**Gospel Focus**

Romans 8:5-13

We are pressing on in our **CORE VALUES series**. We started with Scripture - because everything we are and all we do is grounded in the truth and authority of God’s Word. Then we studied PRAYER. Our mission is to join God in His work, so prayer has to undergird and infuse everything we do. The Lord’s prayer gave us guideposts for our journey with Jesus. Now we have come to our third core value - gospel-centered ministry. We are spending six weeks in Romans 8 to reflect on the beauty and power of the gospel.

And our agenda with this Core Values series is to articulate ***HOW WE DO MINISTRY*** at Oakwood. Our mission is our WHY - why do we exist? To join God in His work of transforming people and communities through the gospel. Our baseball diamond is our WHAT - what do we do? We make disciples who run the bases - loving God, growing in Christ, serving the church and reaching the world.

Our CORE VALUES show us ***the HOW*** - the manner in which we run our ministry of disciplemaking. Everything we do should be Bible-based, prayer-saturated and gospel-centered. Our worship services should feel this way, our small groups, our ministry teams, our outreach, our missions. We value these things so we prioritize them in what we do. After the gospel we will go on to RELATIONAL MINISTRY, empowering everyone and multiplying disciplemakers!

Today we will focus on Romans 8:5-13, but let’s get the context by going back to 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, ***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.” Romans 8:3-4

Instead of condemning us for the sin in our flesh, God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son. Knowing that none of us could save ourselves, God did what we could never do. This is what separates Christianity from all other religions! ***Religion is about what YOU MUST DO. The gospel is the good news of what GOD HAS DONE!***

Specifically in the CROSS - God the Father offered God the Son as a once for all sacrifice for sin. Verse four shows us WHY - IN ORDER THAT the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us - or FULLY REALIZED in us.

That is a beautiful phrase - “Fulfilled.” Think about **what the Law of God requires**. PERFECTION. Consider your level of obedience to ***the 10 commandments***, if all of them were evaluated from 1 to 10.

* Worship only God - 1 to 10 - what’s your score?
* Idolatry - serving other gods - 10 being zero idolatry, 1 being lots
* Respect - honoring God’s name and reputation
* Sabbath - resting as God has commanded us, pacing life according to His will
* Honor your parents - 1 to 10
* Don’t murder, or use mean words
* Don’t commit adultery, or lust
* Don’t steal, even a little
* Don’t lie, even a little
* Don’t covet anything

The maximum score in our little quiz is 100 - how did you do? Honestly. Did you give yourself an A grade. Did you even pass with a D?

***What the Law requires is PERFECTION.*** Absolute holiness. Untarnished, worshipful, God-loving obedience. The Law of Moses is a mirror and a bright light that shows us how far we fall short of this glorious standard.

But notice how this is phrased in verse 4. ***He doesn’t say, “in order that YOU MIGHT finally fulfill all righteousness.”*** Paul knows that’s impossible - just read chapter 7. Israel failed. Paul failed. Trust me, next to Paul the apostle who was Saul the Pharisee, you and I haven’t even begun to attempt to obey God’s Law.

Look at the words: “In order that the righteous requirement of the law might BE FULFILLED in us.” This is a continuation of what God has done and is doing! ***God is filling up your RIGHTEOUSNESS METER.*** He is growing you, more and more, toward the perfection of Jesus. It’s like your ***big brother Jesus gave you his clothes*** and they don’t fit you yet, but you are growing up into them. In fact, it’s exactly like that theologically.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Justification** | **Sanctification** |
| You are declared righteousin Christ | You are becoming righteousthrough Christ |

Justification happens at the moment that you call on Jesus in faith. As soon as you ask Jesus to forgive your sins and become Lord of your life, He takes away all of your sin and gives you credit for His perfection. ***He gives you his robe of perfect righteousness*** and from then on that is how God sees you - JUSTIFIED. Righteous. Holy. Perfect. An adopted son of God. A prince or princess in the Kingdom.

***But at first, the robe doesn’t fit.*** It’s way too big. We trip and fall. We are not yet in PRACTICE what we have as our POSITION in Christ. So we have to GROW! **That is sanctification**. Justification is an event. Sanctification is a process - a lifelong process of growth and development - of falling down and getting back up - but of pressing on and increasingly pursuing in actuality the righteousness we already have as a gift.

The question is HOW. ***Romans 8:5-13 shows us how*** - how to grow up in righteousness; how to grow into the holiness of Jesus; how to increasingly see the righteous requirement of the law fulfilled in us. We’ll see three steps in this process of sanctification, like a 3 step dance. We never stop taking these steps - we keep walking in this pattern until Jesus calls us home!

Step 1:

**How to Fulfill All Righteousness:**

1. Find your **Identity** in Christ

“Fulfilled in us, ***who walk*** not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those ***who live*** according to the flesh…” Romans 8:4-5

Verses 4 and 5 show us two words that are close in meaning but have an important difference. Verse 4, “who walk” is the common phrase for **lifestyle** - your walk of life. Verse 5, “who live” is the Greek word ONTES - from which we get **ONTOLOGY** - the state of BEING. The two are obviously closely connected - your lifestyle shapes your identity and your identity shapes your lifestyle. Look at verse 9 in a more literal translation:

1. Find your **Identity** in Christ

“You, however, **are not** in the flesh but in the Spirit… Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ **is not** his.” Romans 8:9

Twice we see ***the simple verb “to be.”*** Paul is teaching us in this passage about WHO WE ARE in Christ. The Christian is no longer ***in sin*** or ***in the flesh***, but now we are in the Spirit because we belong to Jesus - we ARE HIS.

So that out loud right now: “I AM HIS.” [repeat]

You are no longer in the flesh. Now you are HIS. You are in the Spirit. You are one with Jesus. You belong to Him. You are under His protection. Feel the force of these identity statements. Say these out loud with me.

**Our new Identity in Christ:**

* “I am forgiven.”
* “I am a child of God.”
* “I am His masterpiece.”
* “I am secure forever.”

Neil Anderson has a great book on this called *Victory over the Darkness*. It is one of a handful of books that dramatically changed my life. Go to the Oakwood Blog today to download the handout Anderson made on these ***identity statements***. When your identity is firmly rooted in Christ you know that you are SECURE, you are accepted and you are significant! Because you are HIS.

The Christian is so closely connected with Jesus that Paul can say it both ways - ***you are in Christ AND Christ is in you!***

1. Find your **Identity** in Christ

“If in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you… If Christ is in you… the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you…” Rom. 8:9-11

This word for “dwelling” is the verbal form of the **Greek word OIKOS** - household. The Spirit of God has made His HOME in you! That is where He lives! And notice how ***TRINITARIAN*** these verses are! The Spirit of God is immediately named the Spirit of Christ or simply Christ HIMSELF in us, and the Spirit of the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. We see the Threeness of God in the different names and persons of God. Yet we see the Oneness of God in the fact that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all involved in this transformational, identity shaping process!

The fullness of the GODHEAD lives in your heart! **This is WHO YOU ARE**.

* You were an enemy of God, now you are His child.
* You were dead in your sin, now you are alive in Christ.
* You were a slave to sin, now you are free from those chains and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.
* You were blind and lost in sin, now you have the light and love and guidance of the Spirit of God in you.

The first essential step to living a life of righteousness is to get your identity right. Establish this truth deep in your heart and mind. This is who you are now. You are not the person you were. You have been born again - made into a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. That moves us on to the next step.

**How to Fulfill All Righteousness:**

1. Focus on the **Spirit** who is in you

“Those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” Romans 8:5

Lifestyle feeds identity and identity shapes lifestyle. Being influences doing and doing in turn, shapes being. But in the middle, determining which way the influence will go - toward the Spirit or toward the flesh - is the MIND. Will we focus on the flesh - the old nature, the old ways - or will we focus on the SPIRIT - the new life, the new ways? This is ***the BATTLE FOR THE MIND***. And it is constant. Unrelenting.

* ***Money is tight***. Do you focus on your fears and worry all the time - or do you focus on the Spirit and trust that God is in control?
* ***A loved one is sick.*** Do you scramble to do everything you can MEDICALLY and never slow down enough to pray? Are you focused only on the flesh or are you focused on the Spirit who is calling you to rest in Him?
* ***Your marriage is rocky.*** Do you dwell on your spouse’s faults and talk about them to anyone you can? Or do you set your heart and mind on the Lord, trusting Him to enable you to keep loving and serving, even when you get nothing in return?
* ***You’re under a lot of pressure*** and your mind keeps coming back to that old habit. Your mouse hovers over that incognito button that is so demonic. No one will know, whispers your flesh. Do you dwell on those desires? Or do you get up, walk away, make a phone call and then come back to a Bible verse that reminds you who you are in Christ?

***Your mind is the battleground*** where spiritual warfare is waged. All of those pieces of armor described in Ephesians 6 are resources for your MIND.

* ***The helmet of salvation*** literally covers your HEAD.
* ***The breastplate of righteousness*** covers your heart but think about what it is - it’s protection for you as you remember with your MIND the righteousness you have in Christ and the righteousness He calls you to. If you think about good things, noble things, true, holy, righteous things - that is how you fasten that breastplate on.
* ***The shield of faith*** you pick up with your mind as you remember and meditate on the truth you know about Jesus - strengthening your faith in HIM. Faith is not an abstract feeling, it is a commitment of the will, just like love. You commit to Jesus in faith because you KNOW He is Lord and you believe He alone can save you. That is how you pick up and hold onto the shield of faith - with your mind.
* And of course ***the Sword of the Spirit***. How do you wield the Word of God except with your mind? Your read the Bible, study the Bible, meditate on it, memorize it, talk about, listen to it.

**All of the pieces of armor you put on and utilize with your mind**. You choose, moment by moment and day by day, to focus your thoughts ABOVE rather than BELOW. You resist the desires of your old nature and you continually turn back toward the new desires the Holy Spirit is calling you to grow in.

***How are you doing*** at these steps to fulfilling all righteousness? Is your identity fixed in Christ? Do you see yourself primarily as a child of God and a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you able to focus on the Holy Spirit more and more instead of on the flesh?

This is why it’s **so important to read your Bible** and grow in the discipline of prayer. That is how we tune our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit. That is how we get to know His voice. Don’t kid yourself that you can “hear the Holy Spirit” apart from God’s Word. You may be hearing voices, but if you are not well studied in Scripture the odds are that those “voices” are not from God.

We had ***a family friend*** who is now home with the Lord, so I can tell stories about her. She had a hard life. Her husband died when her kids were young, so she was a single mom. Later she remarried but that marriage was difficult. But her biggest problem was herself. She became convinced that every man she ever saw was lusting after her. She wrote letters to pastors confronting them for their sinful desires.

I know she sincerely loved Jesus and wanted to walk faithfully with Him. But in an effort to listen to the Holy Spirit she became critical and bossy to the people in her life - including her husband and her friends. One time she was out shopping with my mom and said, ***“The Lord told me you should buy this end table.”*** My Mom knew her well by this point and responded, “You’re welcome to buy it for yourself, but the Lord will have to convince me directly before I buy that thing.”

***Just because you have a feeling about something doesn’t mean it’s the Holy Spirit.*** Paul writes in another place to “test the spirits.” How do we test our feelings and inclinations? **Against SCRIPTURE**. Do these feelings and desires fit God’s general will? Is this the kind of thing God led people to do in the Bible?

* ***Go share the gospel with your neighbor***. Sounds like the Spirit to me.
* Ignore that grumpy neighbor and only talk to the friendly one. That sounds more like the flesh.
* ***Go help your wife wash the dishes***. Better yet, take over and have her sit down. Sounds like the Spirit to me.
* Ignore your wife’s requests for help and her appeals to talk to her. That sounds more like the flesh.

The leading of the Spirit should become for us **a familiar experience**. I’m not getting all mystical here. I’m just saying that if our minds are set on the things of the Spirit, that WILL affect our day to day lives. Listen to the progression in verse 5-8.

“Those who live according to the flesh have 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 of the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.” Romans 8:5-6

Remember this word “to live” is that ONTES word about BEING. It should become simply ***WHO WE ARE*** that our minds are set on the Spirit and the things of God. And this brings us to the third step in fulfilling righteousness. We must learn to fight sin in our flesh.

**How to Fulfill All Righteousness:**

1. Fight against the **Flesh** which clings to you

“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.” Romans 8:7

“Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” If we continue to focus on our old, sinful, selfish was of thinking and acting we will become increasingly hostile to God and resistant to His Word and His will.

***Do you KNOW YOUR FLESH?*** Are you familiar with your sinful nature? Do you know the familiar tactics of your enemy? How does the devil entice you? What lies are you prone to believe? What temptations tend to get to you?

Google knows. Instagram knows. ***Do you know what COOKIES do?*** They sound sweet and delicious but they are anything but. Cookies track your behavior as you browse the internet or scroll through your facebook feed. They track not only what you click on but what you PAUSE over. They know what makes you slow down and what makes you click. And then, of course, they use that information to send you targeted ads.

If social media is that smart, ***don’t you think the devil is smarter?*** Who came up with social media after all? We must not underestimate our enemy. But we must also remember that our greatest enemy is in our own hearts - our own FLESH. That old set of desires that used to rule over us will try to creep back onto us every chance it can. Jesus killed it on the cross. But it keeps coming back to life. So we have to nail it to the cross every day. Look at verse 13.

1. Fight against the **Flesh** which clings to you

“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.” Romans 8:12-13

It really is that simple. Life or death. The flesh or the Spirit. ***Paul is writing to CHRISTIANS***. It is possible for followers of Jesus to focus on the flesh, fall back into sinful habits and the nature of sin is such that it destroys - even once godly people.

It’s like **God said to Cain** when he brought a second rate offering - “Sin is crouching at your door - its desire is for you, but you must conquer it.” Cain did not heed that warning, and his desire for vengeance, his resentment against his brother, eventually consumed him.

The Holy Spirit is giving every one of us **this same warning**. “Sin is crouching at your door. It wants to destroy you. Just like the devil, who prowls around like a lion waiting for someone to fall back from the pack.”

If you don’t learn to know your sin and fight your sin then ***it will stick to you***, it will cling to you and try to take over your life. This is why the writer of Hebrews exhorts us to “Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that clings so closely,” so you can run the race with Jesus. Sin will trip you up and try to tear you down. But if you know its usual ways you can stay a step ahead.

This is another reason **we need close friends** in the battle with us. No sensible soldier strolls into battle alone. They always go as part of a team. There is strength in numbers. Live together. Die alone.

And the point of Christian fellowship is ***not to pretend*** - that is called HYPOCRISY. The point is to be real - to share how you are actually doing, so your brothers and sisters can pray for you - so they can stand firm with you.

It’s like ***how the Spartans used to fight***, interlocking their shields when the barrage of arrows came in. Each shield played an important role in protecting the whole squad. Each member had to know exactly where their shield went. And the maneuver had to be practiced so they could put it in place quickly, every time.

***Is that what our small groups and huddles are like?*** Are we open and honest about our struggles? Are we actively sharing what it means for us to live according to the Spirit and to fight against the desires of the flesh?

**JOHN OWEN** literally wrote the book on fighting sin. It was called “On the Mortification of Sin” and he followed it with another one called “Indwelling Sin.” Owen was a British Puritan in the 1600s. ***These were not easy times by any measure***. He was married twice and both wives died. Between the two women they gave birth to 11 children, all of whom died in infancy, and only one who made it to her first birthday and then died.

The 1600s in England were a time of intense conflict and division in the church and in government - and often the lines of authority blurred or clashed directly. Owen was in the middle of all of that, with Cromwell and those guys. These were the days of John Bunyan being put in prison and writing Pilgrim’s Progress. Dark days. Bible believing preachers like John Owen were in very short supply and faced constant dangers and threats.

Owen didn’t have to deal with the internet or modern American politics - but he had more than his share of hardships. But the main thing John Owen knew was that ***his greatest problem was INSIDE HIM not OUTSIDE of him***. His greatest danger was the sin in his own heart - sins of pride and selfishness, of worry and fear, of trusting in man or his own flesh instead of in God… Here is what Owen said about KNOWING YOUR SIN:

“We need to be intimately acquainted with the ways, wiles, methods, advantages, and occasions which give sin (lust) its success. This is how men deal with their enemies. They search out their plans, ponder their goals, and consider how, and by what means they have prevailed over them *in the past*. Then they can be defeated.” John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*

Before you can really fight your sin, you have to KNOW IT. You have to know your temptations and excuses, become familiar with the times and seasons when you are most vulnerable.

“One of the… most important parts of spiritual wisdom is to find out the subtleties, policies, and depths of any indwelling sin; to consider where its greatest strength lies – how it uses occasions, opportunities, and temptations to gain advantage. We need to find out its pleas, pretenses and reasonings, and see what its strategies, disguises and excuses are!

We need to… trace this serpent in all of its turning and windings, and to bring its most secret tricks out into the open. We must learn to say – ‘this is your usual method; I know what you are up to.” John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*

***The point here is not to DWELL ON SIN*** or temptation but rather to know the patterns your sinful flesh takes so you can **build up adequate defenses** against them. I’ve met with many young men who struggle with pornography, and I ask them what their defenses look like. What software do you have on your devices? What accountability do you have in place? Often, I’ve found, that addictions grow when there are virtually no defenses in place. It is like using a piece of paper to defend against a missile strike. You don’t need a flimsy sheet of paper; you need a concrete and steel reinforced bunker! You need iron-clad, impenetrable software, along with intentional, at least weekly personal accountability. Here is how Owen describes fighting sin:

“The first thing in mortification is the *weakening* of this habit…This is called ‘crucifying the flesh and the lusts thereof (Gal 5:24); that is, taking away its blood and spirits that give it strength and power… Sin …is fastened to the cross… that… the power of sin [be] weakened and abolished by little and little.” John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*

Often with our sin we take small, half measures. We don’t actually intend to KILL the sin, ***we just seek to RESTRAIN it a little.*** This will not do. Owen compares it to dealing with a snake. You would not take half measures if you were dealing with a poisonous viper. You would smash that thing on the head with the heaviest, sharpest weapon you had on hand. You would not stop until you were certain the thing was dead.

**I was gardening** a couple of years ago - and by gardening I mean pulling some of the multitude of weeds that grow in our front display area - and by display area I mean the mulched section around our palm tree that the previous owners obviously took care of but we really haven’t. Anyway, I was “gardening” when I came across a soft spot in the grass and suddenly a hole opened up and at the bottom was a small but colorful snake. Red, orange, yellow.

Now, ***I don’t know a lot about snakes***, and I’ve pretty much learned that the skinny black ones are considered “nice” around here. Colorful, I understand, is bad. Naturally, I jumped back and screamed a little - hoping no one was around. Then I went to the garage and got my full size shovel and went back and pulverized that poor little snake. I mean, he was maybe 5, 6 inches long. Pretty much pencil size. But I chopped that sucker up into 25 pieces before I stopped hacking it with that shovel.

Is that how we deal with our sin?

Let’s come back to Romans as we close.

1. Fight against the **Flesh** which clings to you

“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.” Romans 8:12-13

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-john-owen/>

How can we grow in order to fulfill all righteousness? First, ***find your identity in Christ***. Learn who you ARE now in Him. Remember, celebrate and grow in your understanding of this gospel reality. In Christ you are forgiven! In CHrist, you are free! In Christ, you are one with the Triune God of heaven. In Christ, you are a temple of the Holy Spirit. You have power and love and live coursing through your spiritual veins. You are defined by Jesus and only Jesus - let nothing else become your identity!

Second, ***focus on the Spirit*** who is in you, as you learn to ***fight the flesh*** that is on you. Set your mind on the Spirit, resist turning your thoughts back to your old sinful desires. Fight against those old desires as you become familiar with their ways and build up strong defenses against them.

***It’s a battle for the mind!*** Every time you say yes to a sin, you give it more power. But every time you say no to a sin, you decrease its power. Correspondingly, every time you say yes to the Spirit - opening your Bible, saying a prayer, serving a loved one, sharing your faith - every yes helps you know Him a little better and walk with Him a little bolder. Every time you ignore the Spirit or resist His leading you get a little weaker.

Keep memorizing Romans 8 - let these words from the Lord get into your mind and fill your mind so it comes to define who you are and strengthen you in the battle with sin!

Let’s pray.