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## ROMANS 8:14-27

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, our hearts go out to the victims of the Paris attacks this week. I just pray right now for the families of those folks. I also pray for Christians and churches that are today actively processing this and trying to help people process this. I pray that you would guide them and lead people more to yourself.

Lord, we each experience problems in our own personal lives that don't get publicity, but they challenge us in our hearts and our hearts get weighed down by things that are going on in our lives. Sometimes those challenges are other people that are difficult to deal with. Sometimes those challenges are financially related or have to do with even habits or patterns in our own lives that need to be addressed. Lord, I ask that this morning as we open your word that you would speak to us and comfort us. But I also ask that you would change us and help us to grow to be the people you want us to be. Lord, give us such a strength and a confidence inside of our hearts that we can face the personal challenges that we face every day. Use this passage to that end. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

We are going verse by verse through the book of Romans. If you missed last week you'll want to go back and listen to the sermons. They're all online. They're on our app. You can listen to them when you're on the road as you're driving. One family was telling me they listen to the sermons on the way to work. So I would encourage you to listen. If you miss one, listen to it. Especially right now when we're in this series about how people change. It's just really valuable to see the principles. I'm going to review some of them today, but I hope you will go back and listen to some of the things we've talked about.

If you want to process it a little bit more then you can come tomorrow night to the small group where they talk about the sermon. It's the "Take Jesus Home" Bible study and it's at Fred Thompson's home. They're processing a little bit more about what happens here and what we talk about. So if you'd like to be a part of that, please feel free to see Fred and be a part of what's going on.

Now in Romans 8 I'm convinced that this chapter is designed for us to have assurance and confidence in our lives to deal with the most important issues of our faith. Things like forgiveness and approval of God, eternal life, about suffering in our world. Those kinds of things are addressed here in this passage and so I want you to see them.

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I want to take them apart a little bit because I'm convinced that part of Paul's goal is to deal with the uncertainties of life. How do we deal with some of the uncertainties that happen? The chaos, the suffering, the problems, the stress of our lives – how do we deal with those things?

We've looked already at principle number one. When we talked about sanctification, we spent a whole Sunday just on this one verse. Principle number one is *therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*. So there is no room for you to be put on the shelf or to put yourself on the shelf because you believe that you're unworthy or unloved or unaccepted before God. There's no reason for that. God has designed a way for guilt to be addressed and that guilt is addressed through Jesus Christ. So if you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior then there is now no condemnation and you can be freed from that.

The second principle that we talked about is the one from verse 12 there. We talked about grace and how this is all about God's grace working in our lives. But does that mean we don't have an obligation? No, we do. We have an obligation and Romans 8:12 talks about that. *Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation*.

So we talked about our part and how we get on the grace train. It's God's grace that changes us, but we have to step on it. We have to go forward. That's going to make changes in our lives. God wants to do deeper changes in our hearts and this sense of obligation helps that. It helps us say, "Okay, I need to do something" or "I need to not do something." Maybe that's determination. But I'm doing it because I want something bigger, I believe something deeply. And so I have this sense of obligation to step on the grace train and allow God to work in my life.

Now you could come to this and you could be very behavioral and you could say, "Through sheer will power I'm trying to change." A lot of people do change that way. But the deepest form of change is when the Spirit drives us and we're able to change on the inside and rely on the Holy Spirit.

So when we talk about self-discipline, maybe in your eating patterns, you're trying to eat differently or eat better, you could use self-discipline to do that. But you could also view this as a wrestling between the sin nature and the Spirit in your life. The desire to be honoring to God or to give into pleasure, the pleasure of eating food. So you could view this as a spiritual endeavor as well. Something happens when you do that. It turns it into a spiritual battle, something that you can have much more spiritual resources to address.

Or maybe it's not what you put in your mouth. Maybe you're working on something to deal with what comes out of your mouth. Maybe you're trying to become more gracious instead of critical or angry or hostile or whatever it might be. That is something that God can do inside of our hearts. He wants us to rely on Him spiritually so it's not just behavioral. Certainly if you have an addiction you know you're working on this. If you have an addiction, it's very, very difficult to do this with sheer will power.

Now what we need is we need to rely on the Spirit of God. So this whole chapter is about the power of God's Spirit in our lives. It's not just behavioral; it's something different.

Now when you're making changes in your life and you're adjusting things in your heart, you want to come to a place where it ties into your identity. I'm changing, not just because my parents want me to. I'm not just changing because I want to get some approval in something in my job. I'm changing because this is part of what God wants for me in my life. It's part of the way God has designed me. It's part of my identity. It's who I am in Christ.

And that's where we go today. As we start with the third principle we're looking at verse 14 – *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.* That's our identity – *children of God.*

What I'd like to do is help us understand this very important truth. There's wrestling that takes place in our Christian lives, in our own hearts about common things. I'm not just talking about difficult things, I'm talking about common things in our lives. We wrestle in our hearts, we have no condemnation in Christ (we've seen that), we have an obligation. It's all a part of our identity and when we tie it into that identity then good things happen.

Years ago I had four sessions with a physician. An unsaved physician told me how to manage my stress. It was great. I loved it. It was very helpful for me. I still use the principles today. It helps me to manage my life.

The fourth session, though, that I was with him, he said, "Now here's what you need to do. Take this and tie it into your purpose in life." It just hit me at that moment. Here I was learning something from this unsaved doctor. God did something really important to me because I took the things he was teaching me. I really had a separation in my life between the physical stress things and the spiritual things in my life. He was integrating them for me even though he wasn't a believer. He was saying tie it into your purpose. So as I began to do that, it became even more powerful for me in my own life.

I think that's what Paul is saying here for us. You want to tie the changes you're making as God is changing you into your spiritual identity as a child of God. Being led by the Spirit is what he's talking about. Every area of our life.

Let me talk to you a moment about being healthy. Because if we look at the sanctification principle number three, which has to do with being led by the Spirit, I would suggest that being healthy in any area of your life you can tie it back to this idea of being led by the Spirit.

What I want to do is integrate your faith with the other things you're working on in your life. You're trying to move to the next level of your personal development or you're trying to get to the next level in your job or you're trying to do better in your own personal health. All of that can be tied into this idea of being led by the Spirit. I want to show you what that's going to look like in every area.

Let's just talk about being physically healthy for a moment. I assume that you are, as I am, looking for ways to eat better, exercise, think better, manage my own stress level. All those

things we're trying to do. But I think we tie them into our relationship to the Spirit of God, being led by the Spirit.

This verse in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 helps us do that. It says, *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.* So there's this sense in which our bodies are very important. When we're getting physical health we want to tie that into the Spirit of God.

Another part of our health has to do with intellectual health – our mind, thinking right thoughts, and so on. *Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires* (Romans 8:5). So there's an intellectual health we want to have and it ties right into the Spirit of God. That's what I'm wanting you to see. All of this ties into the Spirit of God.

Now sometimes in our emotions we have three dominant emotions, I would suggest, that get us off track. Some of you who are counselors know this. They are disappointment, anger, and anxiety. Those are the three common emotions that get us into trouble in our lives. But I would suggest there are Holy Spirit-filled emotions. That's why in the fruit of the Spirit they start with three emotions – love, joy, and peace.

I'm convinced that when we rely on the Holy Spirit, we're led by the Spirit of God, as we see in our verse today in Romans 8:14, that it will affect our emotional health. Because there's fruit that comes from being led by the Spirit. It's the fruit of the Spirit we see in Galatians 5:22. And the first ones, all three of them, are emotions.

There's also spiritual health that we can accomplish. Now let me say, when we look at spirit, unrelated to godliness (I'm just talking about every one of us has a spirit), the spirit really helps us obtain purpose and direction in life. And so sometimes people have their spirit into, they put their heart into something. Their spirit is something that's not necessarily godly, but they have purpose in their life they feel like. Well there's no purpose that's as great as that as having the Spirit control you, and that's being *led by the Spirit*.

Galatians 5:25 says, *Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.* So spiritual health means that we're going to have purpose in our lives that the Holy Spirit gives us. Every day in our lives we're asking the Lord to work deeply in us and guide us and lead us and we want to follow the Spirit.

So all of that has to do with health. I would suggest that we need a holistic view of health that ties into the Spirit of God. That's what I would suggest it means to be *led by the Spirit*. The Spirit is going to be permeating every area of who we are.

Let's go to the second part of the verse as we're taking apart verse 14. Let's talk about the children of God. It says, *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.*

It's a very interesting idea to think about being a child of God. What does it mean to be a child of God? Now that's hard for some people, I think, to grasp, especially those who have had a wicked childhood in one way or another. That something bad has happened to them in their childhood or maybe the things that happened in growing up were very difficult for them. To imagine a relationship with God that is described as a parent is hard for some.

But I want you to stop for a moment and I want you to think. Because I think even those people who have been deeply hurt in their past have this something inside of their heart that longs for this family relationship, longs for a good family, longs for something special, and God offers that to us. We can imagine and we can even experience in our lives that closeness that God wants us to have because He offers that into our lives. It's built into who we are.

When we trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior we become a child...of God. I just think it's interesting. We say those words so quickly, I'm just trying to pause for a moment and see what do they actually mean.

If you've had significant pain or trauma in your life, you'll want to look at the next verse, verse 15. Notice that in your Bibles verse 15 says this: *The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*

Now what Paul is going to do to illustrate the childhood of God idea is he's going to compare two things – the slave idea, slave to fear, and this idea of the son and relationship.

If you are dominated by fears in your life (the fear of rejection, the fear of some catastrophe, or the fear of losing something), if you're dominated by fear continually then you're missing out on something God wants for you. And so he contrasts this idea of being a slave because that's what fear does to a person. It makes them a slave. They're in bondage to something. God wants us to be free. We see that earlier in the passage. We're free. We are now a child. The child – here the idea is relationship. So you make a choice whether you're going to think in terms like a slave does and be characterized by fear, or you're going to live like a son or a daughter of God.

He then describes this process as adoption into His family. Why adoption?

Well, first, because God already has kids or a kid who's biological. So let me just show you that first of all. In John 3:16 it says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.* He just has one Son. In the King James Version it's translated *his only begotten Son*. The scriptures make a point that there's only one Son of God that's biological, begotten, and so on.

But then he illustrates this idea for us because we then become adopted into His family. It's a very interesting picture that he uses for us and I think it's a good one for us to talk about because adopted kids struggle with identity issues. They have a hard time with identity.

I was working with one parent of a Chinese daughter who was eight years old who was obsessed with her birth family. Well nobody could find her birth family. She was adopted from an orphanage in China. There's no way to find out anything about this birth family. But she's

thinking about it, she's thinking that her birth family would be better than where she is now. Which is a common feeling among those who are adopted. As they're trying to wrestle with things in their lives, they often think "there could have been something better for me," and they struggle with an identity issue. Not unlike us in our lives.

So for an adopted child to come to a real health in their lives they must wrestle with that and come to an acceptance of where they are and what God has for them now. In a very real sense we're doing the same thing in our lives. We need to come to this understanding of a new identity in Christ. That God has given us something different.

You see, he uses the word adoption because we weren't always with Him. We're only adopted into His family when we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Then we come into His family. We are coming from something into something else. We are changing our identity as it were.

Now I think adopted kids have an asset here. It's easier for them to come to a place where they can accept God as their heavenly Father because they understand this identity thing a little bit more. They can come to a place where they can accept their new identity in Christ and it's really effective in working in their lives.

Knowing who we are in Christ affects every area of who we are. It's our identity. So as you're making changes in your life, you want to tie it back into who you are, not just what you're doing. Because we look at who we are, we see who we are in Christ.

"We are no longer fearful of being rejected because of our inadequacies but rather we are confident and secure in our relationship with God. When you receive the Holy Spirit you did not *receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear*. What is Paul referring to here? He is talking about those who are not certain about their standing with God. They may be religious and outwardly moral but they are also fearful of judgment because they are not sure where they stand with God. Christians do not need to have this uncertainty. Christians can be sure that they are children of God and therefore can have confidence, not fear!"

Go to verse 16, the next verse. It says, *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children*.

Now let's just go to some theology for a moment and understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He has lots of jobs and when we describe and understand who He is as a person, but He has lots of jobs as He's interacting with us. One of His jobs is to do this very thing here, to testify that we are children of God.

It's like we were to take a certificate and put it on the wall of our heart, as you might see in a doctor's office or a dentist office or a lawyer's office – a certificate that tells where they graduated from school or what kind of license they have or something like that. Which does what? It gives us as patients or customers a confidence that this person knows what they're doing.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit is that plaque. This isn't the only thing He does. He's also moving around and doing other things, but one of the things He is is He's that plaque on the side of our heart to remind us that we're children of God. The certification that we are the real deal. And so He comes in and He does that for us in a powerful way. So it's a beautiful picture here that's illustrated about the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children and there are benefits to being children.

Let's go on. Verse 17: *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Now we come to the place in the passage where the rubber meets the road for us. We talked about how we need to tie our identity into the fact that we're children of God, but now we're going to talk about suffering and pain and challenges because we all experience them in our lives. So now we're going to understand this problem of suffering that we all experience in life a little bit more.

Being a Christian, a child of God, gives you a way to think about suffering, chaos, all the things that are kind of in that word suffering there. It's a way of thinking that's different than someone who's not a Christian.

I like Charlie Brown and Lucy is often the person in the Charlie Brown comic strip that's giving wisdom. Sometimes it's on her "advice for 5 cents." But she's the one who's often giving Charlie Brown wisdom. So she says to Charlie Brown, "Charlie Brown, go ahead and kick the ball." So Charlie Brown goes and kicks the ball, and she pulls the ball out of the way. He groans [groan] and she says to him, "Life's unfair. Get over it."

Now I was reminded of that cartoon because I think that's how a lot of us feel sometimes. Someone's pulled the rug underneath us, pulled the ball away, and so we end up groaning about life's problems.

I want you to think about a problem you have for a moment and we're going to practice groaning. Okay? Alright? Are you thinking about something that's bothering you, something that's a pressure for you? Alright. Let's groan together. [groan] We're talking about groaning here, so you might as well practice it.

Verse 18: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

So here's truth number one about suffering. If we're going to listen to some truths about suffering, here's number one. We're straight out of the text. We need to consider suffering worth less than the glory. The glory is not only future glory but the glory that God is working in our lives to produce something.

By the way, this is the same passage – we won't look at it this week, but next week we're going to look at the verse that says *all things work together for good*. So we'll talk about that next week. But it's in that same context.

You need to understand where Paul is going here. He's saying when you experience suffering you've got something different you can think about that will give you a bigger perspective. Let's stop for a minute, step out of our situation, and look back and see where we are here so that we can put this into perspective.

It's like the trainer who's training someone and the person, "Oh my muscles are sore." And the trainer's saying, "Come on! You can do this! That soreness represents growth. We're moving forward." That's the idea here that Paul is saying. We've got something we can focus on.

What is this suffering he's talking about? Well it's certainly the suffering that Jesus Christ experienced on the cross. On Friday of that week He was crucified and He experienced a tremendous amount of suffering. It talks about comparing that suffering to ours and the suffering that we experienced. That's the Friday. Then He's glorified and on Sunday He's resurrected from the dead. There's that Friday experience and there's that Sunday experience. Even if we're in the midst of that Friday experience, we need to focus on the Sunday experience in order to obtain what God wants for us. That we will be glorified. That God is giving us something.

There's no doubt that even though we're children of God we will experience sufferings. I don't care how much faith you have or how spiritual you are, all of us experience suffering in our lives. We need to know how to think about it rightly.

That's why the word there used in verse 18 is the word *consider*. It's a math term. I think you need to do the spiritual math when you're experiencing suffering. You need to put the suffering in one column and the glory in the other column, and you recognize, wow, you can't even compare them. That's what he's saying here in the verse. They don't even compare. There's so much glory coming the suffering's minor compared to that. And that enables us to be able to move forward. Consider suffering worth less than glory.

Spiritual truth number two is that suffering is part of living in a broken world. Let's read on in verse 19. *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

We tend to want to avoid suffering and difficulties and pain and trials, but we live in a world that's crushed and broken and torn, a world that's looking forward to the glory of God as well. I'm talking about creation. All of the world. All that's there.

Verse 22 says, *We know that the whole creation has been groaning [groan] as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

That's a particular kind of groaning. I'm not familiar with pains of childbirth, but the idea here is that the pains of childbirth that are coming on a person, that she's able to endure that thinking, "There's a baby coming out of this mess that's going on right now!" So even in our own lives we have that sense of what God is doing inside of us – that there's something better coming.

Notice in verse 20 the word there is *frustrated*. The world is frustrated. Creation is frustrated. That's because our world is just messed up. That's the idea. We live in a broken world here. You think you're frustrated; the whole world's frustrated!

Verse 23. Let's go on. *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.*

*This hope.* This hope is something that's in the heart that keeps us going forward, that allows us to continue even when we feel overwhelmed and we feel like we're going to give up. We have this hope inside. *But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

So truth number three I would suggest about suffering is this: Good things come to those who wait. We have this sense in which God is doing a beautiful thing in us and He's producing something. Right now we live in a fallen world that's experiencing the pain of being corrupted by sin. And with it we experience pain and hurt. Even as the pains of life intensify, we're not to lose heart or be overwhelmed because one day soon it will all be worth it. Creation will no longer groan in frustration and neither will we as Christians.

Let me show you another verse that ties right into this and gives a little bit more clarity about where our focus should be. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 it says, *Therefore we do not lose heart. We don't get overwhelmed. We're not so discouraged that we give up. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* There's something going on inside of us. Even though there's frustration and suffering going on outside of us, there's something inside of our hearts that's being renewed day by day. *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

God is doing this special work inside of us, and, for that, we have a different way of thinking about problems and suffering. See the early Christians, I think it appears, were disillusioned about their suffering. They had imagined that becoming Christians would free them up from a lot of the pain, suffering, and so on that was happening in the world. But they had some real problems in their political system and the way the world was operating. Christians were the focus of a lot of the problems in that world. And so it was hard.

I just want to bring it back to our own personal lives because I think it's really hard. I work as a counselor with people and it is hard. I see some of the pain that some people are dealing with now and the frustration that they're working through. Past hurts or present problems or whatever it is, it is hard. I often as a counselor feel overwhelmed. But I know God doesn't give the counselor grace to deal with that person's problem. He gives the person the grace to deal with their problems. I know that God provides that grace for people and so I just pray. In those moments when I see someone feeling overwhelmed, it's just really difficult, I just know that God provides something very special for them.

He's talking about this whole idea. See, I think we need help. It's not something we can do on our own. So if you feel overwhelmed sometimes, you feel like giving up, you don't want to go to alcohol, you don't want to go to an addiction. What you want to do is you want to go to Romans 8:26.

Look at the verse with me. *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*

“Lord, I just don't even know what to pray. I don't even know what words to come out. I just feel overwhelmed about the present problems that I'm experiencing in my life.” And that's why the Holy Spirit is present. The whole passage here is about the Holy Spirit's work in our lives and how we can rely on Him and trust Him in the midst of that.

Verse 27 is the last verse I want to read for today. It says, *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.*

I want to just say to you today, look at that first part of verse 27 – *and he who searches our hearts*. God knows your heart. He knows every part of it. You may try to hide something in the back closet of your heart, but God searches it out. He knows every anxious thought. He knows every temptation that you experience. He knows every time that you feel overwhelmed in your life. He knows all of it. And He has sent us the Spirit of God to live inside of our hearts so that we can rest.

I was trying to imagine an illustration this week that I could share with you. Resting in the arms of the Holy Spirit somehow. Being able to fall back on the Holy Spirit. Because then we have spiritual energy to deal with the current problem, the suffering that we're experiencing right now.

Let's review what we've talked about today. Change takes place in our hearts when we're led by the Holy Spirit. We want to tie that change that's taking place in our lives into our identity as children of God. As we struggle or suffer, we need to focus on the glory that's yet to come. As we struggle or suffer, the Holy Spirit is there to comfort us and intercede on our behalf.

Change isn't easy. It's really challenging sometimes. We have to decide whether we're going to focus on the Friday experience and groan, or we're going to focus on the Sunday experience and cry, “Hallelujah. God is at work in my life. Holy Spirit, I just want you to permeate my life. Just take over every area of who I am.” We want to integrate the spiritual things we learn on Sunday to the Monday grind in what we're trying to do when we're living life. We want all of that to be together so we're a whole person. We've got this picture of health that's more than just looking at the pieces. It's looking at the whole and what God wants to do.

It's all about the Holy Spirit. We want the Holy Spirit present in our personal lives. We want the Holy Spirit working in our church. We want the Holy Spirit evident regularly. That's the message of Romans 8.

The Holy Spirit is available to every person who accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and their Savior. So if you've not made that decision today, I want to invite you to make that commitment to Jesus Christ, to ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart. It's not about a list of dos and don'ts. It's about a personal relationship. You're adopted into His family when you accept Him into your heart.

Have you made that decision? "Yes, I want to trust Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior." There are some who trust Him as the distant Savior. We're talking about a personal Lord and Savior. He's the one who comes in and runs you. He lives inside of you and He empowers you to handle life. We're talking about integrating this whole thing and God does it. We don't do it; we just step on the grace train. We obey the Lord and do what He asks us to do. And that first step is to come to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

If you haven't made that decision yet, I want to invite you to make that decision today. We're going to have prayer counselors on the side as we sing this next song. During that song, make your way to one of those prayer counselors and say, "I want to accept Jesus Christ into my heart." They'll pray with you. Walk out of here an adopted son or daughter of the heavenly Father today.

Let's stand and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and ask for you to pour out your heart and your grace to us so that we can receive it in ways that you know we need it. Lord, you know each one of our hearts. You know our lives. You know the challenges that we're facing. You search out our hearts and I pray that you'd help us to be open with our hearts. Not hide things, but just say, "Lord, I need you. I want you." Lord, I pray for those who are here this morning who are particularly overwhelmed, that you'd give them your grace and your power. Teach us what it means to rely on your strength today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.