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ROMANS 8:1

Romans Series: How God Changes People

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I want to ask you right now for a blessed isolation in the hearts of the people here. What I mean, Lord, is help them to isolate themselves from the challenges [garbled], pull themselves back in a way that allows them to just focus in on what you want to say today. Lord, I pray that you'd put a spotlight on each of our hearts. Reveal whatever needs to be revealed there and come closer to you today as result of this verse that we're going to be looking at. Lord, we ask you to speak to us today. We ask that with anticipation, knowing that you do amazing things in our hearts as we trust you and allow you to work. Lord, be blessed today as result of our receptivity to you as we look at this verse. In Jesus' name, amen.

If you look at Romans 7, which is where we were last week, we saw the wrestling that takes place in the Christian life and that if you're a Christian you're wrestling inside. You're wrestling with sin. There is a sin nature. A sin nature is this magnetic pull toward sin, but if you become a Christian you also have a spiritual nature, and so there's a wrestling going inside of you about the right thing to do. And sometimes you're successful in yielding yourself to the Holy Spirit and He frees you to do what's right. But there's sometimes when we fail.

Last week we saw Paul being very honest, ensuring, saying there's sometimes *I don't do what I want to do*. It's the reality of the Christian life that if we're sensitive to the sin in our life, we're wrestling about those things together. It's hard because we could hurt somebody.

I was talking to a woman this week. She came back from the parenting seminar, she said, "I think I'm ruining my kids. I have such an anger problem. I yell at my kids, [garbled], and now I see that there's a different way that I can work with my children. But I think it's too late." She was just torn up inside about guilt in her life. I really feel for people like that. It hurts me to see that taking place in someone's heart.

I took her to this verse. This verse is in Romans 8:1. You can turn there in your Bibles with me. In Romans 8:1 we're going to see one verse today. That's all I want to spend our time. I took her to this verse because this is the key verse that I think she needs, but I think we all need this. I think we need it because we mess up, we make mistakes, and we then put ourselves on the shelf and we say, "God can't use me" or "I'm inadequate" or "I feel discouraged or despondent or despairing." Or we have this view of God that He's judged us in some way that we are worthless now.

So we need this verse. This is the verse I took her to. *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. Amen? That was kind of weak. I'm going to read the verse

again. Let's see if you agree. Amen means I agree. Let's try that again. *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* [Amen!] Yes.

We want to see that we are wrestling inside, we mess up, we fail. One of the important things we all have to understand as believers is that there is no condemnation from God when you fail.

We live in a world where there's a lot of disappointing things that happen, things that don't go like you thought. We have expectations of what's going to happen. In fact some companies will try to sell their products by putting a label on them that says "satisfaction guaranteed." [garbled] cell phones stop working. There are uncertainties that surround us every day in our lives, but there's one thing we can be certain about and that is this: God doesn't want us to have uncertainties when it comes to foundational, spiritual truths.

You can know this today. You can claim this as your own personal truth. I'm not just talking about in your head. You want to claim this in your heart. We all need this. We make a choice in our lives between the anxieties that come with failure because we all fail in certain ways. Look at your own lives. [garbled]

We start feeling the anxiety about that failure or we can have a freedom of forgiveness. Those are the two choices we have and God gives us a tremendous benefit in our lives called freedom and forgiveness and [garbled] sharing in this verse. We need this verse plastered on our minds, I believe. Satan wants to defeat us and he uses discouragement as a primary tool to do that by getting us to believe that we are unworthy, unloved, unacceptable, unforgiven.

I talked to a husband who realizes now that he had been so controlling with his wife he's probably ruined his marriage. He's been pretty controlling [garbled] his marriage. But she is willing to forgive him and he's willing to go forward and learn how to live life a little bit differently. They need this verse.

There is never a time when you turn toward God and not find His arms extended waiting for you to return. Why would anybody turn away from God? I think we turn away because we start to condemn ourselves. We start to say to ourselves that "God doesn't love me," "God doesn't approve of me." "I am condemned" is what we say to ourselves. That God doesn't approve. This is a misunderstanding of theology.

So I want to park on this one verse today. This one verse that says, *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Amen? [Amen.] You're going to get it here.

Now I feel like I should talk really slowly today. Not because you're unintelligent. This church has more intelligence than most churches. I'll tell you that. In fact I'm an intelligent person. But sometimes my spiritual intelligence doesn't meet up with my brainpower and I need to get it from here down in here. Sometimes I just say, "God, would you say it again? Would you say it a little more slowly so I can get it? So I can get it [garbled] in my heart where I need that."

So I want to go very slowly through this one verse. Just hitting one verse today. I want to go very slowly through this verse and I want to take it piece by piece. I want you to get each piece of it

because I think it will help you for the rest of your life. If I were you, I'd bookmark this verse, put a post-it note in here. You will come back to this verse. We all need this verse.

The first word in the verse is the word *therefore* which implies that we're coming off of some logic and some information that's already been presented in the passage. Here we're in chapter 8 and he's referring back to the things he's already talked about up to this point. Let's go back and remind us about some of those things that he's talked about already.

In Romans 2:5-6 it says, *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will repay each person according to what they have done."* That doesn't look too promising, does it?

He continues in Romans 3:23 by saying *for all have sinned*. That's every one of us, not just the bad guys. *All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. Doesn't look too hopeful. Until we get to chapter 5.

In chapter 5 he says, *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners (not after we perfected ourselves, not after we got everything straightened out, but while we were yet sinners), Christ died for us.*

He continues in Romans 6 if we're kind of going through the passage here. He says, *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.*

This changes everything. Salvation changes everything. It changes it all. Because Christ died for our past sins, our present sins, He died for our future sins. He died to satisfy the wrath and the justice and the holiness of God. What's left? The fatherhood of God. We can enjoy the fatherhood of God because Christ died for all that other stuff so that we don't experience that condemnation.

In Ephesians 2:4-5 Paul summarizes the gospel this way. He says, *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.* You do not need to be plagued by guilt today. Self-disappointment and self-condemnation are not part of God's plan for you.

One thing I learned years ago is that guilt is not a good motivator. Some people are afraid to talk about grace too much because we're afraid that obedience would be minimized and that obedience wouldn't be on the table because grace weakens your sin and God will forgive us. But the truth is you can motivate people through guilt, but it doesn't last very long.

It makes my heart very sad when I hear parents tell me that they discipline their children in a way that's condemning, that could be harsh, and yelling, and sometimes they even use God words. They use those God words in a way that help kids understand that they have violated God's command. "You violated command number seven. I would like you to write this verse ten

times.” And then by doing so, by using a lot of God words in correction, the impression about God is that He is judgmental, that He is condemning.

That’s really sad for me to hear. Because if we think about the theology, our theology is that God has freed us to learn from righteousness. I think we can talk about the Lord as we work with our children. I think that’s very powerful. But let’s talk about the Lord in a way that He’s freeing us up, He’s moving us forward. He wants to empower us to do what’s right.

You can push kids to obey the rules. And they may all obey the rules [garbled] so they can grow older, stronger, more dependent, they can go off and do whatever they want. They can [garbled] with fear and intimidation and they’ll do just enough to get by. But there’s a habit of resentment around the shop or the office. There are coaches who motivate through humiliation, that pointing out the weaknesses of the player [garbled]. They just seem to humiliate, thinking that that’s somehow going to move someone forward.

If you’re trying to rip the heart out of a team, that’s the best way to do it. But begin to let your team know that you believe in them. Let your employees know that you appreciate them. Let your child know that they have your approval even when they fail. You’ll see what difference grace makes.

Grace is powerful. It changes the way we work with each other, and that’s why this verse is so important in Romans 8:1. It says, *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Amen? [Amen.] Amen!

Let’s go to the second important word in the passage, the word *now*. The word *now* says we’re not talking about the past, we’re not talking about the future; now you are a Christian. You are different than you were before and because you’re in Christ, *now there is no condemnation*.

But some people don’t read it *now*. What they read is “someday”. That’s how they read this. They read this “therefore, there is someday no condemnation.” That is not what it says! But there are some people who say, “God can’t love me the way I am. I am so imperfect. I’ve failed so much. I need to get myself right before God and accept me the way I am.” It’s not about the future. It’s right now. Don’t miss the word *now*. It’s a small word, but it’s the most important word in the sentence because it refers to today. Grace is the defining element of the Christian faith.

Dave Miller in the office used this word this week – quintessential. I don’t use big words, so I had to look up what it means. Do you know what quintessential means? It means the element that represents the hopeful. That’s what it means. So I would say grace is the quintessential element that helps us understand God and salvation and the plan that He has for us.

Let’s go to the next word, *no condemnation*. There’s a lot of guilt in the world and one of the privileges we have of knowing Jesus is you can be free from it. You don’t have to live with guilt in your life.

A college baseball coach told this story. He discovered four of his players had broken curfew the previous night. He immediately called a team meeting and said, "I know who you are, but I don't wish to embarrass you. You know the rules. You'll each be fined \$100. I placed an envelope on my desk. I expect the four of you who broke curfew to put your money in the envelope by 3pm." At the end of the day, the coach found \$700 in the envelope.

What the coach discovered is there is a lot more guilt out there than he imagined. I would suggest that's true in our lives too.

I'm always intrigued by the Conscience Fund. The Conscience Fund is a fund that the government has that you and I give money to. It's voluntary to satisfy our consciences.

This is Wikipedia's definition of the conscience fund: "Donations given to the Conscience Fund vary in size and reason. A 9-cent donation was made by a person from Massachusetts who had reused a 3-cent postage stamp, while a person from Jersey City sent \$40,000 in several installments for \$8,000 he had previously taken. Another donor sent handmade quilts in an effort to settle her tax bill. Most gifts to the Conscience Fund are from anonymous donors. Others are forwarded by clergy who have received deathbed confessions. The sincerity of some donors' repentance can be uncertain, as demonstrated by a received letter reading, 'Dear Internal Revenue Service, I have not been able to sleep at night because I cheated on last year's income tax. Enclosed find a cashier's check for \$1,000. If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the balance.'"

Look, we all experience guilt. The question is how are we going to process it. How we process it is very important and God has designed a way for us to process it. It's called repentance. Repentance is the ability to confess to say, "Yes, God. I have sinned. God, will you forgive me for my sin?" He forgives us. He cleans us up.

As believers, we're going to miss the mark sometimes. That's what sin means. We're going to miss the mark. We're going to mess up. We're going to sin. We're going to fail to live up to God's standards and many times we fail to live up to our own standards. You may lie, you may lust, you may be unkind, you may struggle with a strong, sinful habit in your life, and find yourself continually defeated by it. This is when you need to know that you're forgiven. Because those failures can lead to overwhelming guilt and despair. They can cause us to fear God's judgment, put ourselves on the sidelines, not serve the Lord the way He wants.

I know. I experience those fears, those anxieties, that guilt. I've also counseled with people who have and it's so sad. So sad to see one who's in despair, who can't seem to dig out of the pit because they just want to beat themselves up because of their guilt and the pain. They seem to live on guilt street, so every time they come out of their house there it is in front of them again. Forgiveness comes through Christ.

I've taken up golf. I've taken up golf because there are a lot of people here, or several people at Calvary Chapel that like to play golf, so it's a great way for me to connect with them. My friends and my sons play golf, so I decided I'm going to take up golf. So earlier this year, I rented some golf clubs and played a couple games of golf. I think I can get into this.

When I was down in Virginia a couple months ago, I stopped into a Golf Pro Shop to check out golf clubs. When I went into the Golf Pro Shop, I was looking for inexpensive clubs. When you play like me, you don't need to spend a lot of money on golf. So I go over to this place where they're selling clubs and there's a set of golf clubs for 400 bucks. I'm thinking, "This is an expensive hobby. Four hundred bucks?" I'm talking to the guy about the clubs and everything and I'm deciding, you know what, I'm going to go on Amazon or eBay. I don't have to stay here and buy some at the Pro Shop.

So I turned around to leave after talking to the salesman for a while and learning some more about golf, and as I'm walking out the door (I'm left-handed), there's a left-handed golf club there for \$395. One golf club for \$395! I'm looking at that and I said to the guy, "Excuse me just a minute. Can you tell me why this golf club is \$395?" He says to me, "It's a forgiving golf club."

Okay. I am at this point paralyzed for several reasons. One is I'm studying Romans in preparation to teach you and I'm all in forgiveness. Okay? Now he's using theology to describe a golf club, so I'm perplexed by that.

Secondly, God speaks to me often in situations when I'm getting ready to teach. He gives me an illustration and when this guy said this, I knew I was in the moment and I want to be right on top of this. I want to hear exactly what's going to happen in these next few minutes because something's going to happen here. I'm probably going to tell this story.

But I'm mostly trying to imagine in my life, how in the world a golf club could have theology and be a forgiving golf club? I mean does it sit in your bag and when you swing the golf club says, "It's okay. You're forgiven." I'm just trying to figure this out.

Furthermore, I've just golfed a couple of games and rented clubs and if anybody needs forgiveness when it comes to golf, it's me! So this guy has my attention.

So I look at him and I said, "Could you please tell me what you mean when you say that a golf club is forgiving?"

He says, "Well, it's weighted in the face of it in such a way that it's harder to make a bad shot." I look at him, I look at the golf club, I look back at him, I look at the golf club and the price of this golf club, and I said, "I think I need a little less forgiveness," as I started to walk out of the shop.

When I walked out of the shop, I realized this: Forgiveness is expensive. That's why I'm glad that Jesus Christ paid that for me. I don't have to live with guilt. I don't have to go around in despair. *There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus* because Jesus Christ paid for that. I don't have to pay for it! I don't have to beat myself up. I don't have to live in despair for this. *There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* None! Zero! There's no room for it. When you trust in Christ you can be certain that you're truly forgiven. The process of forgiveness is beautiful and it's complete.

1 John 1:9 helps us get a picture of what this forgiveness looks like. It says, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

That word *purify* in the Greek means purify. It means to cleanse. It's the word *catharsis*. That's where it comes from. *Catharsis* – that's the Greek word. It's a pretty word. It means to clean up and God says, "That's what I'm going to do for you. I'm going to clean you up."

But I've got to show you another verse that uses the same exact word in reference. I just love this verse. In Hebrews 9:14 it says, *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences (I need a cleansed conscience) from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

Do you see what God does? Because of the death of Jesus Christ, our consciences are cleared, cleansed, purified. We don't have to go around living with guilt in our lives. We are free now to enjoy who God is and what He wants from us.

One woman said, "I gave Jesus a chance, but it just didn't work out between us. The Lord laid out too much guilt on me." And I say, "That's sad she never made it to chapter 8." Because yeah, chapter 3, we've all sinned. Yeah, we're all guilty. You've got to get to chapter 8. She didn't get to chapter 8 because in chapter 8 there's a verse there. It says, *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Amen? [Amen.]

When Christ comes into our life, He doesn't just parole us. He pardons us. He frees us. We are no longer guilty.

So there is now a way to parent that doesn't emphasize condemnation. That we can parent our kids in a way that is pulling out their weaknesses. Oh sure, we have to parent them. We have to discipline them. We don't have to be harsh. We can still be firm. I think we model to our kids who God is in the way that we treat them.

The unfortunate thing is, if you look at your life, most of us grew up in homes where parents didn't quite do that very well. Maybe your picture of God to a great extent has been molded by your understanding of how your parent disciplined you. So when you think of God as a parent, that makes it very difficult for you to imagine because of the way your parents treated you.

So I think we need to retrain. Retraining inside of our hearts to think rightly about this concept of guilt in our lives and how this truth is at the core of how we perceive ourselves. It isn't the core of how we don't have confidence in our lives. It is so important for us to catch this truth that we are no longer condemned. We are free to enjoy God. Free from condemnation.

This is big. Just let it sink in today. It's hard because of lingering guilt in our lives. At least that's how I experience it.

I don't know if you've had this experience, but I set my phone on vibrate so it vibrates on my hip, so I know when there's a phone call even when I'm in a meeting or something. But there's sometimes when I have my phone on my desk and I feel something vibrating on my hip and it's

this phantom vibration of some kind. I reach for my phone; it's not even there. What was that I just felt? And then I think that's how guilt is in our lives. It shouldn't be there, but there's this phantom there that's reminding us that we're inadequate, we're unlovely, we're unworthy.

I think in the same way that Christians can be obsessed with this guilt of sin that is only been forgiven when God wants us to be free of that. They let guilt that doesn't even exist cause them pain, despair, and anxiety. To escape that rap we have to understand this principle in Romans 8:1 – *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Amen? [Amen.] Yes.

I think if you get this truth, there is a major piece of information, a major platform on which God wants to build.

Paul is honest, very honest in the passage in Romans 7 and it talks about his current status in his relationship with his struggle with sin. We saw last week he says *what I want to do, I don't do. And the very thing I know I shouldn't do, I do. I hate what I do*, is the kind of thing he's talking about. Paul's not talking about how he used to be. He's saying just this morning I made that again.

It happens to us all. Even earlier in his letter he's proclaimed *no one is righteous, not even one.* Later he stated matter of fact, *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* But then read chapter 7. It says even more personally, "I struggle with sin and sometimes I lose."

So look in your Bibles to the verse two verses earlier to the one we're looking at right here. Look at verse 23, chapter 7. Two verses before this one. Do you see what Paul says when he's talking about this wrestling that's going on? He says these words: *What a wretched man I am!*

See, that's the conclusion I think we come to where we only look at the wrestling that we're doing and the failure that we're making and don't measure up to our expectations and we have to make a choice between 7:24 and 8:1. There's only two verses in between there. Are you going to say to yourself, "Oh what a wretched man that I am," or are you going to say, "There's no condemnation." We have to make a choice. Where are we going to spend our time?

He's reminding himself of good theology. I would suggest that the good theology is what's going to keep us moving forward because we started thinking right about the gospel.

Now I've got to tell you, sometimes there is condemnation for the Christian. But it doesn't come from God. It comes from Satan. Do you know that Satan – in the Old Testament, the translation of the name Satan is accuser? He wants to accuse us. He wants to tell us that we're unworthy, that we're unloved. He wants to tell us that we are to be condemned. He wants to trap us into believing that we are inadequate and unworthy. God wants something more for us.

In your Bibles, just look at verse 2. I don't want to spend a lot of time there, but I want you to see the contrast that He's giving in 8:1 and then 8:2 he says, *because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

Man, I like those words. And I need that in my heart. I want to be free. I don't want to be encumbered by condemnation in my life, but rather I want to be set free and enjoy the freedom that God has provided for me. There is a higher law now because I'm in Christ. There's a higher law that I can enjoy because the Spirit's alive and working in me. Christ frees me.

Now when you're tempted to lash out in someone in anger or sarcastic remark, the Holy Spirit reminds you, "I don't think you want to do that." When you're in traffic and you're wanting revenge on someone, the Holy Spirit reminds you, "I don't think that's going to make you feel better in the end." When you're about to spend money and money that you don't have, the Holy Spirit will remind you, "I don't think that's a good idea." And there's this freedom that comes with the Spirit living inside of us.

We can't leave off the last parts of this because these are so important. If we look at the passage, there's one group of people for whom this benefit exists. It's *those who are in Christ Jesus*.

The bad news is that everyone outside of Christ experiences the judgment for their sin. They have a reason to feel guilty. They have a reason to have a guilty conscience, and thus are motivated and prompted in their hearts to find a Savior, someone to save them from themselves and their guilty conscience.

The good news is that God has made a provision for us to come into Christ, for those who are in Christ Jesus. To be in Christ Jesus means that we recognize that we are sinners and we don't just blame the problem on other people, rationalize it, justify it, defend ourselves. Confess it. We say, "I know I sinned. Yes, I have sinned. I've done wrong. There's no excuse for my sin. God, I confess it to you. Would you take it away? Provide for me that Savior. I trust in that Savior, Jesus Christ."

When we do, we become in Christ, you see, and then we are living in a place of freedom because Christ died for all of that stuff. He was a sacrifice that paid for all the sins of the past, all of the sins of the present, and all of the sins of the future. God knows that. He knows every sin that we might ever commit. He already died for it so that we can enjoy the freedom in Christ. Wow. It's just a powerful verse.

I'm going to take this whole chapter very slowly as we go through it because I think there's so many good things as we go through here. We want to move forward and not backwards in our life. If you are focused on guilt it's because you are focused backwards and God wants you to think forward, He wants you to move forward in your life, be freed up. You can experience freedom today.

If you're here today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can make that choice today. There's going to be counselors on the side when we sing a song. Or maybe you're plagued with guilt in your life and you're a Christian already, but you know you need to just turn it over to the Lord, give it to Him. I encourage you to take advantage of the prayer counselors that we have because they want to bless you and pray for you in the midst of that.

You know every one of us has a heart, and that heart is the sacred place that God wants to live in. That's where He lives. He lives in our hearts. It's a platform, really, upon which we make our decisions. We put our heart into it, we do things with all of our heart, we love people with all our heart. The heart is a sacred place that we have. There's a choice of what you're going to put on that platform. You're going to put your guilt there and let the guilt control you, cause you to look backwards. Or you can put grace there and clean it all up and say, "I want to serve the Lord in my life. I want to embrace that, I want to see that grace in my heart."

I think there's really a war going on in our hearts between condemnation and grace, between guilt and grace. Grace wins every time when we turn our hearts over to Him.

Would you stand with me. We're going to sing that song. If God's speaking to your heart, I just want to encourage you to...

[Abrupt end to audio]