

The Big Picture
Romans 1-8
By David Feddes

There are different ways of considering the Word of God. In a sermon series, we look at chunks one at a time and think about them in some depth and see how they apply to our lives. In the same way, you can read the Bible a little bit at a time and meditate on small passages. But there's also reading for the big picture—reading big chunks of the Bible in one sitting. There are sermons that step back and say, "What's going on in the big picture as a whole?" So let's look at these eight chapters of Romans in one swoop. I'm not going to spend the 15 hours on it that we have thus far—at least I hope not, and maybe you do too.

The book opens simply by saying that Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. He is somebody who was called by God—and called when he was a killer, when he was a murderer of Christians—and the risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him and called him not only to be a follower of Christ, but to be a great missionary of Christ and to spread the gospel. So when Paul speaks of God's grace towards sinners, he is not talking about some doctrine that's way out there. He's talking about something that happened to him, first of all, and all of what he knows of Christ has flowed out of that.

There were times later on when he was caught up to heaven and saw things he wasn't permitted to tell. The Lord revealed amazing things to him. But it all began when he was called to be a follower of Jesus and a messenger of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wrote this letter to people in Rome—to the capital of the most powerful empire in the world, to a mighty city, a glorious city. And he was sort of a nobody compared to the greatness and power of the emperor in some respects. And yet he said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. Because in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16–17).

You can have the power and glory of Rome, but the power of God is demonstrated in the gospel—in what happened in the events described in the gospel, but also in the impact of the gospel in transforming people. It's God's power to save, to bring people from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, to give them life everlasting. This is the theme verse of this great epistle: the gospel is God's power for salvation—everybody who has faith.

Then the apostle begins to expound why we need that gospel. There are various ways that God has revealed himself, and the gospel isn't the only way God reveals himself. In creation, what may be known about God is plain to people because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, the invisible things of God—his eternal power and divine nature—are clearly seen, being seen in the things that are made, so that people are without excuse (Romans 1:19–20). That's what the apostle Paul says. So creation displays God's power and divine nature.

A little later, he says your conscience sometimes accuses you, and yes, sometimes it excuses you. But you have conscience that gives you an inner impression of what God wants—of his law. Along with creation and conscience, you have the covenant through Moses—God's law of

obedience: "The person who does these things will live by them" (Leviticus 18:5). You have the written requirements of God's law. So you have available revelation in creation, in your own conscience, in the law that God revealed to the people of Israel.

And yet those forms of revelation aren't enough. We need Christ. We need the gospel. We need the Holy Spirit, because we need forgiveness and we need eternal life. And those are things that creation and conscience and the law of Moses cannot bring. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to bring them.

And in those forms of revelation, there are different brands of sinners. Paul talks about each of those brands of sinners. Each of us can see parts of ourselves—maybe in more than one category. But one kind of sinner is those who have the creation—they have the greatness of God shown to them—but they start worshiping created things rather than the Creator, whether that's gods they make up, whether that's chasing whatever their sexual urges might be, whether that's just being mean to others. The apostle talks about these rebels without restraint, who just live wild and wicked lives. That's one kind of sinner.

Then there is another kind of sinner. Those kinds of sinners look at the rebels without restraint and say, "Oh yeah, those are bad, bad people. Glad I'm not like that. We need more morality in our culture." And the apostle says, yeah, you believe in morality, but really you're just moralizing. You're saying that people ought to be good, but are you really so perfect yourself? You condemn others, but how about what you're doing? Or in the words of Jesus, you're trying to take a speck out of somebody's eye, but that's a little tough to do when there's a big log sticking out of your own eye. That's what's going on when you have this moralism without morality in yourself. You want God's law to prevail on other people, but you're not living up to it yourself whenever it seems inconvenient for you.

So conscience alone doesn't get it done any more than creation alone gets it done. If you have just creation, you still could have these rebels without restraint. Even if you have some conscience, people manage to tiptoe around their conscience and apply it to others rather than looking in the mirror.

Then there are those who have religion, who have maybe the law of Moses and the great rituals. And they start counting on the rituals, and they start counting on their deeds. And those things can't save them because they don't have a living relationship with God.

So the apostle says at the end of all that, "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all. There is no one who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:9–12). He's saying there are different brands of sinners. If you're in one group rather than another—if you're the rebels without restraint—you say to yourself, "Well, I'm better than those others, because at least I don't pretend. I'm authentic. I'm genuine. I don't pretend to be some stuffed shirt." So you can feel superior when you're a rebel without restraint—you feel superior to all those stuffy religious people. "I stay away from church; they're just a bunch of hypocrites. I'm not a hypocrite. I parade it openly."

Then you have the people who have their morals and look down on those who don't. You have the religious people who have their religious practices and rituals and look down on those who don't. But the apostle just levels it all and says, "Are we any better? No. There's nobody who does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10,12).

Who is closer to making it to the moon—someone who's in a wheelchair and can't walk and is at sea level, or somebody who is at the top of Mount Everest and is an expert climber? Obviously, the climber can do some things that the person in the wheelchair can't do, and there are some people who are comparatively a little more moral than other people. But if you want to make the comparison from the point of view that matters the most, how do they compare? How does the wheelchair-bound person compare to the great mountain climber?

Well, if you're on the moon, here's what they look like. If you're on the moon and you look back at Earth, there's the comparison between the mountain climber and the wheelchair-bound person. The difference is irrelevant. If you want to make the trip from the Earth to the moon, you do not need climbing lessons. You need a rocket. And if you want to cover the distance that has arisen between humanity and God, you don't need a few more lessons in how to be a nice person. You need a complete transformation. You need somebody who can cover that distance for you.

All have sinned and fall short. We will always fall short of the glory of God, and our own efforts aren't going to get us there. And it all comes down to this devastating diagnosis. That's a tongue twister—you can say it fast a lot of times—but devastating diagnosis. It says, here's what's wrong with you, and it is really serious. We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law. Why? So that they can be saved by themselves? No. So that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. So all of God's revelation—whether in creation, conscience, or the law—leaves us without excuse and shows that we are all sinful.

And then the apostle makes the turn with those great words: but now. But now a righteousness from God has been revealed, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. It's been made known apart from law, but the Law and the Prophets talked about it. And this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement—or a propitiation—through faith in his blood. So this is what God has done. Redemption is a picture of God purchasing us and rescuing us from bondage, like redemption out of Egypt. Justified means God declares us right with him—that we are accepted by him. And atonement or propitiation means that Christ has paid the penalty through his blood. And it's through faith in that blood that we become right with God.

There's this tremendous power in Jesus' blood to make us right with God. And that is how God has revealed his righteousness. He did this to show that he's just—he punished sin. He didn't punish the sins right away when they happened, but he was storing up the punishment, and he

laid it all on Christ. He lays all of our sins on Christ. And Jesus' blood is the payment for that. It provides redemption and justification, makes us right with God.

Then the apostle, in chapter 4, goes on to say, "I'm not saying anything brand new." God had been planning this all along. It's just part of what he's always said and part of his unfolding plan. All along, God justified the wicked by counting faith as righteousness. Abraham was not called when he was a great all-around guy. He and his family were idol worshipers when God called him. All along, God chose Abraham to be the father of many nations—not just one. It's not a new thing that God wants to bless all nations. God never had only Israel in mind when he chose Abraham. He said, "Through you all nations will be blessed."

So Paul says, don't talk to me like I shouldn't be mentioning God has good news for Gentiles. He's always been planning this. And now here's how it's happening: through Christ, the seed of Abraham, all the nations are being blessed. That chosen nation was not meant to just keep to itself and be snooty and despise others. It was always meant to bring blessing to all nations. If you turned into a bunch of racists who despised other nations, then you misunderstood God's intention for Israel.

All along, forgiveness and justification would come through the Son of David. He shows that this was the case with Abraham. He shows it was the case with David himself, who said, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered, whose sin the Lord does not count against him" (Psalm 32:1–2). So neither Abraham nor David claimed to be right with God based on how good they were. It was always being justified through faith.

To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. God credits righteousness apart from works. And then he quotes the Old Testament Scriptures: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). The words "it was credited to him" were not written for his benefit, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

So always God has justified people—accepted them on the basis of their trust in him, not on the basis of how well they have performed and earned his favor.

Then Paul says, "Since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By him we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

You see, at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man—though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die—but God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And since we've now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life? And not only is this so, but we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5:1-11)

That great passage speaks on the benefits of being reconciled to God, of belonging to him. You have peace with God. You have God's favor and friendship. You rejoice in his glory. Even if you're suffering, you know God's doing something good in the middle of it, so you're rejoicing in that too. You're flooded by the Holy Spirit. You're sure of God's saving love, and so you have joy in God—not just belief that he exists, not just a desire to do something so you don't get in trouble with him, but you rejoice in God. And you rejoice in God supremely because of his love.

This passage shows the two greatest demonstrations of God's love. One is simply the experience of God's love as he pours his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and we sense deep down that we're loved. The other is the great public demonstration of love: while we were sinners, Christ died for us. The apostle will say a lot more about the love poured out in the Holy Spirit and more about God's love in Jesus Christ, from which nothing can separate us. But here are the great principles of love—that God makes it known to you on the inside by his Holy Spirit, and he makes it known to you publicly and objectively on the outside, as it were, in the giving of his Son even while we were still God's enemies.

Again, this is God the Father's love that's being demonstrated. We should never think, "Yeah, the Holy Spirit is nice to us and loves us, and Jesus loves us, and it's a good thing because they'll get us off the hook with that grumpy God the Father." God the Father is the one who gave his Son, and it is his love that pours out the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

The apostle says how this works. He says that we are represented and involved with Adam, and we are represented and involved with Christ. When Adam sinned, he brought sin into the world. When Christ obeyed perfectly and gave his life, he gives people victory over sin. Many died because of Adam's sin. Many live because of Christ's grace. Adam's sin brings condemnation. Jesus' death results in justification. Adam's disobedience brings sin to many—if you're involved in Adam, you're involved in his sin. But Jesus' obedience brings righteousness to many—so you're involved in what Jesus has done.

Adam's sin reigns in death, but Christ's grace reigns in righteousness to bring eternal life. These great representatives—you're in Adam. You're just born a child of Adam and Eve, and you're in him. He represents you. In his sin, you sin. You're at war with God by being involved in Adam. And it's not just that you were good but Adam represented you, so even though you're good, you've got problems. It's that you went right along with old Adam too. But if you're represented in Christ, then you have somebody who has made you right with God, and you're involved in him. And everything that involves him involves you too.

We're complete in Christ. And one thing that means, as we've already seen when it comes to justification, is that salvation equals Christ plus nothing. Nothing I do makes me right with God. As the apostle says near the end of Romans 5, the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. It was Jesus and his great act of righteousness. So salvation is Jesus plus nothing—and what a great reality that is.

But also remember the other reality: salvation equals Jesus minus nothing. There are some in our time who have said, "Oh, you can accept Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. You can get his salvation, but hey, your life might not change at all." And there were some back then who accused Paul of saying something like that. They said, "Well, why don't we just keep on sinning so that grace may abound? If forgiving is kind of God's job anyway, well, let's give him a job to do. Let's sin. Let's do bad stuff because salvation is Jesus plus nothing."

And the apostle says, "Yeah, but it's also Jesus minus nothing." Everything Jesus is and everything Jesus does involves me. The whole me is in union with the whole Christ. I can't divide him into being Savior and ruler. I need to take the whole Christ, and he gets the whole me.

That's what he goes on to describe—this union with Christ. We have the legal union, where Jesus represents us. He's our legal head, and so he acts on our behalf, the way a president can bring his country into a war or refrain from a war. He's involving us and acting on our behalf. What he does is counted by God as ours. So his perfect obedience is credited to us. The blood he shed is credited to us as the full payment for our sins. He's our legal representative. We have this legal union with him.

And we have a living union with him. He lives in us, and we live in him through a living connection. He's our living head, and we're his body. His actions affect and direct our experience, and his death and his resurrection flow into our lives. The apostle speaks of this especially with regard to baptism. What happened to Jesus happens to us. We're in union with him. We were buried with him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

So when he was buried, we were buried. When he died, we died. When he was raised, we're raised. And this has implications for how we live. We have new life because we're alive in Christ. And then we get the first command in the book of Romans: count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The apostle has been writing and speaking of the gospel a long time before he ever says anything that you're supposed to do. It's about what God has done. That's the first and foremost thing the gospel is—it's what God has done in Christ and in his Holy Spirit. And now, what do we do?

Well, the first thing we need to do is count yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus—because you are. One way to think of that is a person who has spent some time in prison. After you've spent a long time in prison, you start to think like a prisoner. You're kind of worried about what the guards are going to do. You're a little worried about what your fellow prisoners might do. You're quite dependent, and you're not really ready to live independently sometimes.

So when the prison door swings open, you're free. The prison guards don't have any authority over you anymore. But if you bump into one in a coffee shop, you might still feel intimidated. So you have to start thinking like somebody who's free. You have to start considering and counting yourself as somebody who's been set free, who is no longer trapped in sin, imprisoned in sin, but who is instead free and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

You have to get out of the prisoner mindset and into the free-person mindset. Count yourself dead to sin, alive to God in Christ Jesus. And if you're tempted to just want to go back—don't even think about it. "What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death. But now that you've been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:21–23).

Every once in a while, you get tempted to think, "Hey, the life of sin had its advantages"—just as the Israelites sometimes thought, "Oh man, back in Egypt, the leeks and the onions—they were so tasty." And they forget that their babies were being murdered there, that they were slaves, and the lash of the taskmasters was constantly on them. All they remembered was their stinking onions.

And sometimes that's the way a Christian can be. You think back to the life of sin and one or two things that were kind of fun for you at the time, and you say, "Boy, those might have been the good old days. What if I go back?" And the apostle says, "Come on—think about it. That was just giving you shame, and it was ruining your life. And death." Sin's wages are death. God's gift is life. Keep the gift. Dump the wages.

Then he talks about the relation of Christians to the law. The law of God is a good thing, and it was given for a definite purpose—but it was not given for the purpose of saving us. We need to be rescued from it.

One way to think of it is in marriage. You're tied to somebody as long as both of you are alive. But if one dies, then you're no longer tied to that person in marriage—the marriage has ended because of death. And so the apostle says, "Likewise, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another—to him who has been raised from the dead—in order that we may bear fruit for God" (Romans 7:4). We've been set free from the law so that we can belong to Jesus.

We have a new spouse. If you have a spouse who's perfect, that's not always that comforting—especially if he's a perfectionist. You might say, "Oh, I wish I had the perfect spouse." Be careful what you wish for. The law was a perfect spouse in one sense—it was always right. Do you really want to be stuck with someone who's always right and insists that you always be right, and never helps you with any of it? That would be a very difficult situation. But that's what the law was like. It was like a perfectionistic spouse that's always right but doesn't help you to get right.

Jesus is always right. He's perfect. But Jesus also brings the forgiveness and the grace and the mercy that helps you to really grow and be transformed in your life.

So what does it mean to be released from God's law? It doesn't mean that now we can just do bad stuff and the law and God's good will don't matter anymore. But it does mean this: we're righteous apart from law. We're right with God through faith in Jesus, who kept God's law perfectly on our behalf. We're free from the law's curses, because Jesus suffered the curse. The law said, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23), and Jesus took that curse on the cross. He canceled our debt.

And we don't have to change our lives just through the law. The Holy Spirit writes God's law in our hearts—not just on tablets of stone—and so he gives us not just the rules and the guidance, but he gives us the desire to obey God and even the ability to obey God more and more. So the Spirit, in a sense, is applying the same law of God but now giving us power and ability to keep it.

And all the old signs that God used before Jesus came—those rituals that were pointing, the sacrifices, the dietary laws, the feast days—those things were pictures pointing to Christ. And now those Old Covenant signs give way to the New Covenant reality of Christ.

So we're released from the law in these senses—not in the sense that what God wants doesn't matter anymore. What God wants matters a lot. But the Holy Spirit is the one who transforms us to live in line with that law.

And yet there's an "already" and a "not yet" in the Christian life. Wonderful things have happened, but not everything has happened completely. And one of those things that hasn't happened completely is the complete transformation into the likeness of Jesus. So you find yourself in that difficult struggle of Romans 7, where you're doing things you hate, and you're not always doing the things that you really want to do.

We know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). Now, if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law that it's good. So it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

So there's still something there. But now it's not me—it's kind of an alien power in me that's trying to ruin me. And I need to recognize that fact when I'm struggling with an addiction—whether it's an addiction to pornography, alcohol, or drugs; whether it's a rut of anger or any other habit that has really got a hold on me and that I cannot seem to change successfully. I need to realize that I'm in Christ and that I'm not going to be able to deal with it just on my own energy.

When you have this flesh—this kind of cancerous fallen self—still bothering you, one temptation is to go with self-indulgence: "I'm just going to surrender and try to enjoy living in immorality and tell myself that God's not a factor anyway."

And an opposite reaction, rather than self-indulgence, is self-improvement: "I'm going to try harder. I'm going to fight the flesh by just more effort to be a better person." But if you've ever tried that to deal with something that is really powerful and addicting in your life, you find yourself almost more addicted the harder you try.

So you have to give up on self-indulgence and self-improvement and rely on God's Holy Spirit.

This is where the apostle begins to speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in more detail. We have to trust God's grace in Christ to forgive our sins. That's one of the first things to release you from an addiction. The more guilty you feel about something and the more ashamed of it you are, ironically, the more likely you are to keep on doing it. It sounds weird, but even if you don't believe Christian theology, psychology will tell you that the things you are most ashamed of and feel most guilty about are very often the hardest things to quit.

So one of the first things to break addiction is to know that you are forgiven. It is not held against you. You do not need to feel constant shame and guilt about it anymore.

Another is that there is somebody at work in you who is stronger still than that addiction. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Right after the apostle Paul says, "O wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24–25). Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The condemnation is gone. So don't feel guilty and ashamed anymore. And realize who's at work in you now: God's Spirit is inside you.

That is the great theme of Romans 8: what God's Spirit does in us. God's Spirit—the third person of the Holy Trinity, the helper, the counselor—was sent by Jesus and the Father from the throne to be with us and to be in us. We see in Romans 8 that he's the Spirit of freedom, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of adoption or sonship, the Spirit of expectation, the Spirit of prayer. And in each of these areas we have wonderful blessings from God.

Again, we're reminded that if you want to soar and think you're just going to come up with your own efforts, your own machine, and your own little flapping of the wings—that is not the way to overcome the flesh and the power of sin in your life. "The power of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). There has to be a different law at work.

One way to think of that is in the laws of flight. If you only think about how to build a machine where you can flap your wings hard enough to defeat the power of gravity with your own energy, that's not going to work. You need to have a different law going on. When people finally did figure out how to fly, they learned how the laws of aerodynamics and the laws of combustion in the internal combustion engine could counteract the law of gravity so that you could actually have something that flies.

The apostle says that's what it's like when the law of the Holy Spirit sets you free from the law of sin and death. That gravity is overpowered by a new law that's at work within you. (The apostle was not talking about airplanes, by the way—the airplanes were my illustration of a different law at work that overcomes a different law. He had prophetic powers, but I don't think the Lord revealed airplanes to him.)

There's the Spirit of freedom that sets you free from the law of sin and death. There's the Spirit of life. The apostle says, "The mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). The Spirit is God's life inside you. And "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (Romans 8:11).

So he's the Spirit of life in the sense that he transforms your life, but also the Spirit of life in the sense that once he's in you, your body too is going to be raised like Christ's body has been raised. By the Spirit of life, you kill the deeds of the body and live to Christ. You have abundant life now through the Holy Spirit, and not only that—you have resurrection life forever and ever when you're made perfect and your body itself is raised again.

He's the Spirit of adoption. "You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption (or of sonship). And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:15–17).

This is what the Spirit tells us: that we are God's children. And we cry out to him as our Father—our Daddy—who loves us and whom we love.

In the great parable of the prodigal son, Jesus speaks of two sons, and neither of the sons knew their father's heart. The younger son wanted his inheritance—he wished his dad were dead so he could have it all. But the dad gave it to him while he was still living. He took off and blew all the money. Then, when he was envying the food—the pig slop that the hogs were eating—he thought, "I'm not too bright." You know something has gone wrong when pig slop looks good to you. He says, "I'm going to return and go to my father and say, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be your son. Make me one of your slaves.'"

And when he gets home, he starts this speech, but he never gets a chance to finish it. He says, "I'm no longer worthy to be your son," but he doesn't even get to the part, "Make me your slave," because his father runs to him, throws his arms around him, and says, "Put the robe on him. Give him the ring that shows he's a son and one of the heirs of the family." He restores him to his position as a son. He wanted to go back as a slave, but his father wouldn't take him back as a slave. He took him back as a son.

You don't receive the spirit of slavery; you received the Spirit of sonship. You're children of God.

And of course, the older brother had the language of slave around his lips too. He got ticked off when the father took the son back. He said, "All these years I've been slaving away for you, and you didn't even give me a little goat for a feast with my friends. And you give him the fattened calf?" And the father says, "Son, everything I have is yours. You want to talk about me giving you a little goat? Didn't you realize everything I have is yours?"

God gives us the Spirit of sonship. We cry out, “Abba, Father.” We’re his heirs. We’re fellow heirs with Christ. God loves us with the same love that he has for Christ. That’s what the Bible teaches—he loves us as much as he loves his own Son, and his Spirit tells us so.

So don’t say, “God, I’m going to try to be a better slave from now on,” or, “God, I’m sorry, please take me back as a slave or a hired man,” or, “God, you haven’t been treating me well lately—I wish you’d give me just a little goat so I could have a party once in a while.” Say, “God, I thank you that everything that is yours has been given to me in Christ.”

The Spirit of adoption—and the Spirit of expectation.

Now if we’re children, then we’re heirs. And if we’re heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, then we have big expectations. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit, and so we wait eagerly for various things. The apostle says we’re waiting for our adoption to be confirmed and the redemption of our bodies—the resurrection of the body—and for us to be publicly declared to be the children of God.

We’re going to enjoy the glory of God’s children when God says, “Well done,” and when God sings over us and rejoices over us, and when all the splendor of the creation is shining from us as well. We will have that freedom from sin and Satan that we’re going to have as God’s children. We look forward to that.

And we look forward not only to ourselves being changed but to something that happens to the whole creation. The entire creation has been groaning, but it’s going to be set free from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

Now we’re really getting into the big picture. Did you think that God was dying just to save you? That is a wonderful thing—and he loves you with a tremendous love.

Don’t forget how the story ends in *The Hobbit*. If you’ve ever read that, you know at the very end, Gandalf says, “Now Bilbo, did you think this was all about you? You’re a very fine little hobbit, but there’s a lot more going on than just you.” And so it is. God is redeeming us one at a time in some ways, and he’s redeeming a whole people for himself, but the whole purpose is to redeem the whole creation.

He appointed humanity to run creation—and run it well. And when he’s redeemed us, we’re going to run it well. And the creation itself will be liberated, just as our bodies are raised glorious, the whole creation is going to be raised glorious—with the people of God in charge.

That day hasn’t yet come. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit. There are some signs of flourishing, some buds, some little flowers here and there of God’s work in our life. But much more needs to happen, because between the time of Jesus’ first coming and his second coming, we have the last days. The new age of eternal life has begun, but not yet fully. The old age has been dealt a very nasty blow, but it’s not yet quite over. So we live in the overlap of those two eons, those two ages.

We're in the last days. And living in the last days can sometimes be a struggle. The kingdom has come, and yet the kingdom has not come in its fullness. Satan has been defeated, and yet he goes around like a roaring lion—and he's angrier than ever because he suffered a mortal wound. We've been raised with Christ, but our bodies are not yet raised and perfected. The church is the bride of Christ—and it still stinks quite a bit. We have a new status in Christ: we're justified, we're adopted. And yet our adoption is not fully made public. We're not displayed yet in the glory of the children of God.

Holiness—we still do things we hate and don't do things we know we ought to do. We're changing. The Holy Spirit is doing stuff, but it's not complete yet. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit. We have the down payment, not the completeness.

The Spirit helps us in our prayer life, and yet a lot of times, we don't know what to pray for. The Spirit gives great wonders of healing—and yet some of Paul's own colleagues were near to death, or even died. He advised the young man, "Now you've got to drink just a little more wine and not some of that bad water—to help your stomach out." He didn't just wave his arms over them and say, "In the name of Jesus, I heal you." Sometimes he did. Sometimes God gave this mighty power to heal. And sometimes he didn't.

And when Christ comes again, there will be no limited powers to heal. There will be a total healing of everybody—once and for all, forever. Sometimes the Spirit gives us clear guidance. Sometimes we're kind of perplexed, and we don't know what the next step is. There's an already and not yet even in the area of guidance.

We've come to know God, and yet we know in part. We don't know fully yet as we will in the future, when we'll know completely. So there's this already and not yet. And while you're living in the middle of that—you groan. The creation groans. We who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan. And the Spirit himself groans.

And it's because of childbirth. When you're pregnant—do you have a baby or don't you? Well, you have a baby... but you don't. So there is the groaning in the meantime until that child emerges. And so it is: there is this groaning—of creation, of Christians, of the Spirit himself—as we await that fullness that's coming.

In the meantime, as we groan, and as the Spirit groans—his groans are prayers. "He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:27). Even when you don't know what you ought to pray for—don't sweat it. The Holy Spirit is at work praying for you. And Christ is interceding. And the Father knows what you need even before you ask him.

And in all of that, the apostle—after showing our sin and what God has done in Christ and in the Holy Spirit—says: don't forget what God has been doing all along.

You have this tremendous work of the Holy Spirit—of freedom, of life, of adoption, of expectation, of prayer—and this work is going on. But God had a plan before it ever got going. It was God the Father who started all this. It was God the Father who loved you before the

foundation of the world—who foreknew you in the sense of loving you and choosing you in advance. And he predestined you—that you would be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that you’d be like Jesus.

And he called you. He opened your heart. He helped you to hear God's voice on the inside. And those he called, he justified—made right with God. And those he justified, he glorified. Already now you have the Spirit of glory and of grace resting upon you. And that glory will only become greater.

So there is this chain. We don’t supply a little paper chain to connect us to the might and power of Christ to pull us out of our mess. We have a chain that God himself forged—made with his own hand, that is mighty, and that was forged in the fires of eternity: from eternity past to eternity present and into eternity in the future.

Right now, we live in light of the eternal. And because God planned all that and has all that in store, then you can bank on this: right now God is working all things for good for those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose. Because God has the really big picture in mind. And he is our really big God. And his wisdom and his power had this in mind all along. This is why he’s doing what he did in Christ and why he continues to do it through his Holy Spirit—this mighty plan of God.

So do not think only, “Me and Jesus have a little relationship.” That’s wonderful—if you have a personal relationship with Jesus. But it’s not going to be a little one, because he’s a big Jesus, with a very big Father and a mighty Holy Spirit. And God has this magnificent eternal plan, and he wants us to know it, so that we will have an expanded view of the greatness and majesty of God, so that we will know who he is. And nothing will intimidate us once we know this God. And nothing will pull us down.

“What shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31–39).

Prayer

We praise you, Lord, for your greatness, for the incredible wisdom that extends from before the foundations of the world on into eternity beyond measure—for the plan of salvation, for the

wonder of your love, for all the magnificence of your gospel, the power of you for our salvation, for the salvation of people of whatever racial background.

We praise you, Lord, for this gospel. May we, Lord, see the big picture and have our minds expanded by it and praise you as the great and glorious God. May the picture of your vastness and wonder shrivel down to size our fears, our sins—all the things, Lord, that hold us back, that keep us from being who we were meant to be. And as we come to know you better and know your gospel more deeply, may we become more and more like Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

The Big Picture
Romans 1-8
By David Feddes
Slide Contents

Respond to THIS!

^{8:31} What, then, shall we say in response to this?

Called by Christ

^{1:1} Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.

Gospel power

^{1:16} I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Available revelation

- **Creation** displays God’s power and divine nature.
- **Conscience** gives an inner impression of God’s law.
- **Covenant** through Moses gives written requirements of God’s law.
- **Christ**, through his gospel and Spirit, brings forgiveness and eternal life.

Three kinds of sinners

- Rebels without restraint (1:18-32)
- Moralism without morality (2:1-16)
- Religion without relationship (2:17-3:8)

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! ... there is no one who does good, not even one. (3:9-12)

Devastating diagnosis

^{3:19} Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Righteousness from God

^{3:21} But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Power in Jesus' blood

There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement [propitiation], through faith in his blood.

One God, one plan all along

- All along God justified the wicked by counting faith as righteousness.
- All along God chose Abraham to be father of many nations, not just one nation.
- All along God's chosen nation was meant to bring blessing to all nations.
- All along forgiveness and justification would come through the Son of David.

Justified through faith

To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness... God credits righteousness apart from works... God will credit righteousness to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. (Romans 4:5-6, 23-25)

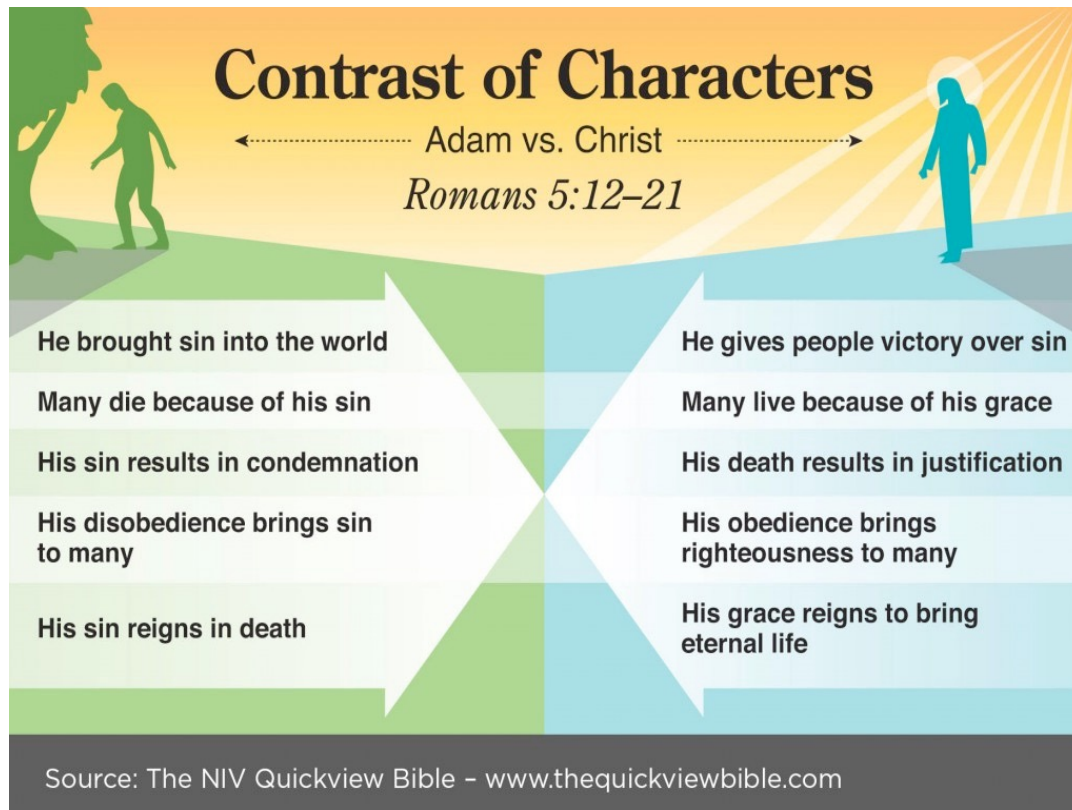
Benefits of belonging (reconciliation)

- We have peace with God.
- We stand in God's favor & friendship.
- We rejoice in the hope of God's glory.
- We rejoice in sufferings.
- We are flooded by the Spirit.
- We are sure of God's saving love.
- We rejoice in God through Jesus.

Knowing God's love

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)



Complete in Christ

Salvation = Jesus plus nothing!

Nothing I do makes me right with God.

“The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.” (5:18)

Salvation = Jesus minus nothing!

All that Jesus is and does involves me. The whole me is in union with the whole Christ. I cannot divide Savior from Ruler.

Union With Christ

- **Legal union:** Jesus represents us. He is our legal head. He acts on our behalf. What he does is counted by God as ours.
- **Living union:** Jesus lives in us and we in him through a living connection. He is our living head, and we are his body. His actions affect and direct our experience. His death, resurrection, and reign flow into our lives.

^{6:4} We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

^{6:11} Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Sin's wages vs. God's gift

^{6:21} What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Free from the law

^{7:4} Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Released from the law

- **Declared righteous apart from law:** We are right with God through faith in Jesus, who perfectly kept God's law on our behalf.
- **Free from law's covenant curses:** Jesus suffered the curse and canceled our debt.
- **Empowered by Spirit, not law:** The Holy Spirit writes God's law on our heart, giving us the desire and the ability to obey.
- **Old rituals replaced:** Old Covenant signs give way to New Covenant reality of Christ.

Doing what I hate

^{7:14} For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Dealing with the flesh

- **Self-indulgence:** Surrender to the flesh and try to enjoy being immoral (lawless).
- **Self-improvement:** Fight the flesh by trying harder to become moral (law).
- **Spirit-indwelling:** Trust God's grace in Christ to forgive you and depend on the Spirit's power to defeat the flesh.

^{8:1} Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

God's Spirit within us

- Spirit of freedom (8:1-4)
- Spirit of life (8:5-13)
- Spirit of adoption (8:14-17)
- Spirit of expectation (8:18-25)
- Spirit of prayer (8:26-27)

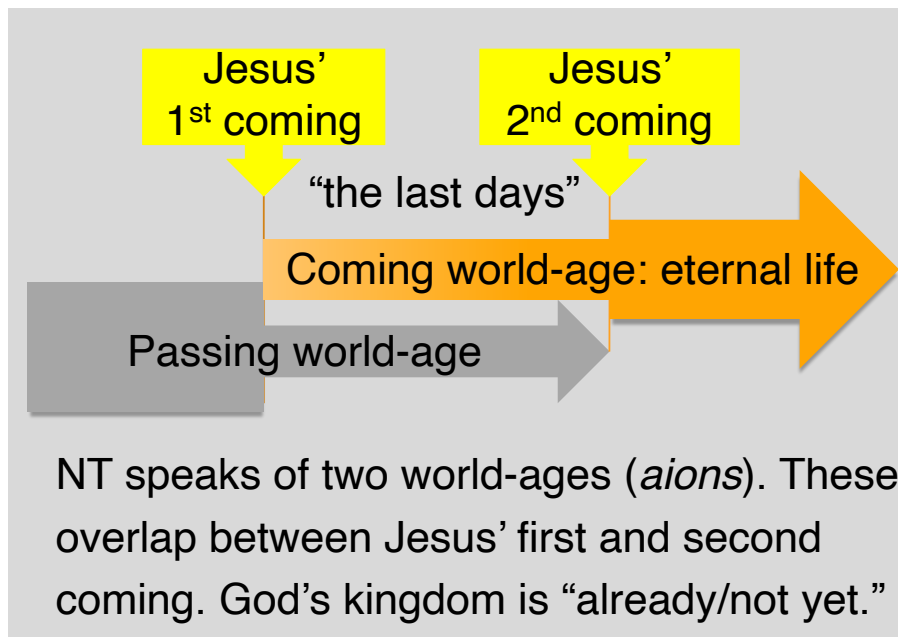
Spirit of life

- Spirit's mind is life and peace
- Spirit is God's life inside you
- Spirit will raise bodies to life
- By the Spirit, kill the deeds of the body, and you will live: abundant life now, resurrection life forever.

Spirit of expectation

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ... We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit... wait eagerly...

- Adoption confirmed, bodies redeemed
- Glory and freedom of God's children
- Creation flourishing, free from decay



NT speaks of two world-ages (*aions*). These overlap between Jesus' first and second coming. God's kingdom is "already/not yet."

Already But Not Yet

- Kingdom
- Victory
- Resurrection
- Church
- Status
- Holiness
- Prayer
- Healing
- Guidance
- Encounter

Groaning together

- The whole **creation** has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth. (8:22)
- **We ourselves**, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly. (8:23)
- **The Spirit himself** intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. (8:26)

Creation groans. We groan within creation. The Holy Spirit groans within us.

Spirit of prayer

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:27)

God's Spirit within us

- Spirit of freedom (8:1-4)
- Spirit of life (8:5-13)
- Spirit of adoption (8:14-17)
- Spirit of expectation (8:18-25)
- Spirit of prayer (8:26-27)

God's Golden Chain

- Foreknew
- Predestined
- Called
- Justified
- Glorified

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

Respond to THIS!

^{8:31} What, then, shall we say in response to this?