

**"Therefore...How Are We to Live?"  
"Guilt & Grace"**

Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus. Before turning to our text, allow me to share about two events from last weekend. The first is a quick update on what's going on up in Auburn. I had the chance to be with the members at Our Savior Lutheran, an NALC Mission Start that we've been supporting. It was their Celebration Weekend. They recently gained access to what was a preschool building and have now renovated it into their place of worship. They did some advertising in the community and hosted an Open House last Saturday. I'm guessing there were close to 100 people who came to visit. The next morning we shared in worship, celebrating the new facility, thanking God for where they have been, and looking forward to where they are being led in the months ahead.

They certainly have some challenges. It'll be a while before they'll be able to call a pastor, but, they're off to a good start. For now, we've committed to sending one of our three pastors to be with them one Sunday each month, for the remainder of this year. As we move into 2015, we'll reassess our involvement. Until then, I encourage you to keep them in prayer. That was the first event, up in Auburn.

The second was one that happened right here, while I was gone, in our third grade Sunday school class. I wouldn't have known about it, except that my wife, Mary, is one of the teachers. (And I have to tell you I was a bit disappointed in what I heard.)

Last Sunday was the first week of classes. The teachers were introducing themselves. It came to Mary, and she introduced herself. She said, "You know Pastor Dan...Do you know how we are related?" (The kids said), "You're his daughter." (She said), "No, I'm his wife"...and then the kids were embarrassed.

Embarrassed or not, the worst part was that the teachers thought it was funny. (I didn't find the humor.) Just for the record, I've drafted a letter to be sent to those three teachers (my wife included), copying Maria Bones, our Children's Ministry Director, outlining the importance of teaching children to respect their elders....Out of the mouths of babes...! Let's turn to God in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day of worship, for the chance to gather together and to be reminded of who you are and what you have done for us. As we turn to your Word, open our hearts and our minds to hear your voice, and open our lives and our wills to respond in faith...in Jesus' name. Amen.

Today we begin a five-week sermon series in which we'll be working our way, verse by verse, through one chapter of the Bible. Romans, chapter 8, is not only central to what Paul is saying in his letter to the church in Rome, but it's also a chapter that covers some of the main and overarching themes of the entire Bible.

Romans 8 is to the Bible what middle-C is to the piano, what a steering wheel is to a car, what water is to a fish, and what the pitcher and catcher are to baseball. It's central. It's key. It holds together what's happening (around it) and it outlines for us what God, through the apostle Paul, wants us to hear.

The challenge we'll be holding in front of you for the next few weeks (during this series) is to read the book Romans (from start to finish) once per week in each of the next four weeks. We'll be zeroing in on chapter eight, but we're challenging you to read the (entire letter) each week. Because in Paul's letter to the Romans, we find (not only) some of the most important doctrinal teachings of the church, things (the Bible tells us) about God and what he's done, but also some of the most direct challenges (we have) for the Christian life, for living as followers of Jesus.

Go through the letter, and that's what you'll find. The first seven chapters are pretty heavy on the doctrinal side. They lay the foundation for the Christian faith: who we are, the problem we face, and what God has done. The last five chapters (if not more) talk about how we are to live; what's to be our response to what God has done for us in Christ.

That's the letter to the Romans: what God has done and how we are to respond. That's the Christian life: what Jesus has accomplished and how we are to live.

In the Lutheran Church, we often make the distinction between what the Bible refers to as the law and what we talk about as the gospel. (It's basic to our faith.) The gospel is what God has done for us in Jesus. The law is what God calls us (in Christ) to do. The gospel is those things (God has done) that we could never

accomplish for ourselves. The law is those things we are able to accomplish as God's Spirit is at work in us. The law condemns. The gospel sets us free. The law leads to death. The gospel offers life.

Now, obviously, they're not the same, but they're tied together. They're not to be confused, but neither can we separate one from the other. The one has to do with our salvation; what God in Christ has saved us from. The other has to do with the Christian life; what God in Christ has saved us for.

That's what we're going to find in this series. That's what we'll be dealing with in chapter eight. We're going to take it verse by verse and we're going to be laying out some of the major truths found in scripture by dealing with some of the major paradoxes given to us in the Bible.

That's what we find. It's not always in straightforward, easy to follow statements, like "God so loved the world", that we find God's truth. It's oftentimes found in paradox.

And so, what's a paradox? A paradox (and we've talked about this before) is a statement that "seems to contradict itself or to conflict with common sense, but which actually contains the truth."

Things like "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first...If you want to save your life, you need to lose it...only as you lose your life (give it away for Christ) will you ever find it." Those are paradoxes. They sound like they make little sense, but when held together (side by side) they point to the truth.

Romans eight deals with some of the major paradoxes of the Bible. Today it's guilt and grace. Next week, it's flesh and spirit. Week three, it's despair and hope; then, fear and faith. And finally, in week five, we'll talk about victory and defeat.

Let's go after it. Today it's the first four verses in chapter eight. We're dealing with guilt and grace; with the fact that we all stand before God, guilty (in his sight), based upon what we have done, and how (at the same time) we are covered and carried (in life) by the grace of God.

Look in your Bibles at the first four verses in chapter eight. (If you're not there, go ahead and find it.) I want to call your attention (today) to four little words (or phrases) around which this "guilt and grace" paradox is built.

Starting in verse one (it says), "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

Now, let's go back and unpack what we just read, because (what we just read) is loaded. I said there were four little words (or phrases) around which this "guilt and grace" paradox is built. Take a look at the first. It's the very first word in the chapter.

What does it say? It says "Therefore...there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Therefore, there is nothing you need to worry about because everything (you might have worried about) has been taken care of by Jesus.

The very first word sets the stage for what this entire eighth chapter is all about. "Therefore...here is what you need to know ...Therefore...here is how you are to live."

My grandma used to say that whenever you see the word "therefore", you need to ask yourself what it's there for. In this chapter, what it's there for is to point us back to what was just said. And what was just said, in the seven chapters leading up to chapter eight, is what God has done for us in Jesus and why he needed to do it!

Now, we don't have the time to go through those seven chapters. When you read them (this next week), keep in mind that it's all leading up to chapter eight. What Paul does in those chapters is to lay the foundation for our faith. He uses them to help us see (and understand) the need we have (in our lives) for Christ.

He starts (in chapter one) with the Gentiles and then he goes on (in chapter two) to deal with the Jews. He talks about how (in the face of the law) all of us have sinned and how there's no excuse. As far as our salvation goes (he says), we're all in trouble. Not one of us has a chance. There's not one of us (when it comes to the commandments of God) who will measure up.

You know, it's interesting, (as an aside for a moment) how what we find in the Bible is so much different than what we find in the world. In the world, when people talk about how they're going to get to heaven, almost always (without exception) they talk about the law, they talk about how well they have lived. In

the Bible, when it deals with the law, where it leads is to the fact that we're all in trouble. "The wages of sin is death," it says. What our best efforts in this life will earn us is nothing more than the grave.

One of my professors at seminary preached a sermon in chapel. His opening line (I still remember it) was straight to the point. (He said), "The law was not given to us to make us feel good." (The law was not given to us to make us feel good.)

What Paul does (in the opening chapters) is to help us see what we're up against when it comes to the law. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (That's what we're up against.) Not one of us has a chance. "Therefore (it says), no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin."

Go back to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and you'll find the same thing. The law in the Old Testament was tough. The law in the New Testament is even harder.

"You've heard that it was said (in the Old Testament) 'Do not murder;' but I say to you, anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgment... You've heard that is said, 'You shall not commit adultery;' but I say to you, anyone who looks lustfully at another person has broken that command... You've heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth;' but I say to you, love your enemies, turn the other cheek, and go that extra mile."

And so, how are you doing? How does it all stack up in your life when it comes to keeping God's law? The law was not given to us to make us feel good. "Rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin."

The law and the gospel: the demands of God on our life and what God has done for us in the life of his Son. Do you know what the gospel is? We say it's the "good news." Do you know what the Bible says? The Bible says the gospel is "the righteousness of God." It's the righteousness of God that has been given to us in Jesus Christ. It's 2 Corinthians 5: "For God made him who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God." It's Romans, chapter one: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel... for in it, the righteousness of God is given to those who have faith."

In seminary, they called it the doctrine of imputation; that in the cross, we become what Christ is, and that on the cross, he became what we are. His righteousness is given to us, and our sin is given to him. All the perfection, all the integrity, all the identity that belonged to Jesus as God's perfect Son, becomes ours by his suffering and death on the cross.

That's what's going in chapter eight; four little words (or phrases) around which this "guilt and grace" paradox is built. It all holds together.

Verse one: "**Therefore**... there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Therefore, there is nothing you need to worry about because everything (you might have worried about) has been taken care of by Christ. All of your sin has been given to him. All of your guilt has been laid upon Jesus when he went to the cross.

My friend, if you're carrying any guilt in your life, let it go. If you're hanging on to (whatever it is) from your past that's weighing you down, give that weight to Jesus. He's not going to condemn you. He's not holding it against you. You're forgiven. Your sins have been washed away. It's all clean. How come?

Verse two: "...**because**, through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." In other words, we're no longer living under the burden of God's law, but we're living (instead) in the freedom of God's grace.

The law of God is like a mirror. When we look into it, we see our sin. And it hasn't changed. It's still there. This side of the grave, we'll be struggling (to keep it) until we die. But (in Christ) that law has been met, the punishment has been given, and what we have instead is God's Spirit living in us and working through us and reminding us (every day) that we belong to him.

Verse one: "**Therefore**, there is no condemnation." Verse two: "**because** through Christ Jesus we have been set free." Verse three: "**for** what the law was powerless to do... God did by sending his own Son."

There it is. Did you hear it? The law has no power to save us. (It has no power to save us.) If we kept it, we wouldn't need saving. But because we haven't, we do. And because we do, what got us into trouble in the first place (our failure to keep the law); it has no power to get us out of what it got us into. (Did you follow that?) The law has no power to save us. Only God has the power to save us. And that's what he did in Jesus. That's what he does in Christ.

Verse one: “**Therefore**, there is no condemnation...” Verse two: “**because** through Christ Jesus we have been set free...” Verse three: “**for** what the law was powerless to do...God did by sending his own Son.” Verse four: “**in order that** the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

My friends, these are big words. They hold it all together. Therefore, because, for, in order that...they all bring it back to Jesus. They all tie it back to Christ.

Do you know how this works? Here’s how it works. When the day comes for your judgment, when you’re standing before God and he’s looking at everything you’ve done in your life. He has that projector set up and he’s playing the DVD that shows what you’ve done and failed to do, and it’s all there for you to see. (I don’t know how it’s going to play out.) Do you know what’s going to happen? Do you know what you’ll have to say in your defense?

The Bible says, (when that day comes) “Every mouth will be silent and the whole world will be held accountable to God.” When my life is laid out and I’m trying to build a case...I’ll have nothing to say. It’ll be silent in my defense...except for Jesus...except for what God has already said for us in Christ.

In order that...the righteous requirement of the law might be met in us. In order that...what God accomplished on the cross (in his Son) might be given to you.

That’s how it works. What belongs to you (your sin) is given to Jesus. What belongs to Jesus (his righteousness) is given to you. Guilt and Grace. The law and the gospel. One of the greatest and most life-giving paradoxes you’ll ever find. “Therefore...How are we to live?”

Next week, it’s the flesh and the Spirit. Still in chapter eight. Don’t forget your homework. Read the entire book...once each week for the next four weeks. It’s good stuff. You’ll be glad you did. Amen.