in v. 24, *for in this hope we were saved*. It’s just like what he said in the first section about creation. As creation groans, it’s pregnant with hope. Now we see that we ourselves also groan in a robust hope as we wait for the final Day.

Our family learned this afresh during my sabbatical. It was very nice having a rest from the weekly work of the church. We felt that immediately. But as the weeks began to go by, especially each Sunday as we’d go to a different church if we were in town, there started to be a noticeable and uncomfortable groan springing up within us to be back with you all. I know it was only two months but today does feel like a small reunion after a time of waiting. Isn’t this so like the Christian life? There’s a groaning within us to be home, to be in our true country. Church, this waiting is part of the suffering mentioned in v. 18. But again, let’s read the whole verse. When compared to what’s coming, when we’re finally at rest, the glory to come far surpasses all we’ve groaned over and endured in this life. Until that final Day, we groan along with all creation.

But, it’s not only all creation and all Christians who groan for glory, the Holy Spirit does, too.

***The Spirit Groaning (verses 26-27)***

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Verse 26 is honest to mention that in this life we’ll face much weakness, both in us and around us due to the fall. But notice that the kind of weakness Paul mentions is our struggling in prayer. Because of our weak and sinful condition there will be times when we won’t know how to pray. I’m encouraged at the honesty here, are you? This is one of those verses that we get to and say, *thank God!* I thought I was a defective Christian because I’ve had many times of prayer when words just wouldn’t come. I’m sure glad I’m not the only one. Well, in this weakness we have a great Helper. The Spirit of God, who in the midst of this weakness, helps abundantly. How? Verse 26b says when words fail us *the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words*. It’s not surprising that this is a very debated passage. There are all kinds of opinions about what exactly it means. I’d encourage you to be okay with some mystery here, for this is mysterious. It does really seem to mean that the Spirit prays for us, in our hearts, in a way that is imperceptible to us.[[68]](#footnote-68) Verse 27 adds to this, clarifying that both the Father and the Spirit are involved, the Father being the one who knows the mind of the Spirit, and the Spirit being the one doing the praying in line with the will of the Father.[[69]](#footnote-69)

We often talk of Jesus praying for us in heaven, and rightly so! But how great is it to know we’ve got another intercessor in the Spirit within us? It seems that God has us covered on all sides.

All in all, there seems to be a kind of symphony of sighs happening all around us in this life. Yet v. 18 remains true. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Do you consider this? I think we get what vv. 18-27 is teaching us. I think we understand our suffering is due to sin, and I think we understand the groaning this leads to. But do we really? Is there really a point to examining these verses if we don’t allow them to examine us, and reshape how we live and believe?

The big question that comes from this passage is this: do you groan for glory? Do you groan to be home with the Lord forever? If you do, you’ve got everything in this passage to look forward to. Rejoice in this! If not, if you don’t groan to be with Jesus while you’re here in this life, what makes you think you’ll actually be with him in the next?

Ironically, the absence or presence of this groaning for glory tells us a lot about ourselves. If you don’t groan for glory, that might prove that you’re not in the faith or it might prove you’re far too in love with this world. The presence of this eager groaning proves your faith is genuine.

Church, if all creation groans, shouldn’t we who experience so great a salvation groan even more so? We have been saved and we are being saved. Let’s eagerly look forward to the day when we will be saved!

So vastly different is our future glory from our present sufferings that it’s not even worth comparing. So, all that’s present and visible for us must be understood in light of what is future and invisible.[[70]](#footnote-70)

**8**

# A GREAT PROMISE

*Romans 8:28*

***Introduction***

When I was a kid I did not enjoy going to the dentist. I don’t think I’m all that unique in this. It seems to be the experience of most young kids. There wasn’t anything really all that bad about the dentist or getting my teeth cleaned. It was just something I didn’t really find all that comfortable. Laying back in a chair under a bright light while someone I don’t know sticks their fingers in my mouth is just weird. But there was one thing about going to the dentist that made it all worth it as a kid. Once the cleaning was over and the dentist came in for the final check, I would get up and they would lead me over to a big plastic treasure chest filled with goodies and I would get to choose a new toy to take home with me. It was awesome! Even when I was a bit older in middle school when I was too cool for pretty much everything, the dentist would still lead me over to the chest! Of course, I would pretend to not be excited and act all mature, but as soon as it opened and I saw all the bouncy balls and G.I. Joes and those plastic jumpy frogs, I would immediately reach down like a 6 year-old and claim my treasure.

As we draw near our passage today, some of that feeling comes flooding back for me. Because simply put, Romans 8:28 is a treasure chest of joy for God’s people. And in a small measure I feel like the dentist leading you to that chest and inviting you to enjoy its abundance.

I do believe today marks something of a momentous occasion. Ever since we began thinking about preaching on Romans, and now that we’ve been in it for some time, there’s been not just a few of us who have been eagerly looking forward to the day we arrive at Romans 8:28. And now the day has come!

I know I’ve said many times the brightest gem in Romans 8 is v. 1. And I think that’s true. Verse 1 does indeed shine the brightest. But I also think v. 1 isn’t the most famous verse of chapter 8. No, that honor belongs to v. 28. Why? Because it’s one of the greatest promises God makes to his people in the Bible. It’s not surprising then to find that throughout the ages, whether under threat of persecution or at peace, Christians have found rich comfort in troubles and robust courage to endure sufferings of all kinds in Romans 8:28.

Let’s begin with the context and ask the question: why is v. 28 placed where it is in Romans 8? Specifically, why does it come after vv. 18-27? Well, look back at v. 18. There we’re told we live in this present time—a time in which we will experience suffering of many kinds. But even though this is true, this present age is not all there is. See that? We who are in this present age groan inwardly and long eagerly for—what? For the age to come! When Christ returns, our adoption and redemption will be full and final. We long for this, and so does all creation. As vv. 18-27 continue on, we also learn that in our suffering we’re not left alone but have the great help of the Holy Spirit who groans within us, interceding to the Father on our behalf, according to God’s will. And not only so! As vv. 26-27 give way to v. 28, we learn more that encourages us in this present age. Yes, we look forward eagerly to the age to come when suffering will be done. Yes, we love the help of the Spirit in our weakness as he groans within us. And, see it Church, in this v. 18 world where suffering plagues us, v. 28 teaches that God sovereignly works all things together for our good.[[71]](#footnote-71) This is a great promise indeed!

So why does v. 28 come after vv. 18-27? I think v. 28 exists where it does in our Bibles to give more firmness to our feet as we walk through this fallen world. How does it encourage and give firmness to our feet? By showing God to us. Not a God subject to chance and circumstance and the will of man, but a God who is over all things, and working all things, so that in all things we receive the greatest possible good. Why does God do this? For his greatest possible glory.

Now that we’ve seen the verse in its context, we can begin unpacking it.

Read it again. “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Let’s take it a phrase at a time.

*And we know*. That Paul speaks like this, saying this great promise is something we know, means for Paul this is fact. To him this is not theory, this is no positive thinking or optimistic notion he subscribes to.[[72]](#footnote-72) He had just admitted in v. 26 that there are times in his own weakness when he does not know and must rely on the help of the Spirit to see him through those times, whether lengthy or brief. But here in v. 28, we find that this is something he knows. He knows from his own experience; it’s been proven true in his own life as he has lived through great suffering and seen the sovereign hand of God work it all toward his good. Paul knew this and he wants us to know it, so he says, *and we know*. So Church, as we go through the rest of this verse I’d like you to be asking yourself some questions: do I know this? Have I known this to be true? Do I love the truth that God, in his sovereign grace, so rules over all the affairs of my life that all things now work toward my good? Or is this just a theory to me?

Before he states the great promise, do you see that Paul defines who this promise is for? See it as the verse continues.

*And we know that for those who love God*. Before the promise is given, we learn the promise only belongs to a certain group of people, those who love God. The promise discriminates and is only in operation for some people, not all people. Only for those who love God do all things work together for good. Do you wonder at this? Couldn’t Paul have put it differently and said something like, all things work together for good to them who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?[[73]](#footnote-73) He could’ve said that, but he didn’t. Why is that so? Why does he frame this in terms of love toward God? There are probably many reasons he does it, but one of them is that many describe their Christianity solely in terms of the mind, regarding Christianity as only a matter of believing the right things. This was an issue in Paul’s day, it has been an issue throughout church history, and it’s still a problem today. And Paul’s eager to show us that the Christian faith, while it does have much to do with the mind and much to do with what we believe, goes beyond the mind to the center of who we are, to the heart. It’s one thing to believe in God and to agree with certain doctrines about God; it’s another thing to love God with the heart. Is there not a great difference between ‘I believe in God’ and ‘I love God’? This aims deep within us. Do we desire God, yearn for his nearness, and long for his presence? Do we love him?

But also see it in another light. He does not say, and we know that as long as we love God or, and we know that for those who love God deep enough*.* No. Paul states it simply, as if it were an identity marker. Who is this promise for? It’s for Christians. Who are Christians? Christians are those who love God.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Let’s move on and see the next phrase.

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good*. There it is. The great promise that’s so grand we wouldn’t believe it to be true unless the Bible said it. All things work together for good. Remember, this isn’t just positive thinking or a kind of general optimism available to us in the universe that we can tap into to live our best lives. This is a promise, a great promise from God to those who love him. A promise clearly stating that God, in his sovereign and wise rule over all things, causes all things to work toward one goal, our good. Theologically, we call this the doctrine of God’s providence which describes how God governs over and ordains whatsoever comes to pass.

That God does this means not one detail of the Christian’s life works ultimately for evil; God works it all for good.[[75]](#footnote-75) All of it. *All* really does mean all here. Every single event in our lives, every single relationship, every single day, down to every single millisecond is in view in the word all. Think about what that means. Is there a square inch or a rogue molecule out there somewhere doing whatever it wants to do outside of God’s sovereign rule? No. God is truly sovereign over all.

But, there’s a few cautions here. First, Paul certainly doesn’t mean that everything that happens to us or everything we do in life is good, not at all. There are all kinds of evil things we do to others as well as all kinds of evil things others do to us. Sin is always evil, always regrettable, and there are always consequences to face from sin. The promise here is that God is so great and so big and so sovereign that he works all things, even evil and even sin, to our good. Again, this doesn’t ever excuse sin. But it ought to give us pause and prompt us to look for God’s purpose in our sin and suffering.[[76]](#footnote-76)

In the closing chapters of Genesis when Joseph was abandoned for dead, sold into slavery, falsely accused, sent to prison and forgotten, he probably wondered what God was up to.[[77]](#footnote-77) But when all these events played out and Joseph was exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh, his father and his brothers came to him for food during the famine. Do you know what Joseph told them? Did he say, *wow, what a coincidence! I just happened to be in the right place at the right time to help you!* No, he didn’t say that. He confidently told them in Genesis 50:20, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” What the brothers did was really evil, but what God was doing in it all was really good.

In Job 1:21, when Job faced the loss of all he owned and the death of his ten children he said, “…The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” And in Job 2:10, when sickness and sores racked his body and his wife told him to curse God and die Job said, “…Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”

What about Paul? In Philippians 1:12, when he faced all manner of sufferings, stonings, and imprisonments, he told the church in Philippi, “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.”

Did all these saints believe that all things come to pass by chance? No. Joseph, Job, and Paul knew who God was and the sovereignty of God was the pillow they rested on.

We should admit in the midst of suffering we rarely see the grand purpose of God. It’s like trying to make sense of a whole puzzle by just looking at one puzzle piece. But once you finish the puzzle and step back to see the whole of it, you can see how each piece not only fits into the whole but how each piece was needed in order to complete the whole. So too for the Christian. Romans 8:28 promises us that none of what occurs in our lives is meaningless, that one day we’ll be able to look back and see how each moment of life not only fits, but was needed in order to bring us good.

Another caution here is this: let’s be careful how we define the good God is working for us. Do we define it in worldly terms like health, wealth and prosperity? This doesn’t seem like a good idea because those were the very things Satan promised to give Jesus when he was tempting him. So, it follows that we should define the good in view spiritually. But what good spiritually does God intend to bring us? Well, the context of our passage helps. Verse 29 speaks of our being conformed to the image of Christ. Is that the good? I think so. Why? Look how v. 28 ends.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Once again, those who receive this great promise are defined. Earlier we saw it’s those who love God, now we see it’s *those* *who are called according to his purpose.* But ask: called to what purpose? That v. 29 follows this leads me to believe that the good God is working all things toward is also the very purpose God has called us to—to grow us further into the image of Christ.

This brings us to vv. 29-30 which, Lord willing, we’ll cover next. For now, let me just say this. Romans 8:28 enables us to say something. Regardless of how many deep and prolonged minor keys there are in your life, God is working it all into a grand symphony culminating in our good, and resounding to the great glory of his name. So we can say in it all, ‘God is working for my good.’

But, there are two sides to the coin of this great promise. On one side is the truth that God, for the Christian, will work everything in life toward our good. But the other side is that for those who reject the gospel and reject Jesus Christ, everything in life will ultimately work toward their condemnation. Conclusion? Come to Christ! If you come, you’ll find this promise to be true in your own life as well.

**9**

# THE GOLDEN CHAIN

*Romans 8:29-30*

***Introduction***

We just handled a passage many of us have been looking forward to, Romans 8:28. We lingered on it, and slowly turned it like a gem to see it shine from many different angles. And we were encouraged to hear the great promise it contains, that God sovereignly and wisely rules over all things and causes all things to work together toward one goal, our good. But he doesn’t do this for everyone; he only does it for those who love him, those whom he calls according to his purpose. One of the questions we asked of this verse was how do we define the good God promises to work all things toward? We only briefly touched on it. Now, we arrive at a full answer as we continue on to vv. 29-30, where we find that the good God works all things towards is our growth into the image of Christ.

So, right here at the outset, we see it’s really important to read, understand, and take in not only what comes before Romans 8:28, but what comes after it as well.

As we come to it, you should know many throughout Church history have called vv. 29-30 the golden chain of salvation. Think about chains. Many of the popular songs in Christian circles and many songs we sing here mention chains. When this happens it’s usually in the context of chains of sin being broken. For example, in the song *Death Was Arrested*, “Released from my chains I’m a prisoner no more….” Or in the song *Living Hope*, “Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free. Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me. You have broken every chain….” Or my favorite example, the hymn *And Can It Be,* contains the lyric, “My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed Thee.”

In the sense of being set free from sin and death, these lyrics are wonderful, and we should sing them and enjoy the truth present in them. But there’s another way to view chains in the Bible, especially as we come to Romans 8:29-30. Here God shows us the chain he has bound us with, a chain that secures us and our salvation, a chain that will never break. This chain stretches back into eternity past before time began and stretches forward into our eternal future in glory. There are five links in this golden chain: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. Yet, these are not all the links present in our redemption.[[78]](#footnote-78) There’s no mention here of regeneration, faith, repentance, adoption, or sanctification. So, clearly the point in this is not to provide us with a complete picture of our salvation, no. Rather, God desires us to know these five links of the golden chain in particular to show us how invincible our salvation truly is.

So, let’s begin by looking at…

***The Purpose of the Chain (verse 29)***

“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

Don’t you find it so encouraging that Paul begins with the love of God?[[79]](#footnote-79) Do you see that? Or have I just confused you? At first glance it might not be immediately clear, but the love of God is front and center in the word *foreknew*. Let me explain. I think when most people see the word foreknew they think of the idea of the foresight of faith.[[80]](#footnote-80) That God in eternity past looked down the corridor of time or hallway of history, saw who said yes to Jesus, and then on that basis chose or predestined them. That’s what most people think of when they see this word foreknew. This is the majority view today, that God chose us long ago because he knows we’ll choose him one day. But I disagree because this roots predestination in the decision of man rather than the pleasure of God. Let me explain more.

You see, in the Bible to know is to love. In Genesis 4:1 it says, “Now Adam knew Eve his wife….” Does that refer to Adam being mentally aware that Eve was his wife? Of course not. This knowing between Adam and Eve is an intimate and personal knowledge, the result of which was the birth of a child. Later in the Old Testament, Hosea speaks in the same manner. In Hosea 13:4-5 God says, “…I am the LORD your God.… It was I who knew youin the wilderness, in the land of drought….” Amos says the same thing. In Amos 3:2 God says, “You only have Iknownof all the families of the earth….” Question: do these passages teach that God is only mentally aware of his people Israel and was ignorant of all others? Of course not. God is omniscient, all-knowing. So, when the Bible speaks of God knowing his people, more is in view than mere awareness or knowledge. This gives us a deeper insight into what Jesus meant when he spoke to false converts in Matthew 7:23 saying, “…I never knew you….” And even in Romans itself further on in 11:2a Paul says, “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.”

Come back to v. 29. While we certainly believe that God does know all things, and that God can look back and forth throughout all history and observe what man does and does not do, this is not what Paul is speaking of. When it says God foreknew us in v. 29, it doesn’t just mean that God knows what decision about Jesus we would one day make. It means God *fore-loved* us and set his affection on us. Then out of his great love he then predestined us. This is echoed in Ephesians 1:4-5, “…In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ….”

But maybe you’re asking, why spend time on this? Isn’t this all just wildly debated anyway? Does it matter at all? Yes, it does. It matters a great deal. Look at vv. 29-30. Foreknowledge is the beginning of the golden chain, and since foreknowledge is the first link, how we define foreknowledge matters because it sets the tone for the whole chain. If foreknowledge is all about us and our choice of God, then all the rest God does here really began with us and our own choice. In effect, this makes man the center of all these verses rather than God. Church, don’t make this mistake. Foreknowledge refers to God’s setting his affection on his people before the world was made. So, if we were to reword Romans 8:29 to display this it would read, for those whom God intimately set his affection upon, he also predestined.

For what purpose did God foreknow us? See v. 29. He foreknew us to predestine us. Why did he predestine us? So that we would be *conformed to the image of his Son.* Why does God conform us to the image of his Son? So that his Son might be *the firstborn among many brothers.* Here is the purpose of the golden chain. That Jesus would receive the glory as the firstborn. This is resurrection language. Jesus was the first to come out of the grave in triumph over sin. And by doing all of these things in us, God will see to it that his Son is born in us, that his image grows in us, until we too come out of our graves like he did in the great resurrection on the final Day. This is the great purpose of the golden chain.

Even so, I wonder if you see this purpose as many of our own purposes. I can purpose to not mindlessly scroll through the social media feeds on my phone. But, haven’t you been there? Before you even know you’re doing it, you’re doing it and mindlessly scrolling. Many of our purposes fail, but (praise God!) God’s purposes never fail. Verse 29 is not only the purpose God intends or aims for, it’s the purpose he will achieve in us.

We’ve looked at foreknowledge, the first link in the chain. Now we can move on to the others.

***The Other Links (verse 30)***

“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

It is lamentable that there is such a stout prejudice against the doctrine of *predestination*. Perhaps then firstly, just see that this word is in the Bible. Too many people believe the word and the concept of predestination was invented by John Calvin during the Reformation. Not at all.[[81]](#footnote-81) It is and will ever remain to be God’s truth. And since it’s God’s truth we would do well to embrace it. See how this fits in the chain. All whom God foreknew, he predestined. This word means what it appears to mean. Pre meaning beforehand, destinedmeaning destination. God set our destination beforehand. The Greek word here is *pro-horisen*. Do you hear the word *horizon* in that? God determined our horizon and set our sail toward it.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Many hear this and say, *‘Ok, so God just determines the destiny of all people randomly? That’s not fair!’* I do think that’s a natural reaction to this. It was my own reaction to it when I first came across it. But pause and ask, do we want God to be fair? If God operated by fairness, no one would be saved. Why? Because of sin. Isn’t it fair for a judge to punish lawbreakers? So too with God. Predestination then, isn’t unjust. God so works that some receive mercy, and some receive justice for their sin. No one ever receives injustice from God. In fact, our sin is so great that if God didn’t predestine anyone, no one would ever embrace the gospel because sinners always prefer sin to righteousness. So, if you believe God is unfair to do this, or that you could never love a God who did this, I would urge caution. As we’ll see in Romans 9, who are we to question God as if we knew better? It’s like sawing off the branch you’re sitting on. More on this in just a minute.

*And those whom he predestined he also called*. What does this mean? This is the moment in time when God’s grace in our lives comes to fruition. God’s foreknowing us and predestining us occurred before time began, but calling occurs in time. Paul speaks about this in Galatians 1:14-16 saying, “And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles….” So, Paul was going about his life, zealously growing in prominence in his Jewish circles. But something interrupted his pursuit. What? Who? God. God, who set him apart before he was born (that’s foreknowing and predestining work), called him by his grace! And when God called Paul, what happened? God revealed his Son to Paul.

This is calling. It happens to everyone who has been foreknown by God and predestined. It’s the moment when you hear the gospel and in the gospel call, you hear God calling you home. It’s the moment when our blind eyes and our dead hearts are awakened and opened to God like a flower opens to the sun. I do think this can take place in various ways. Some are called by God with such a gentle call that they don’t know when the call truly began, while others are so suddenly called that their conversion stands out with blazing clarity.[[83]](#footnote-83) Regardless, this call is an irresistible call. It’s a powerful call. And it’s a resurrecting call, like God calling out into the void and creating the world, or Jesus calling out into the dark tomb and creating new life in dead Lazarus.

*And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified.* Well, we shouldn’t spend too much time on this simply because this is the grand theme of Romans. We’ve seen it time and time again all through these chapters. Remember, justification is what occurs when we repent and believe. It’s a one-time event in which God declares us to be what we’re not, righteous. Why? Because of us? No, because of Jesus’ own righteousness being credited to our account. Paul simply can’t get away from justification. He mentions it everywhere. And he mentions it here because justification is bound up with God’s sovereign purpose and plan, which means God’s sovereignty isn’t just some side doctrine existing in isolation. It has everything to do with the cross, the gospel, and salvation. So, when we explain predestination and the gospel isn’t mentioned, we do something the Bible never does. Justification, the great gift of God given to those who embrace his Son, is ever and always bound up with God’s sovereign purpose. What God has joined together, let no man separate.

*And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* We now arrive at the end of the golden chain. All those whom God foreknew he predestined, he called, he justified, and he glorified. While all of the chain leads us to rejoicing, glorification holds a near and dear place in the heart of every believer. In this life we’re constantly plagued with sin and face the consequences of sin, whether it be our own or the sin of others. This happens even though the power and penalty of sin has been dealt with by Jesus on the cross. To be glorified is to be entirely freed from the presence of sin, to be entirely made new, and to enter the presence of the Lord. In a very real sense, glorification is the grand finale of the Christian life.

Do you find it strange that Paul puts this in the past tense? Isn’t glorification an event that is yet to come? Something in the future? Why then the past tense? Paul didn’t make a mistake here. He meant what he said. He wrote this in the past tense to show us that in God’s mind, because of all his great work in us, it’s as if our glorification is already settled.[[84]](#footnote-84) Or we could say, Paul is so certain of the believer’s final glorification he writes as if it has already occurred.[[85]](#footnote-85) Why is Paul so certain? Because the sovereign purpose of God is invincible. In this golden chain there are no dropouts, no loose ends, no weak spots, no kinks, no notches that can weaken it, there is nothing that can break this chain. All those he foreknew he predestined, all those he predestined he called, all those he called he justified, and all those he justified he glorified.

So, Church, I encourage you to examine and enjoy the glory and the assurance of this golden chain. Look back and see God’s great love for you before the world was and before time began. See his foreknowing, setting his affection on you and predestining you. Look with gratitude to his calling you from the darkness of sin when you were blind to his beauty. And hear his justifying declaration over you. That you, because of Jesus, are righteous. And look on ahead with eager anticipation to the day of our glorification as we enter his presence, when we join our voices to the eternal song, when all prejudice against sovereignty is gone, and when we finally believe the King had loved us all along.

**10**

# WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY?

*Romans 8:31-39*

***Introduction***

The time we’ve spent together in Romans 8 has been nothing short of wonderful. We’ve learned much, we’ve seen much, been reminded of much, and been deeply comforted with the great assurance that is ours in Christ. As we come now to the close of this, the greatest chapter in the Bible, I feel a great sense of celebration. Why? Because vv. 31-39 are nothing but celebration! What other response could there be to these things? All we’ve seen in Romans 8, and expanding backwards to all we’ve seen in Romans chapters 1-8 so far, should so move upon our souls that we too are filled with joyful celebration and praise to God.

Is that where you are? Given all that we’ve seen and heard here, are you rejoicing? Or are you deeply moved within? Do you want to praise God for his great works displayed here, or for these great doctrines we’ve been lingering on? Have these things for you been more than mere matters of debate and controversy? Or perhaps you do agree and affirm these great truths, but you only treat them coldly and clinically as if they were formulas to dissect with precision. Paul does get precise here, no doubt. But he is not cold in his treatment of them. His heart is blazing with love and affection for this great God who does such great things. And since Paul, as our guide through Romans 8, has in v. 31 arrived at a joyful praise of God, shouldn’t we be arriving there as well? If you’re there, praise God! Rejoice and give God the glory he’s worthy of. If you’re not praising God after coming through this glorious chapter, may these verses today lead you there.

This passage contains many questions and answers, but four big questions frame the whole argument. Let’s take them one at a time.

***Question One (verse 31)***

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Verse 31 begins with the question that forms the title of this message and reveals the theme of this passage, *what then shall we say to these things?* This is the first question Paul asks after thirty verses of rich and weighty doctrine. In a sense he’s making a transition. His teaching is finished, and he now desires to move on to other matters. But that’s not the only thing in view. He’s calling for a response from us, his readers. After giving us thirty verses of rich and weighty doctrine, Paul isn’t content to just end and move on to something else. No, he asks the *so what?* question, what then shall we say to these things? Simply put, we can say a lot about these things! Volumes and volumes have been written on these great truths throughout the history of the church. What these things mean, what they don’t mean, why they matter, how they reveal who God is, how they reveal who we are, how we apply them in our own cultural moment, and more. And until Christ returns, Christians will continue to dwell and write and linger over and meditate on these things, as we ought to. What shall we say? Because there will always be loads to say about these precious truths, the moment the church thinks we’ve said enough about these things is the moment reformation must begin again.

See Paul’s answer to his own question though, what then shall we say to these things? *If God is for us, who can be against us?* He answers his question with another question. But, even though it’s technically a question, it’s a dramatic and powerful statement of truth. The small word *if* is not used here to indicate any kind of uncertainty.[[86]](#footnote-86) No, we get the gist of what he’s telling us. Romans 8 has taught us one great principle: God is for us. From before time began, to glory in eternity future, and all in between, God is forever and always for his chosen, called, saved, transformed, and kept people. So, *if* or *since* or *because* God is for us, Paul asks, who’s against us?

There are two ways to answer this question. The first way to answer this question of who can be against us is everyone. The whole world could be against us. Why? Because men are by nature rebels seeking to dethrone God and enthrone themselves. So naturally, if men hate God, men will also hate us who love God, and in that hatred, they will seek opportunity to come against us. This is why the church has always been, to varying degrees, a persecuted church. We’ll see some of this in vv. 35-39 in a moment. The second way to answer this question of who can be against us is no one. This is more of what Paul is getting at. Even if the world comes against us, could they really? No. That’s the promise here. Nothing can and nothing will ultimately stand against us. Why? Because God stands for us, with us, and in us. Or, let’s not forget v. 28. Because God is sovereignly working all things out for our good, nothing in life will ultimately work against the good of God’s people.[[87]](#footnote-87)

***Question Two (verse 32)***

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

Verse 32 is an argument from the greater to the lesser. Since God has done the greatest act ever imagined, not sparing his Son but giving him up for us, God can do the lesser, the easier thing as well, giving us all things along with his Son. The idea of sparing is prominent in v. 32. We know what it is to spare someone. We use this word when someone or we ourselves are saved from something awful happening to us at the last second. It’s natural to think of Abraham and Isaac here.[[88]](#footnote-88) Remember it? God had commanded the sacrifice of Isaac, and as unimaginably difficult as that had to be, Abraham obeyed and headed out and up Mt. Moriah with Isaac. Abraham got the altar ready, laid Isaac on it, bound him, and at the last second when the knife was lifted, God stopped him and provided another sacrifice. At this both Abraham and Isaac had to rejoice, because God had spared him.

While God did that for Abraham and Isaac long ago, v. 32 says God didn’t do this with his own Son. God did not alleviate, God did not hold back, and God did not lighten or withhold a single drop of his anger when he poured his wrath out on Christ on the cross. As much as Abraham loved Isaac, it doesn’t compare to how much God the Father loves God the Son. Even so, the Father would not spare his Son in order to save us. See then who delivered up Jesus to die. Was it Judas, for money? Was it Pilate, for fear? Was it the Jews, for envy? Ultimately, no. It was the Father, for love.[[89]](#footnote-89) That God would do this shows us his great heart abounding in love for those he desires to redeem.

See where Paul goes next in v. 32. Since God did the greater thing of not sparing his Son for us, God can also do the lesser thing and give us blessings innumerable in his Son. There is much to enjoy here, but caution is needed as well. The phrase *all things* in v. 32 needs to be interpreted through the phrase *with him.* The blessings in view then aren’t just things we desire to have in this life or the next, no. They’re blessings that come to us in Christ. John Calvin has a great comment on this in his Romans commentary. He says, “This passage ought to remind us of what Christ brings to us, and to awaken us to contemplate his riches; for as he is a pledge of God’s infinite love towards us, so he has not been sent to us void of blessings or empty, but filled with all celestial treasures, so that they who possess him may not lack anything necessary for their perfect happiness.”[[90]](#footnote-90)

Church, God will provide, in Christ, all we need for our life with him. We will not lack anything we truly need. That’s the promise of v. 32. The King’s grace is truly greater than we know.

***Question Three (verses 33-34)***

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

This third question has some repetition in it. Back in v. 31 we’ve already seen Paul bring up the fact that none can stand against us because God is with us and for us. In v. 33 there is similar language but with a difference. Not only is election now mentioned here but justification is mentioned as well. So, it seems what was present implicitly in v. 31 is present explicitly here in v. 33. And, as we understood in v. 31 that many do attempt to stand against us even though no one can ultimately stand against us, here in v. 33 the same is true. *Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?* Well, I’m sure many do. I’m sure many have, and I’m sure many will attempt to bring a charge against God’s elect in the future. But ultimately, will any of these charges stick? Will any of these charges sway the Judge? No. Why not? Because God has already passed verdict on us. *Justified* is the banner over us now and nothing or no one can change that.

Think on this further. Many think the main work of the Devil is temptation. Do you think that? I don’t. I think the Devil’s main work is accusation. It’s in his very name. The Hebrew name Satanmeans the Accuser. So, it’s the very nature of the Devil to harass God’s elect, to constantly tell us of our many sins, prodding our conscience, aiming to stir up our guilt and take away our assurance and joy. And you know what’s crazy about his accusations? Many of them are true. We are great sinners, and we have greatly sinned. But you know what’s even crazier? We have a greater Savior. Look at v. 34. Since God has justified us, who can condemn us? No one. Why? Christ is the one who died for us as our sin-bearer, and more than that, Christ is the one who was raised for us as our sin-defeater, and more than that, Christ is the one seated in victory at the right hand of God ever interceding for us.

In other words, God’s work of redemption, in Christ, is so complete that no one, not the Devil, not anyone, can accuse us or condemn us. God’s verdict stands.

***Question Four (verses 35-39)***

The melody of Romans 8 now reaches its highest and most triumphal pitch.[[91]](#footnote-91)

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Beautiful. Verse 35 is the last question in Romans 8 and is it answered emphatically. Shall anything separate us from the love of Christ? The list Paul rattles off in v. 35 is unsettling, isn’t it? “…tribulation…distress…persecution…famine…nakedness… danger…sword?” I’ve recently been reading about what occurred in France when the Protestant Reformation blew through it, and I’m astonished. Thousands of people who left Roman Catholicism for the new evangelical faith were burned in the streets. But, the executioners ran into a problem. They had to stop publicly executing these people because their boldness and courage in the face of death were creating too many new converts. We may not experience these things in our own Christianity in the affluent West at this time, but do not doubt, this list is nothing less than the hard soil God’s church has grown in throughout the ages.

And Paul even wants to tell us this in v. 36 when he reaches back and quotes Psalm 44:22. God’s people thought of themselves as those that are killed all day long, as sheep for the slaughter. It was true then, it was true in Christ’s own day, it was true in Reformation Europe, and just ask our Afghani brothers and sisters if this is true today. “It’s no new thing for the Lord to permit his saints to be exposed to the cruelty of the wicked.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

But, by God’s grace, his elect church doesn’t just endure or survive this cruelty, we conquer in the midst of it.[[93]](#footnote-93) See that in v. 37? Through him who loved us we conquer. Then Paul rattles off another list in vv. 38-39, answering the question posed in v. 35, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Well Church, we’re now done with Romans 8. Simply put, I think we have, in part, seen why this chapter is widely held as one of the greatest chapters in the Bible.[[94]](#footnote-94) Beginning in v. 1 with no condemnation and ending in v. 39 with no separation, how great is the assurance we have in Jesus Christ? Verse 38 began with the phrase, “For I am sure.” Here’s the question I’d like to leave you with as we end. Are you sure of these things? Are you persuaded? Are you convinced[[95]](#footnote-95) Or are you, maybe even still, unmoved by these things? “If so, bring your heart to Jesus. If you heart is hard, the love of Christ will soften it. If you heart is cold, the love of Christ will warm it. If you heart is sinful, the love of Christ will purify it. If you heart is sorrowful, the love of Christ will soothe it. If you heart is wandering, the love of Christ will draw it back. Bring your heart to Jesus. May you know his love, its fullness and its freeness.”[[96]](#footnote-96)

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3. See Derek W.H. Thomas, *How the Gospel Brings Us All the Way Home* (Sanford, Florida: Reformation Trust, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. Ibid., 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. John Piper, *No Condemnation in Christ, Part 1* (9/9/01, accessed via Accordance Bible software, 4/23/21). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Charles Spurgeon, *In Christ No Condemnation* (8/29/1886, accessed via Accordance Bible software, 4/23/21). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
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10. Timothy Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, God’s Word For You (The Good Book Company, 2015), 12.

11 Spurgeon, *In Christ No Condemnation.*

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19. 19 Ibid., 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
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22. 22 Moo, *Romans*, 511. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
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28. 28 Ibid., 515. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
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66. 66 R.C. Sproul, *Romans*, St. Andrew’s Expositional Commentary (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2009), 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
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68. 68 Moo, *Romans*, 547. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. 69 Perhaps the will of God is mentioned here in v. 27 because that is the very weakness (v. 26) we so often experience in prayer. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. 70 Ibid., 533. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
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96. 96 Octavius Winslow, quoted in Fesko, *Romans*, 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)