Next Steps of Faith

Romans 8:1-17

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ October 25, 2026 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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[1] Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [2] For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. [3] For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. [5] For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. [6] To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. [7] For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed, it cannot, [8] and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

[9] But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. [10] But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. [11] If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

[12] So then, brothers and sisters, we are obligated, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— [13] for if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. [15] For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs: heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if we in fact suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:1-17, NRSV)

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The other day I came home, and our dog Kirbee was not at his usual spot by the door to greet me. When I went looking for him, I found him slinking slowly down the steps from upstairs. He knows he's not supposed to be up there, but he'd found his way around the divider that keeps him out. So his head was down, and his tail was between his legs. I'm not sure what he was expecting, so I tried something unexpected. Instead of reprimanding him in some way, and because I know he meant no harm, I said the one thing that completely changed him in an instant, so that his head was up, his tail was wagging, and he was running circles around me. What did I say?

Do you want to go for a walk?

At that moment, I realized a dog's memory can be as short as they want it to be, because whatever he was feeling guilty about was completely out of his mind. And his next steps were about to be out the door on what Kirbee would consider a grand adventure - the same loop around the neighborhood he takes every day.

I can't help wondering - what if *our* memories were that short. We all have our moments of slinking down the steps, guilty, full of shame, hopeless for a chance that we could actually turn things around and be *good.* It takes more than just a few words to turn it all around and make us forget. We hang on to it, worry about it, get lost in it.

But here we are, going through Romans, and we get exactly to the half-way point and find these words:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And guess what? I think what Paul is hoping for here is a similar reaction to my dog slinking down the stairs and hearing the words, *You wanna go for a walk?* The hope is that in that moment we know we are tethered to a loving father who will go with us on a grand adventure of faith - that in that moment our self-focus on our faults and shortcomings will be wiped away and we'll be ready to go.

If Jeff were here, he would say, "Remember, whenever you see the word *therefore* you have to ask what it's *there* for. This is the way the chapter starts. You might even say that the entire seven chapters were leading up to this point of Paul being able to say, *Therefore, there is now* - what? - *NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

You want to go for a walk?

I found myself on the steps of the Sacramento County Courthouse downtown, filming a House to House message. And I have to say, just standing around, recording a video, made me wonder if I wasn't breaking a law or was standing out in a way I shouldn't. Right after I finished a couple of police vehicles pulled up and an armored car, and I could just imagine the SWAT team was sure to follow, so I made my way across the street.

But it also helped me to imagine moments that happen on those steps when a person wins their case, and they walk out having been told by the judge that their charges are dismissed and they are free to go. It happens from time to time for people that have spent months incarcerated, waiting for the chance to plead their innocence. When it does happen, there they are, on those steps, looking back with joy at what just happened, and perhaps looking ahead with a mixture of emotions asking, "What now?" They have just heard similar words that there will be no sentencing or further punishment. According to the law, all has been forgiven and made right. A blank slate.

I also realized in that moment, that there are so many people in our community and country who feel much more hesitant to show up and linger in front of government buildings. I will never fully be able to understand the level of trepidation that recent times cause for many people.

One common mistake we might make hearing this first verse of Chapter 8 is to say:

Well, that's great. I'm worthy after all! I knew I wasn't as bad as I thought. I've just been pronounced NOT GUILTY!

Paul puts his head in his hands, shakes it, and says:

Oh, they just don't get it. Start over at chapter 1. Remember?

Let's imagine together that this list was read right before the judge said *Therefore there is now no condemnation.* Maybe he looked back and reminded us of who we have been:

1:21 - *Your thinking became futile, your foolish hearts became dark*
1:25 - *You traded the truth of God for a lie*
3:10 - *There is no one righteous, not even one, especially not you*
3:23 - *For all have sinned and you have fallen short of the glory of God*
7:19 - *You do not do the good you know you should do, and in fact, the evil you don't want to do, that's what you do!*
And most recently, 7:24, Paul says: *What a wretched person you are. Who will rescue you from this body that is subject to death?*

That's what the THEREFORE is THERE FOR. And then the judge looks over at you and says, *Now here's the verdict - NO CONDEMNATION*

It's obviously not anything we've done. We find ourselves on the steps of the courthouse wondering how we got out of that given the evidence against us. Justice was done. The penalty was paid on our behalf as the second half of that verse tells us:

There is no condemnation (how?) for those WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS - for those that <u>know</u> what Jesus did for them and believe it with all their hearts - who stand on the courthouse steps and are fully aware they <u>didn't</u> get what they deserved.

And this fact changes everything. It should change the rest of our lives. When we understand that we are set free of the penalty, not because we were proven innocent, but because the judge that just set us free is the one who suffered for us…our motivation to follow the laws of this judge will completely change. The reason we have for

following Jesus and seeking as his disciple to follow him in our daily lives takes on new meaning.

Paul calls it living in the Spirit rather than in the flesh. To live in the flesh is to live our lives wondering how we can live to avoid the consequences of punishment. To live in the Spirit is to have these words of NO CONDEMNATION written on our bones, underneath the flesh, that tell us we belong to a creator who loves us and paid the ultimate price to bring us back to himself.

The difference between a Christian living in the flesh and not really understanding this and one who lives in the Spirit, with these words written deeply in their hearts is this:

The first is like a man breaking the laws of the state and is wondering only about the legal consequences and not wanting to get caught to avoid them.

The other is like a man breaking the vows of marriage with his wife and he is only aware that he is wounding the heart of the person on earth who loves him most. It's not a legal matter, there are no charges that can be brought, but it's a matter of personal relationship. You are not breaking the law of the land, but the law of love of another who has loved you for better or worse. And the effects can be far worse.

So as you stand on the courthouse steps, relief for avoiding the punishment is short-lived. It gives way to a desire to live and obey out of love, and not just duty.

Many people spend years and years wondering what will happen to them on the day they finally meet God in heaven. Will they measure up? Have they done enough? Have they confessed all of their sins?

Is that you? Have you been there? I've spent time in that line of thinking? If you're there now, you're still in the courtroom, awaiting the verdict. You haven't really heard these words in Romans 8.

NT Wright says: *We don't spend our lives wondering whether God will, in the end, finally accept us. In Christ we are invited to live today in the freedom of the verdict God has already given!*

Living in the flesh is to meet together to analyze the verdict. Break it down, discuss it, study it. But not to really believe it. It's like these two standing on the steps after the verdict. (talking, arms folded)

But verse 11 says: *If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives also in YOU, then the same one will fill you with the Spirit of life.*

Living life in the Spirit on the courtroom steps looks a little more like this…(dancing, arms out)

John Owen says this:
He looks not only for our obedience, but also that it be filled up with joy, love, and delight.[1]

It sounds a bit like:

Jesus said it like this: *I have come not only that you might have life, but that you might have it abundantly.*[2]

If you want to see what C.S. Lewis has to say, it's on the front cover.

God wants so much more than reluctant compliance. God's Spirit, when we recognize it, which doesn't look like external dancing for everyone, but internal dancing, absolutely! The Spirit draws us into a relationship in which obedience grows out of love and belonging.

One of the key passages of the Old Testament that connects to this idea of Spirit and flesh is in Ezekiel when the prophet is talking to a hardened and dispersed nation of Israel. They are trying to follow their cultural and religious heritage, but without real joy. These words might sound familiar:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my laws.

What would *make* someone *want* to follow their laws? A new spirit within them, one of love and not just of duty or will power.

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[1] Owen, John. *https://ccel.org/ccel/owen/pneum*

[2] John 10:10

God is not simply looking for people who follow the rules. God is forming children, you and I, who are learning to love what their Father loves.

The other day I saw this license plate:



Forgive 'n forget. It's a passage that I think can be helpful in relationships with one another, but I found myself wondering when I saw it if it fully captured the heart of God's love. I'm just not sure we are supposed to be standing on those steps after hearing that verdict and *forget* what had just been forgiven. Maybe the forgetting part is how God *in effect* treats us after he forgives us. But part of the joy of a new life in Christ is remembering every time we're forgiven the depth and height and length and width of God's love for us. OH! And we WILL break our covenant with God - again and again.

And we'll continue to realize with another dimension how God loves us. How would you rephrase it?

In **Psalm 103** we're told that as far as the east is from the west so far have our sins been removed. That doesn't mean we can't remember it, it just doesn't hold power over us. One of the best ways to see God's power and love is waking up early to look all the way to the east for a glorious sunrise. We're also told that as high as the heavens from the earth is how great God's love is for us. Don't we love to stay up late at night in remote places and gaze at the stars? Something moves in us that can lead us toward God's love.

Okay, let's assume it's finally time to leave the steps of the courthouse. I've left you on those steps far too long this morning, in that analogy. So let's walk down the steps. Let me give you three things that can happen as we go down. We'll start with 3 and count down, since we're descending.

By the way, you'll also find most of these at the end of any courtroom drama movie or book. You don't just end with the protagonist leaping and dancing with joy. You also want to know - what did they do next? Maybe they picked up the phone to connect with an estranged family member. Maybe they saw the hopeful love of their life across the empty parking lot, the one they thought had died. Maybe they open a note that tells them where the treasure is buried and sets up the sequel. Something always happens on the last page.

Same for us. We have to ask: "What's next?"

I'll give you the first couple letters and see if you can make any guesses.

EX….
RE…
MO…

So, STEP 3. The top step is where we are looking back into the courthouse, remembering what just happened. EXHILARATION. There's dancing. There's a remembering that…

Therefore, there is now … NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And there are prayers to be prayed on each of these steps. On this step we find prayers of *gratitude*, of *joy*, and of *confession. Confession* because we will continue to need to bring the truth of who we are, like the tax collector on his face in front of the altar praying and weeping. This isn't just one and done faith, it's a continued walk.

As we go to STEP 2, we turn and look out. We start to get the lay of the land and ask God where we go from here, living out of a new motivation to obey and serve and follow. REORIENTATION. There's discernment, Life Groups, prayer and scripture and coffee conversations about our lives in Christ with each other. How do we live as God's people?

Here we need prayers of *trust*, prayers for *strength*, and prayers for *direction*. Maybe we can't even remember where we parked our car. We get a sense that this may not be easy.

And lastly, we get to the bottom step. Any guesses? MOBILIZATION. God may have something very specific for us to do. Have we asked God to reveal that to us? Have we given God the rhythms of our day? Places and times to hear his voice?

Here we need prayers of *humility*, prayers of *healthy habits*, and prayers that *it's God that others would see in the steps of our lives.*

And it may be the end of this half of the chapter, but really I'm setting up the scene for the sequel that the Reverend Rick Hull will bring us next week. Because as soon as we come down off the last step we look around at the world and realize that so many things are trying to tear us away from the One who has just pronounced us free to go. Temptations abound, and life circumstances are hard, and routine can pull us from the joy we felt on the top step.

But guess what? The judge who just sent us out is taking off his robe and wants to meet us out in the street and says:

You wanna go for a walk?

I think I told you that my dad once had to appear in court before his own dad, my grandfather. He treated him fairly. He gave him the full extent of the penalty. But my dad also knew he was standing in front of a father who loved him and was building in him something he needed.

How do we know when we have finally realized the exhilaration of this Gospel message? When we move from images of God as a distant king or maybe a closer judge into a place where you know his very personal love?

It's verse 15 and 16, it's how this passage eneds: *When we cry "Abba, Father!"....it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*

It's when we truly know we are God's children and we belong to Him.

So let me end this part of the sequel with that reminder to us all:

The One who set you free paid the penalty in full by his own sacrifice, and walks with you into the next day and every day after because he loves you. Amen.

"The Next Step"

A Resource for Life Groups and/or Personal Application

1. Read *Romans 8:1-17* again together. What is your favorite verse or phrase? Where are you still left with questions?

2. How does the image of *standing outside on the courtroom steps* fit with this passage? How is it helpful for you? Where does it fall short?

3. What do you see as the difference between living "in the flesh" and living "in the Spirit" (vs 9)? What do these look like in a person's life? *Your* life?

4. Read *Ezekiel 36:24-27*. How do these ancient words connect to Paul's message here?

5. How would you explain your primary motivation for obedience to God's laws? How does this passage challenge your reasons for following Christ?

6. One more passage: Read together *Psalm 103:8-13*. Does this passage mean that we should forget the sins that have been forgiven? What is helpful about the phrase "forgive and forget"? Would you rephrase it in any way in light of Scripture's overall message?

7. What are some practical ways our "next steps of faith" could look and feel different? What is one step *you* might take this week?

Table to Table

Something for kids and adults to consider together

Does knowing that God loves us no matter what make it easier or harder to follow his rules? Talk about why or why not as a family.