

Forgiven in Christ

Romans 8:1

Our new sermon series is called **Keep Moving Forward**. For the next eight weeks we are going to walk slowly through Romans 8 and let the truth of the Gospel sink deeply into our hearts and minds and lives. I challenge all of us to make an effort to memorize as much of this chapter as we can, starting right here in verse 1: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***

Here is the conviction underneath this series: the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. **The Gospel is what changes us** - both in that first moment of salvation and in every step of growth we experience. Let me clarify. God is the One who changes us. But the instrument He has chosen to use to activate change to His people is the Gospel of Jesus Christ - the Good News of Jesus' finished work. The Gospel is our fuel - it is our food - it gives us the motivation and power to keep moving forward.

All of us want to make progress. All of us want to move forward. No one wants to be stuck. No one wants to keep dealing with the same problems over and over again in life, in marriage, at work, in any relationship.

People don't mind hard work. ***What frustrates us is hard work without progress***, without fruit, without change. All of us are willing to put in effort if we will see results. How many have made resolutions this week related to diet and exercise? Don't raise your hands... But if you knew for 100% sure that a certain program of diet and exercise would guarantee fast and long term results - you would stick with it, wouldn't you? What makes us waver from these kinds of programs is that we don't see results, or at least not as fast as we might like (or not with the amount of cheating that we like to build into them).

I bet you've experienced that same thing in your Christian life. We all have. You start the year with a fresh commitment to read the Bible, pray and go to church. Maybe you even up the ante and join a small group. You stick with your commitments for a little while, maybe even a whole month in which you read the Bible almost every day. But it's hard work to maintain the discipline and you don't see immediate and miraculous changes taking place - so you gradually start to compromise and let those resolutions slide.

Let me suggest that **what is often missing from this kind of New Year's Resolution is the Gospel**. Simply applying more willpower and discipline to a problem or situation might add effort but it will not add RESULTS because it cannot add POWER. The Gospel is our fuel. Self-reliance and willpower is like ***pulling a powerboat by swimming in front of it***. I've done that a few times when I've run out of gas or once when we killed an engine by forgetting to put the oil drain plug back in at the start of a new season... (Turns out that's kind of important.)

Only the Gospel gives us access to the power of God. You'll hear us say this all the time here at Oakwood - "Apply the Gospel!"

- You are struggling with ***purity and holiness*** - apply the Gospel to that battle with sin; believe the promise that you are forgiven and free and live in the light of that truth.

- You are struggling with ***serving your husband or wife*** in marriage - apply the Gospel. Remember how much God has loved and served you in Christ and invite Him to fill you with the love and power you need to give and give and give some more, regardless of the response you receive.
- You are struggling to trust God with ***a painful situation*** - apply the Gospel. No one went through a more painful situation than Jesus Christ - no greater injustice, no greater suffering - reflect on who Jesus is and all He has done for you and let His love and grace fill your heart and mind with life and light and love and power.
- Apply the Gospel. Whatever your struggle, shine the light of Jesus' finished work onto that issue.

That is the first step and the constant need if you are going to make progress and keep moving forward. Remember the Gospel. Preach the Good News of all Jesus has done to yourself and to one another. Rehearse the promises of God and the wonder of how they were fulfilled in Christ. Memorize Scripture like Romans 8 to fill your mind with the truth and beauty and wonder of this world-changing mystery which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The Gospel is our fuel. We were designed to live on Jesus and His Holy Spirit. If you are feeling weak and dry and empty, my guess is that you haven't been to the fueling station often enough. You've probably been trying to pull your little boat along in your own strength... and it's wearing you out! Quit trying to save yourself... quit trying to sanctify yourself in your own power - come to Jesus and **experience the Gospel-Fueled Life [image of triple engine boat]**

Let the Good News of Jesus Christ light a fire in your heart and stoke the flames of your worship. Not just once so you can know "phew, I'm saved," but all day, every day for the rest of your life. Feed on this truth. Chew on it. Fill up on it. Place the Gospel at the center of your very being.

That's what we'll be doing for the next eight weeks - because that is what the book of Romans is all about, and it culminates right here in chapter 8. Define yourself by the Gospel. ***Fill your heart and mind with the truth of the Gospel.*** Resist the flesh - which is self-reliance and self-exaltation. Kill the flesh, put it to death. Throw away the oars of self-reliant religion and engage the 500 horsepower triple turbine engine of the Holy Spirit who runs on the power of the GOSPEL!

Self-reliance is the anti-gospel, the Home Depot Message that says, ***"You can do it, God can help."*** Blasphemy. Heresy. You cannot do it. No one can do it. That's why Jesus did it. And he didn't go part way. He finished the work - all of it, forever. Quit trying to carry the weight. Let the burden drop. You are not your own savior and Lord. Stop trying to be.

Jesus alone is the Savior of the World. Let Him be YOUR Savior. Not just for your initial salvation - praise the Lord for that - but for every minute of every day of your life. Let HIM be the Savior and YOU be the Saved. Try that in 2018 and just wait to see the results, just wait to see how the Holy Spirit will feed and fill you, will empower and lead you into things you never thought possible.

The Gospel is our fuel and **the Beatitudes give us a Road Map to progress** - a guide to growing in Christ. As you saw in the promo video a few minutes ago, we will be going through some material called ***Momentum*** in our Community Groups for the next eight weeks. The cool Scottish

preacher in the warehouse is Colin Smith, the pastor we were blessed to work with in Chicago for the last three years. I'm excited to introduce you all to him since I learned so much from him.

Momentum presents the Beatitudes as a road map for sanctification or growth in Christ. Before this study I had seen the beatitudes as seven or eight "nice virtues" that had no obvious relationship amongst each other. But I think Colin makes a compelling case for the sequential nature of the beatitudes - how they move from one to the next and allow the believer to build up MOMENTUM in his walk with the Lord.

The visual of eight rings shows how you can't jump to the sixth or seventh ring - suddenly becoming pure in heart or making peace in a badly damaged relationship. You will fall flat on your face if you try. But you can always reach the first ring, no matter where you've been or what you've been doing lately. The first ring is where we all have to start: ***"Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

This is the starting point for Christianity. **The portal into the life God blesses is low and small** and you must enter on your knees. Only the poor in Spirit may enter - only the humble will receive the kingdom of heaven. As Indiana Jones discovered at the very last second, repeating the clue "the penitent man may pass"... the penitent man is humble - KNEEL!

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This is the first step toward understanding the Gospel and it is the first step toward making progress in your Christian life: to admit that you bring NOTHING of merit to the Lord. Nothing. Anything you do bring - anything any of us brings - would merit only God's judgment and condemnation.

But this humbling realization is the gateway to freedom and joy - it is the low doorway to blessing. And you can reach this first of the eight rings from anywhere. From the first ring of humility you can swing forward to repentance, experiencing the blessing of those who mourn - who turn from their sin and take hold of Jesus by faith. Then as humility and repentance converge you can swing to the third ring of surrender - for MEEKNESS is not weakness but is the submission of our strengths and abilities to the control of the Lord - meekness moves us into the freedom of total surrender.

And so on, through the beatitudes, one after another, building up momentum to reach purity of heart in a single-minded focus on Christ alone which positions us to become peacemakers who lay down our rights as ambassadors of the gospel of peace. And finally, the result of following this pathway is that the follower of Jesus will have strength and joy to persevere no matter what the cost.

The Gospel is our fuel. The Beatitudes show us the way. And the Church is our vehicle.

Believe me when I say that you will not make it far on this journey by yourself. You need brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, sons and daughters, nieces and nephews - you need God's family around you if you want to make progress. PLEASE join a Community Group if you haven't already. Two easy options are available if you're not sure where to start: Sunday mornings at 9:15 or Sunday nights at 5 p.m. There are other groups as well, of course, just check the website or ask at the Information Desk. You don't have to

commit to a group forever, but please make an eight week commitment to go through Momentum with some fellow believers - you'll be so glad you did!

Ok, that is our orientation to Momentum and how we can keep moving forward in the Christian life. Now drink in some Gospel truth to help us get started. Romans 8:1 ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

This is one of the simplest verses in the Bible yet one of the most significant. We will discuss its meaning in two parts, doing a bad news / good news thing. First, the bad news of what we deserve. Second, the good news of what God offers us in Christ.

The bad news is summed up in this verse in one word: condemnation.

Condemnation is the just penalty for all who sin. If you break the law and get caught, you will stand before a judge who will pronounce your sentence – the judge's verdict will condemn you to pay whatever penalty you owe.

I received a lovely ***letter from the city of Palatine*** soon after we moved to Chicago three years ago, welcoming us to the area. They even had a picture of my silver Accord and a zoom in on my license plate. It was so thoughtful of them to greet us with a picture! But then as I read the letter I saw that it was a \$100 fine for running a red light. I protested! I never ran a red light! I have a totally unblemished driving record!

But they were a step ahead and had a video link so I could watch the replay – over and over if I wanted to. Ok, there I am rolling up to the line – the light IS clearly red in front of me – the giant "No turn on red" sign clearly visible, with the "Photo enforced" sign above it. I slow down, I slow down as I approach the line and I'm watching the video, waiting for the car to stop... and it nearly does...

But then the damning evidence played out right in front of me as the car slowly rolls across the line – it definitely does not stop – and I turn on the red light, blissfully unaware that I had broken the law and would have to pay the price for that violation. I turned the letter over, looking for a way to appeal the verdict – to get around the \$100 condemnation. But there was no such relief. The crime was committed. The criminal was caught. The price must be paid.

There are two parts to condemnation. First the verdict: the ***pronouncement of guilt***. I broke the law by failing to stop at the red light. Then the sentence: the ***announcement of the penalty due***: a \$100 fine.

Every sin brings these two results: a verdict and a sentence; the pronouncement of guilt and of the penalty due. Over time our sins add up in a long list of pronouncements of guilt and a mounting knowledge that these are utterly unpayable fines.

\$100 for negligent driving is one thing. There is much more serious penalty for sin. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Every single person on earth will receive the same verdict and sentence. Romans 3:10 says, ***"None is righteous, no, not one."*** Romans 3:23 says, ***"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."***

So the universal verdict for all of mankind – including you and me – is the pronouncement of guilt before a holy God. There will be no hiding our sins, no way to cover them up, no way to appeal our case.

Listen to Revelation 20: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” Revelation 20:12

Jesus said this in Luke 12: ***“There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.”***

I realize this is terrifying. It is the scariest thing in the world to contemplate. But because of that we shouldn't ignore or deny it – rather, the more serious the reality the more important it is that we DO consider it. And, dear friends, it doesn't get any more serious than to contemplate how that moment will go for you and for the people you love.

Because you will have your day in court. Everyone will. You will stand before the throne of God. And the one who will be seated on that throne is named Jesus Christ. Listen to Acts 17:

“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” Acts 17:30-31

When Jesus judges you at the moment you die or he returns you already know in your heart what the verdict will be: **guilty**. And then **the sentence will be read: death.** ***“For the wages of sin is death.”*** That is the penalty. That is the condemnation that hangs over the world.

The payment every sinner owes is to die for his or her sin – both physically and spiritually. Since our souls are eternal, spiritual death does not bring our existence to an end but makes that existence into ***everlasting torment***. This is the final penalty for sin – eternal, conscious punishment under the just condemnation of God. Listen to John 3:36

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John 3:36

There is no condemnation for those who are IN Christ Jesus - He is a shelter from God's judgment. But for those OUTSIDE of Jesus' protection, “the wrath of God remains on them.”

God's wrath WILL fall on sin. It has to fall on sin or God would not be good and just. Judgment must come or God would not be true and faithful to His Word. On your own, apart from Jesus, that will be your experience. Judgment. Condemnation. Wrath. Torment. Suffering. Misery. Forever.

The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah both pictured God's coming judgment as **a cup filled with wrath**, waiting to be poured out - a cup that those who rebel against God are forced to drink that makes them stagger and vomit. ***This was the agony Jesus wrestled with in the garden*** of Gethsemane as he pleaded with the Father - "Please take this CUP from me." It wasn't the physical pain that Jesus feared - though that must have been terrifying to imagine. It was the spiritual agony of drinking the boiling cup of the wrath of God - full strength, every drop.

Here is how the final judgment is described in Revelation 14:

"He also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image." Revelation 14:10-11

In Revelation 16 the wrath is upgraded from a cup to seven bowls that will be poured out on the earth to consume everything on this planet with the just and righteous Almighty fury of the Lord.

The church today doesn't often preach hellfire and brimstone but the Bible does and Jesus did, so if we are going to remain a Biblically faithful church, then we must include passages like this, even though they are hard for us to stomach. Listen to the very last verse of Isaiah's prophecy:

"And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." Isaiah 66:24

This is the Bad News of what we deserve. The clear and universal verdict of guilt. The terrifying and eternal verdict of death - spiritual, never ending misery and torment. As one young boy shared the gospel with his little brother, ever so lovingly - "you know you're going to hell, right? Where you burn and you burn but you don't die." (That wasn't one of our boys, but the message was effective for that little brother.)

But dear friends, that need not be your experience for there is a way of salvation! There is a Savior for sinners and his name is Jesus Christ the Lord. In Jesus Christ there is NO CONDEMNATION. In Christ there is **freedom from the penalty for sin**. We call this THE GOOD NEWS because it is the best news ever.

Imagine this. **If you belong to Jesus, judgment will be totally different for you.** Yes, you will stand before the holy throne of God when you die or Jesus returns. But at that moment when eternity hangs in the balance, Jesus will step down from his judgment seat, walk over next to you, stand beside you and look up to the Father to say, ***"This one is with me."***

Then he will say to you, ***"Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and join in your Master's happiness."***

If you belong to Jesus by faith, **you HAVE freedom** from the penalty of sin! The condemnation you deserve was poured out on Christ on the cross. It is not waiting for you. It is not stored up in some heavenly vault, simmering in a bowl waiting to be poured out on you. **Jesus paid it all!** "My

sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought – my sin, not in part but the whole – was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.”

Look at verse 3 - ***“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.”***

Instead of condemning all of us as we deserve for the sins of our flesh, God chose to condemn sin in the flesh of his only Son. God has done what you and I could never do. The price to pay was beyond what we could afford. So Jesus came to pay it. He had to live the perfect life and then die a sinner’s death to achieve it – but achieve it he did when he breathed out those three precious words on the cross: ***“It is finished.”***

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

That is the first Gift of freedom we have in Christ. Next week we’ll look at the gift of freedom from the power of sin. And the week after that we’ll look at the blessed freedom we have to follow the Holy Spirit, to walk under the new law of the Spirit of life instead of being governed by the law of sin and death.

Because the bad news is that all of us deserve condemnation from a just and holy God. We have all sinned. We all fall short of the perfect standard of heaven. And the wages of sin is death. Not just physical death but eternal suffering under the just wrath of God.

God offers eternal life to everyone who believes in Jesus, His Son. We deserve eternal death, suffering, judgment and condemnation. But God offers us forgiveness, freedom, life, joy and eternal glory in Christ. The reason there are only these two options - there is no middle ground, no purgatory where people are sort of not in hell and sort of not in heaven - is right there in John 3:36 that we looked at earlier - ***“the wrath of God remains on him.”***

God’s wrath WILL fall on sin. If you belong to Jesus, then God’s wrath has already fallen on your sin, when Jesus died on the cross. That fiery punishment of just condemnation does not await you in the future, because it already happened in the past and the full payment for your sin was accepted and applied to your account.

But if you don’t belong to Jesus then he has not borne your sin for you - your penalty has not been paid by another so you will have to pay it yourself. God’s wrath remains on you. But you can change all of that right now, this very day. Ask Jesus to bear your sin. Come to him in humble faith - begging for His grace right now. He will take that burden from you - he will set you free not only from the penalty of sin but from the power of sin that has been controlling your entire life.

There is the key issue – ***do you belong to Jesus Christ?*** Everything depends on this: Do you have Jesus and does Jesus have you? Are you in Christ and is His Spirit in you?

Theologically and practically there are only two options, ***only two spiritual conditions. A person is either alive in Christ or dead in sin.*** You are either in the flesh and under God’s wrath or you are in Christ and free from God’s condemnation.

Are you absolutely certain that you belong to Jesus?

Freedom from the penalty and power of sin is only promised to those who are IN Christ. John tells us “He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God, does not have life.” Paul exhorts: “work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” If you are uncertain about your salvation or unclear about the Gospel, please contact me or one of the elders today so we can sit down and show you what the Bible says about how you can know that you have eternal life.

Here’s a sign to look for if you do belong to Jesus:

Are you experiencing the joy of being forgiven and declared righteous in Christ? I urge all believers to memorize Romans 8:1-2. There is such joy in letting the Gospel resound in your heart and mind. If the Gospel no longer moves your heart to sing praises to the One who died for you, then it’s time to come back to the basics of the faith and let the truth of Jesus’ finished work fill you up with gratitude. It’s time to shift your gaze from yourself, your struggles, your pains, your doubts, your plans, your desires – and focus on all that Jesus has done for you.

It may be that your sin right now is the sin of pride in thinking you have little need for God’s forgiveness and grace. The one who is forgiven little, loves little. So maybe you need to meet with a trusted Christian friend to share about your lack of joy in the Lord and pray about how you can begin to rekindle your love for Him by reflecting on His love for you.

Those who belong to Jesus are free from the penalty of sin – ***“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***

Come back next week to hear how those who belong to Jesus are free from the power of sin – “The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ from the law of sin and death.”

May the Gospel of God’s grace spark a blaze in our hearts, moving us to worship the Savior and King, Jesus Christ, who paid it all for you and for me!

Let’s pray.