

## The Blueprint: Building a Framework that's Grounded in the Gospel!

### Week 5: Intense Tensions

I. I'm sure we can all relate to being in tension. Sometimes it can be outside forces and other times it can be inside forces. Most of the time it's probably a combination of both. As we've looked the past several weeks at building a framework for our lives that's grounded in the gospel, we've discussed the idea of:

[Slide]: Justification

A. In Christ, the Apostle Paul tells us, we are declared not guilty for the sin we've committed in our lives. When we believe by faith that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sin and was resurrected making the way for eternal life, we experience a heart transplant like Pastor Mike mentioned. Justification comes with an incredible benefits package: peace with God, abundant grace, and confident hope, which can all be summed up by our reconciliation with God. That means that God in Christ didn't just acquit us of our sins and leave us be. He has reconciled us and invited us into relationship!

II. The ongoing work through the power of the Spirit to make us more like Jesus is called:

[Slide]: Sanctification

A. We don't drift through the process of sanctification. Through the Spirit and only through the Spirit does the believer have the ability to be obedient to God, but this in no way negates the responsibility and work of the believer in engaging the process of sanctification through the spiritual disciplines. There is nothing biblical about the idea "let go and let God." Even our rest and abiding in Jesus takes intentionality. Even casting or throwing our anxiety on the Lord takes intentionality.

III. Today, we're going to look at a substantial part of Romans 8 and consider the sometimes-unpopular idea of the Christian life that it comprises:

[Slide]: Intense Tensions

A. Turn with me to Romans 8 or following along on the screen and we'll start in Romans 8:12: Romans 8:12-17 (CSB) [Slide]: 12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, 13 because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. 15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" 16 The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, 17 and if children, also heirs- heirs of God and coheirs with Christ- if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

1. The first tension we need to consider is the tension between:

[Slide]: Adoption vs. Slavery

a. Very few of us enjoy sitting in tension and when tensions arise, we work hard to release the tension. Sometimes this desire spills over into our understanding of God as presented in Scripture and I want to caution us today in doing that. Sometimes we just have to embrace the tension. Justification is a God given order that we can't achieve through human merit. Our eternal life with God rests entirely on the accomplishments of Christ. At the same time Paul never relieves the tension of our becoming like Christ as a result of our salvation and subsequent sanctification. This creates a very real tension as we live our lives as God's sons and daughters while also remaining susceptible to Satan luring us back to slavery.

b. So how do we know we're on the right track?

- (1) First, are we experiencing tension in our life today? That's a really good thing! We're being led by the Spirit in the midst of a broken world. If you're not feeling any tension today with sin in your life, then we should be more concerned. The tension that comes from having the Spirit of adoption in a world where Satan runs rampant is a good thing.
- (2) As we embrace the tension of the Spirit of adoption versus the spirit of slavery, we're also reminded that fear and shame are not from the Lord. If we feel like God is angry with us or ashamed of us that's not the Spirit of adoption within us it's the spirit of slavery. God uses conviction to call us back home; Satan uses shame to fall back into fear. If we watch kids play sports, mistakes rarely happen in isolation. What usually happens is that one simple mistake usually is compounded into a series of mistakes because of the fear and embarrassment of making the mistake. That happens in our Christian life a lot doesn't it. We make a mistake and we run and hide instead of running immediately to our Abba Father. Don't let the tension cause us to run back to a spirit of slavery, rather let's be reminded of our Spirit of adoption. God has declared a covenant relationship with us through Christ that can't be shaken. He's not our taskmaster; he's our Father!
- (3) While the spirit of slavery is strong, the Spirit of adoption is overwhelming. Once you have the Spirit of adoption that only comes through our justification the tension that results from our retreat back to the spirit of slavery is how we know that we're saved! Praise God for this intense tension! I had faith in God ever since I can remember, but I trusted Christ as my Savior and Lord at 8 years old. The Spirit of adoption was so strong in my life! Around 12-13 I started to succumb to the spirit of slavery because I never felt like I could do the Christian life well enough. I started to fall back into the spirit of slavery, but something profound happened to me as a teenager and a young adult. The more I ran; the louder God's voice became. Not audibly loud, but God's Spirit of adoption testified together with my spirit that my Dad was calling me home. For 12 years the Spirit of God testified with my spirit and one day at the age of 26 mercifully broke me. I don't say this today as an endorsement for sin. I say this today to testify that when God lays claim to our life, we're going to find ourselves in tension, but it's a tension that should be embraced. The Spirit of God is leading us and when we fall into sin, God's voice is faithful to call us back home.

2. In addition to the Adoption vs. Slavery tension, another tension I'd like us to consider is the tension between:

[Slide]: Groaning vs. Glory

Romans 8:18-27 (CSB) [Slide]: 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility- not willingly, but because of him who subjected it- in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the first fruits- we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience. 26 In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

- a. I'm not totally sure of the origins, but somewhere along the way it seems as if the Christian life became synonymous with "winning." We expect to "win" in our politics, "win" in our national superiority, "win" in doing church, et cetera. I believe the Apostle Paul would be confused by our conclusions and ask us to more carefully observe the Scriptures. The Christian life has little to do with our definition of "winning" in the way the world defines "winning." Paul would challenge us to embrace the intense tension, that often times the opposite is in fact true. That more often than not, the Christian life leads us down a path that the world would define as "losing." The glory of Jesus came through the path of suffering and this too will be our path in living out the Christian life.
- b. The tension of suffering is hard to explain and even harder to embrace, but Paul lets us know in these verses that suffering is not in opposition to God's overarching or intimate plan of salvation. Paul says in verse 19 that something was greatly altered in all of creation through the sin of Adam because God subjected it to futility. God cursed all of creation in the confident hope that all of creation will one day be restored just as God has brought forth sinful, fallen man to be his children! Right after the curse was enacted we have the Protoevangelium (fancy word that refers to the original unveiling of the gospel) in Genesis 3:15 in which God declares victory over Satan through Christ. A victory made possible through suffering! I don't like suffering and as Christ-followers we're not called to seek or like suffering. But a theology that denies suffering as a part of the Christian life is a very bad theology that sets people up for an unrealistic experience in the Christian life.
- c. Suffering reminds us of the already but not yet reality of the Christian life. We're children of God but we're also heirs. An heir is someone who has been declared or promised to be the recipient of a future possession. Scripture talks so much about hope, because there is an already but not yet aspect to so many promises of God. We sit in the middle of this tension today! The word Paul uses in verse 19 which we translate "eagerly waits with anticipation" [apokaradokia] literally means with outstretched necks. All of God's creation has outstretched necks as it looks ahead to the day of Christ's return in which God's children will be revealed. We're prone to fall in love with the created when all of creation is pointing us back to the only One steady and true, our Creator God. Suffering loosens our grip on the tangible and lifts our eyes back to the eternal. This is hard stuff and quite frankly impossible stuff if it wasn't for the down payment of the inheritance God has given us in the already.
- d. Paul talks about the Holy Spirit as the first fruits to be an indication to us that God will make good on the rest of our inheritance. Paul's focus isn't on the blessing per se of the Holy Spirit in the already but the role of the Holy Spirit in leading us to keep our necks outstretched in anticipation for the Lord's return. In the tension of groaning and glory, we've been given the best gift first: God's Spirit indwelling within us! In the midst of suffering, it's God's Spirit within us that keeps us yearning for home and anticipating the hope of Christ's return. When we're so broken-down we don't even know what to pray, God's Spirit within us cries out and intercedes on our behalf with our Father God. What a gift we've been given!
- e. When Christ returns, the dead in Christ will rise first and then those who are still alive will meet him in the air. As those in Christ we'll experience glorification in which our physical bodies will be restored free of sin and suffering. That will be an awesome experience! But until that day, we don't just sit and soak. The Kingdom of God is expanded with every heart that turns to him. So, we push through boundaries to share the story even in the midst of suffering. We keep our necks outstretched eagerly awaiting the Lord's return! It's an intense tension but we embrace the groanings looking ahead to glory!

3. The last tension for us to consider is:

[Slide]: God's Sovereignty vs. Our Free Will

Romans 8:28-30 (CSB) [Slide]: 28 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

- a. We've been considering today some big tensions of the Christian life. The Spirit of adoption vs. the spirit of slavery, groaning vs. glory, and arguably the biggest of all now, sovereignty vs. free will. The point is we often try to segment these two realities out when it's a tension that we just have to embrace. If we're willing to embrace the tension, I believe we'll have a much better understanding of the often-quoted Romans 8:28. This section of Scripture is like a juicy Big Mac and Romans 8:28 is like the extra bun in the middle. I like the extra bun but it's the beef and the sauce that makes the Big Mac. Romans 8:27 just mentioned that the Spirit of God within us leads us and guides us according to the will of God. Because of that we can be assured that God will use everything whether "good" or "bad" in our earthly journey to make sure that we arrive at our promised destination. Our problem is that we set the bar way too low on what's "good." Paul isn't talking primarily about the here and now; he's talking about our future glorification in the presence of Christ!
- b. Paul reassures us to end this section that overarching our free will, God is the Great I Am. He isn't sitting on the front porch of heaven biting his fingernails to see what's going to happen throughout creation even down to the decisions of our lives. I don't understand how it works, but God is the Alpha and the Omega and stands above time. While we embrace the tension of the already and not yet; while we embrace the tension of our justification, and the working out of our salvation in sanctification, God is behind us, beside, and before us. All of salvation is already laid out before an all knowing, all powerful, all present God. I invite you to embrace the tension.

B. We've looked at some intense tensions today!

Adoption vs. slavery: while we're a new creation and have experienced a transfer of power in Christ, Satan still has a degree of access to each of us. An indication that we have the Spirit of adoption is the tension we experience when we sin.

We've looked at the tension of groaning vs. glory: the Christian life doesn't equate to an easy life. If the glory of Christ came by way of suffering, we should embrace the tension that suffering is a part of the refining process as we follow Christ.

And lastly, Sovereignty vs. Free will: God's Spirit is leading us into God's will for our life, that's one all beef patty. God's Sovereign over every aspect of our salvation from predestination to glorification. That's the other all beef patty. In the middle, God's working out ALL THINGS even the decisions we make on our own volition to bring about our good! Wow!

C. Building a framework that's grounded on the gospel will require us to embrace some tensions as well.

1. Maybe you're here today or joining online and you've not come to Christ because of some of these tensions we've discussed today.
2. May I challenge you to consider that God is so far beyond our comprehension that it's a foolish idea to make a relationship with God contingent on having it all figured out. That perhaps the things that you struggle with might be because we're only considering it through our limited perspective?
3. Trust Christ by faith and embrace the tensions. I'm confident God will meet you where you are, transform your heart, and help you walk in a new way of life.