

Called to Sonship

by Dana Congdon

Dana Congdon's sermon 'Called to Sonship' explores the eternal purpose of God for believers, emphasizing their identity as children of God and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 1:13:37

Scripture: Romans 8:14-18, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:31, Romans 8:35, Romans 8:37-39

Topics: "Sonship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the eternal purpose of God for Christians, focusing on the letter of Paul to the Romans. The first message explored the power of the gospel for salvation and how it is the starting point for experiencing God's eternal purpose. The speaker emphasizes that this process is guided by God and involves being undone and then reconstituted in three areas: church life, body life, and personal transformation. The speaker references Paul's experience of being transformed by the active, powerful word of God in Romans chapter seven.

Transcript

Good morning, brothers and sisters, this is now my second message. How many of you who are here this morning did not hear the first message? Well, half the people, that's good. We're aware there's always a great turnover going on here, people going out to teach the children, having various responsibilities.

I noticed yesterday there were quite a few people in the choral room, I believe, where they show the tapes for those who are working with the children in the morning. So, thank the Lord. If you haven't heard the first message, hopefully you can catch up with it on tape or video.

We are looking at the eternal purpose of God for the Christian, and the context is primarily the letter of Paul to the Romans. And the first time, we basically looked at Romans chapters 1 through 5 and talked about the gospel that is the power of salvation. And I tried to make a very simple point, an elementary point, but when that love of God breaks in upon the sinner, and they realize they can be saved, and by faith they receive the Lord Jesus, this is actually their first touch with the eternal purpose of God.

This is the beginning of a climb that will take them from glory to glory unto God's full purpose. It begins there at salvation. And so Paul carefully traces the route through an awareness of sin to the awareness of the cross's work and the awareness of Jesus as Savior.

I know probably many of you have read books on Romans, and many of these books concentrate on this justification by faith, which we find primarily spoken of in those first five chapters. Interestingly, there are other books written about chapters 6 through 8, as if an entity in itself, talking about the exchanged life and the Holy Spirit, life and various different ways they have of putting it, and they make a whole book on it. And of course, these books are very valuable.

I think John Stott has a very good book called *Men Made New*, based on these chapters, you know. There's not too many books written on the rest. You know, chapters 9 through the end.

That's just like, you know, not interesting to people, but they do the first two sections really well. And the thought occurs to me that these books are always very good, but seldom really attached to the eternal purpose, the calling according to purpose, you know. Some books that talk about justification by faith, they kind of leave it with the fact that you're saved.

Praise God. When you die, you're going to heaven. Chapter 6 through 8, you know, those books, they concentrate on the victorious life and praise God.

Now you're victorious. All you're going to have is blessing and the power of God. Amen.

But they don't attach it to this wonderful eternal purpose. And that's certainly Paul's burden here. So I'd like for us to go to the end of the second section that we'll be looking at.

Chapter 6 through 8. As we said the first time, we're trying to go progressively through this book in one sense. And so let's go to chapter 8 and we're going to pick up at verse 14 and see how this whole section of chapter 6 through 8, in the end, relates to God's eternal purpose. Romans chapter 8, verse 14, through the end of the chapter.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

And if children, heirs also. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. If indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness. For we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good, for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brethren. And these whom he predestined, he also called.

And these whom he called, he also justified. And these whom he justified, he also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him over for us all, how will he not also with him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies.

Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is he who died, yes, rather, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, for your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our Father, we're so thankful that even as we hear these mysteries of glorious sonship, we have your son to look at and to see what it means to be a son.

O Lord, we pray that by the Holy Spirit, the one who has been given to us to reveal all things concerning Christ, that as we share this word together, we may find Christ in us, moving us from glory to glory, even according to this steadfast and eternal purpose. Help us, Lord, by the Holy Spirit. Now, Lord, we've received a lot this week.

Some are stretched to capacity. We all feel tired, but know that the Holy Spirit, among other things, quickens our mortal bodies and makes alive our hearts and minds to understand, to grasp, to have written upon Christ our Lord. Help us, Lord, we pray in this simple time in Jesus name.

Our first session, we began with the gospel. I tried to talk about the electricity of the power of God unto salvation when the gospel is proclaimed. Indeed, it is electricity.

It's God's love, electrifying, electrocuting sinners and bringing them back to life in Christ, the wonderful power. And Paul says, I'm not ashamed of that gospel, because when that gospel is proclaimed, some amazing things happen. First, the righteousness of God is revealed and everybody who has, who hears this and whose eyes are open, sees God is right.

God is just. God is merciful. The righteousness of God is revealed and also faith is kindled as a gift in the hearts of people who are listening.

And suddenly the unbeliever believes, even as our brother Lance was sharing with us last night, some of the most unbelievable atheists touched by some of the most foolish methods for so it pleases God to create out of nothing faith to believe and to be safe. I remember myself the night I was down on my knees and I was saved. You know, in my heart, I knew this was real in my mind.

I still had a lot of doubts. So God just basically electrocuted my mind and I came up a believer off my knees. Praise God.

Well, the Lord knows what he's doing is wonderful gospel of salvation. And as I said, when we first touch that love of God, come down to us in Jesus Christ. Actually, we've had our first taste of eternity.

It sure tastes good. And, of course, Romans goes on to tell us that not only do we have this first taste of God's love, but we also have intimations of eternity. It says in our spirit, we cry out, Abba, Father, there is some transaction now with a God that we can't see.

There's a relationship that's opened up. We receive, as we read in here in chapter eight, the first fruits of the spirit. There's another electrocuting experience.

The Holy Spirit is poured out upon us and suddenly we're energized with something that enabled us to live for God and serve him with power. How wonderful this is. And we become incorporated.

We suddenly sense that we're part of this body, this universal man, this something. It's hard to describe. It's people put together called the church.

I remember when I was first saved and I went home for my first Christmas. I was living in North Carolina and went back to New York. And now I'm saved and I went back home and I was out on the street just getting out of my car to go into the house.

And my next door neighbor, who was a girl my age, and she was a real strong Catholic, was going off to a Catholic college. You know, I saw her and I said, you know what? I'm going to go witness to her. So I went over there and I said, you know, something by the grace of God, you know, you know me, you know me.

I've been around next door. You know what a sinner I was. But by God's grace, he saved me through Jesus Christ.

Well, I almost died. This girl broke down in tears and said, praise God, Dana, I've been praying for you that you'd be saved. I couldn't believe it.

But what I did feel at that moment is, you know, something she and I were in the same thing. It's only when I got back home and my Baptist friends told me a Catholic can't be a Christian that I got confused. But somehow I know you see, of course, you know, they're all different.

But she was a real believing Christian. And I just stays in my mind. I knew I'm part of something big.

She and I, we belong together, even though I never see her. But there we are. And so we're all touching eternity and some of these wonderful ways.

And so we find ourselves as young Christians standing in grace, as it says in Chapter five, with peace, with God standing in grace, by faith, looking through the little portal into glory. Oh, what a wonderful place and feeling as we go through difficult times, the love of God poured through our hearts by the Holy Spirit. What a great consolation to know the love of God.

Oh, love of God, so rich and pure. You just feel it. And you respond back.

And you know what that is? Well, that's first love. Love poured down. You say, I love you, too.

That's it. So simple. And then so you decide, OK, I'm going to serve God.

There's something beyond us. And that's about the time you hear that tape that Lance shared with us last night. You know, when he took us into the twilight zone in Christ and all he is, you know, is like the episode number seven of Star Wars.

I mean, there we are up in the heavens, forming new, new creations and all kinds of things going on. I mean, who can understand this mystery? But all creation is groaning for this thing to happen. And guess what? They're waiting for us to get finished.

To be glorified, it's groaning, they all please sons of God, come on, be perfected, be glorified. Come on, we're all waiting here. This baby's big in the pains of childbirth, waiting for this whole thing to happen in creation.

And guess what? When we see that we start groaning, too. We say, well, yeah, you know, I'm so glad I'm saved, but there's something more there in verse twenty three. We ourselves grown because we've tasted by the Holy Spirit.

That's glory, honey. I like that. I want some more.

We begin to groan as we ourselves sense that we're waiting eagerly for something. What is it? The redemption of these bodies. This body's already given me a hard time.

I'm just a young Christian, but my body is not always agreeing with the Lord. Oh, but the day comes. I'll be in the resurrection body, a glorious body.

I'll be able to walk through walls and eat fish. That's all we know. That's what Jesus did.

But that's a pretty good start. And so we're groaning. We're eagerly waiting.

And then, well, we get down to verse twenty six. In the same way, the spirit also helps our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should.

Now here is a sign that you're becoming aware of this sonship. They say eternal sonship. It's when you sense the Holy Spirit taken over.

You begin to sense that he is beginning to track you on a journey. Of course, he has been before you were even saved. You don't know that now the Holy Spirit helps our weakness.

We don't know how to pray as we should. Now, of course, we take that off. And when we have a problem, we don't know how to pray for it.

But actually, I think in the context here, Paul is saying when we hear the things of glory, when we hear this creation being perfected and set to liberty and when we hear what's going to happen, we see such a gap between where we are and what the plan is. We don't know how to pray for ourselves. How should I pray for myself? God, how am I going to get up to there when I'm right here? We don't know how to pray as we are, so we just go, which the Holy Spirit says, God, he needs more discipline.

The Holy Spirit interprets our groans. We say, oh, God, please. The one thing I can't stand is being poked by that goat.

Holy Spirit's translation. Hit him with the gold, Lord. In other words, the Holy Spirit knows and the father who looks down, sees the father who works all things according to his plan.

He looks down and there's the Holy Spirit inside of you. And you know what the Holy Spirit's praying. You know how tight you are with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit saying, Lord, touch me, discipline me, the Holy Spirit saying through you.

And the Holy Spirit's interceding and the Holy Spirit's helping you, and he's beginning to lift you and change you from glory to glory. And then we come, of course, to this verse 28, where we see the word purpose. We all know the verse.

We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose. Now, you know, some of you are just here first, maybe the first year, three years. You don't know.

I've been coming here 28 years, but for more than 20 of them, they locked me in an upper tower with the teenagers during the whole course of the week. I was there in the morning, in the evening, and they just locked me in there to see if the lions would eat me or if God was with me. I worked with the young people for years.

As a matter of fact, some of the young people are now here with kids who are now in the teenage group. Now, unfortunately, I've been with young people so much. I talk, young people talk.

Sometimes you can tell that because whenever you see Ellen over here, translating in her hair, stand straight up. It's because she has no idea what I'm saying. Star Wars episode seven.

She never heard. Now, at this point, I just want to say this as we are going and the Lord's opening the drapes of eternity before us, we suddenly become aware of what I call to the teenagers. This is why I presented this.

I have teenage talk that I can explain. We come to this door and it says eternity's carwash. You see, whosoever let him come.

And you come to this carwash and you say, OK, Lord, I come to you. I want to come to you. I want to serve you.

And then that chain that goes round and round and that chain locks onto your tire. Now, I don't know. Some of you don't drive.

You may not know this, but there are these automated carwashes that you can get into. You see, all you have to do is basically drive up. You can be a dummy.

You just drive up to the platform and then they say, please put it in neutral. Don't put the brake on. Don't try to steer.

We've got it from here. By God's love, you drive up there. Eternity's carwash.

He says, move up onto the ramp. Well, you did that of your own free will. That's the end.

Now, this thing comes around and hooks onto your tire. And then the Lord, the Holy Spirit says, just don't try to steer. Don't put on the brakes.

Here we go. Ladies and gentlemen, when you go into the carwash, you don't go backwards. Once you've started, you're going to go through.

You will go through the glorifying process. Sometimes you see, I have to, when I was speaking to them every year, I had to change it. So the second year, I would always talk about you get on the roller coaster and you get, you know, you go in there, you sit down.

This is fun. Then you hear click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click, click. And this chain is pulling you up.

Somebody says, Hey, I always say, can I get off? You're going up and you're hearing the click, click, click, click, click. Cause you're going to hear. Now this eternity's carwash gets ahold of you and you get in there and now you're going now and all things start coming at you.

You see, if somebody goes sprays a mist on you, then soap hits your windshield. Now you can't see anything. You turn on your windshield wiper.

It doesn't do any good. And then next thing you need, these big brushes are coming in big brushes start coming in, wiping along the side and everything. Then there's a big mop comes a big blower.

You put your brake on car still goes. The tires squeak, but the car and it's coming closer. That blower gets blows all of you a wax job.

The undercoating. I tell you when you get in there, there's no stopping and all things are working together for good. Now you begin.

I know every Christian wants to get in there. You see, you thought you were in there by your own free will. Wrong.

You look through the rear view mirror and you see a sign behind you. It says you were chosen from the foundation of the world. You thought you were going in by your own free will.

You see, there was an old preacher and I'm not sure who it was. I've read it several times, but there's one old preacher who explained this matter of free will and predestination this way. He says, when you stand outside the gate of salvation, it says, whosoever will may come.

You say, I will. And you get sick. You walk into the garden.

You look behind you in the same gate says chosen before the foundation of the world. Now you can't understand it, but when you look back at the rear view mirror, he's even written the words backwards. So you can read it in the mirror.

You've been chosen before the foundation of the world, and you're going through a carwash that isn't quick. So it'd be good to look in the word of God and see what the end of this whole thing is. Of course, do you know who's waiting for you on the other end? Do you know who's pulling the chain to bring you to himself? Do you know who's all glorious, full of love, smiling, drawing you to him from glory to glory, from tribulation through suffering, the whole process.

You wait till you get clear on the other side and the windshield starts to clear up. There's Jesus, blessed Jesus. You realize why you went through the whole thing, why the whole thing was worthwhile.

And then Paul goes on to say, and again, I use my simple words, but he says, you know something, that carwash was set up before you were ever born just for you. He's got a different one for everybody. It all has the same ending, but he has a different way, a different rooting by the amazing engineering of the Holy Spirit.

And he says, I set that up before you were ever born. As we look at this verse 29, we see, of course, the end of this whole process that we're going through for those whom he foreknew he predestined to become conformed to the image of his son so that he would be the first born among many brethren. You see, to put it one more time, and then I'll leave this analogy.

The Lord already has the perfect car. It's his son, glorious son. He was glorious before he ever came to earth.

Glorious is the son of God with the father. And he came down to earth and did such a perfect work. He is now the glorious son of man as well.

He is full of glory. He is the perfect image of God. He is exactly God's love, his beloved son.

This is, this is it. And God says, now, every car that I put into the wash is going to come out in the image of that son. You are predestined.

Now people have taken that whole thing about predestined to salvation, but this is talking about predestined to be like Jesus. You have been predestined to be conformed to that image of the invisible God, that image that our brother Lance was talking about last night, even the image of his son. Imagine that.

I know you see the gap, but you're early into the car wash. But he has a son. This is the pattern for all humanity.

This is what Adam was patterned after. And now this is the plan whom he foreknew those he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son so that he might be the firstborn. You see, you know something for our sake, can you believe it? Jesus went through a car wash too.

He was suffering. He suffered. He learned obedience to the things he suffered.

He even suffered death on the cross and came through in glory, declared the son of God by the resurrection from the dead by the Holy Spirit. He's been through it. He knows what it's like.

He did it for our sake. Now he wants you to do it for his sake. It's an amazing process when we begin to realize what's going on here.

When we see, of course, back in chapter five, you know, we read these verses, but let's look at it again in chapter five and verse three, four and five. Even the young Christian is aware that there's a process involving tribulation that we have to go through. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations because we know that the tribulations bring about perseverance and perseverance, proven character and proven character, hope and hope doesn't disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

We're already in a process, but we thought perhaps here in chapter five, could I put it this way? Paul shares the process as something of, by the way, a personal development. This is developing our character and our patience and our perseverance. And all of this is true.

But you see, the process is really not for our sake. It's for his sake. And we're being drawn through from glory to glory that we might be like him.

Of course, he wants us to be some of those many brethren that he's bringing to glory. And he's the first one through and he wants us to come through. And so here's a process.

And now we see on a higher level, it isn't just for our own good, you know, our own self-development, a character of patience, perseverance, love. It's for his sake. The father tells us you're going through for the sake of my son.

It's my son that I intend to glorify because he has a third glory going on here. There was the glory of the son of God, the glory of the son of man through the death and resurrection is a third glorious moment of satisfaction when the bride and the groom meet and marry. And there's a final glorious, beaming satisfaction that we always see in a little tight in every wedding of truly happy people.

There is that final satisfaction when these many sons have been brought to glory and they meet with Jesus. And these many brethren are now joined with him with the same nature, same character. Oh, this is there's going to be a tremendous outshining at that time of the glory of God.

And we wait even for that day. This process. In verse 30.

Even leaves us a little bit more dazzled, could I say regarding eternity's plan, because if we read verse 30, a right of chapter eight, we find out that the whole process was already determined and purposed in heaven. This whole redemptive process was processed, as it were, in eternity before we were ever born, before this world was ever created. It says in verse 30, those whom he predestined.

He also called. Now, all of these verbs are past tense, as in completed act. And those whom he called, he justified already and whom he justified.

He also glorified. And notice it does not say he will glorify because then this would make it a process of history. But this is talking about what's already been done in eternity.

You were predestined and you were called and you were justified and you were glorified in eternity. Now, you notice sanctified isn't there because in eternity, that's not part of the picture, but the whole thing was done because Jesus, the son of God, was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. That whole process, as it were, completed in eternity before it ever happened historically was because Jesus had the cross in his heart from before the foundation of the world.

He was the lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. And so we see that the cross was even in eternity's plan. In other words, salvation isn't just, oh, boy, I don't know what men have done, but they've gone all wrong.

Well, we have to come up with something. What can we come up with? As if it were an emergency afterthought in some great mysterious way. God would not have been able to glorify his son sufficiently if Adam had not sinned.

I'm not saying God made Adam sin. But what I'm saying is, if Adam hadn't sinned and Adam and Eve lived in the garden and they kept growing and eating the tree of life and everything, somehow the son of God had to be manifest. And in eternity, it was already seen it would come through his coming to earth and dying on the cross and doing an even greater thing than just joining with man in union.

There is this redeeming love that even the angels don't understand. Well, now we're dealing with something that's mysterious. I mean, when we're talking about being chosen and about all of these things that happened in eternity, it's so beyond us that it's a little hard to explain.

But we have some consolation. As we go through this process, through this calling and justifying and glory as we go through this here historically on earth, we see him. From glory to glory to glory, always the one in front of us, always the one we see more of his glory than we saw before.

As we go along this way, we see this now. So I want to say that for the individual Christian, just to put it simply, God's eternal purpose is sonship. And by sonship, I mean that in the end, we are of his nature in his image.

We are united with him. We are with him in his throne ruling. We are with him in his life as his bride.

Sonship is the eternal purpose of God for the Christian. Now, this was very important in Paul's burden when he shares this letter to the Romans, because, you see, there is a problem. There's a problem of understanding that the gospel is the gospel of salvation and getting saved and serving God in a sort of an outward way, in an outward love, a real love, but never coming to see this eternal purpose in us being saved.

Now, brothers and sisters, I don't need to convince you, I don't think that there's many churches today and many believers who, by God's grace, have been saved and they believe they're going to heaven when they die. But they have no idea why on earth they're here now, except to be good and maybe witness and bring other people to Jesus. But Paul does not want to leave the Christians there.

You see, because if a person is left there, then as soon as things go bad or wrong or they're suffering and there's groanings and there's all things coming at them and they don't realize the purpose of them, they may fall backward. They may become offended. They may quit the whole thing.

Why I got into this race, this Christian race, and then all of these impediments, all of these hurdles, all of these people holding me back. It's just not worth it. I quit when I die.

I'm going to heaven anyway. What's the big deal? Paul doesn't want the Christians to be settled in this outward understanding of serving God, of knowing God, of being called by God, just in an outward way. Now, you know, I have enjoyed and been blessed, so blessed by my trips to Russia.

But can I tell you my burden? The Lord is moving out there. So many people are being saved. But if they don't come to a fuller understanding of what God's purpose is in the church and in their own lives, the whole thing can come to nothing.

You know, the mysteries of the kingdom that Jesus speaks about in parables. I'll just sum up this. If you don't embrace the cross and its deeper work, then in the end, what you do will be corrupted by man's hand.

And as wonderful as the move of God at this beginning stage in these cities that I visited in Russia, you know. If they don't understand the cross and it's working in God's fuller purpose, they will institutionalize and they will grow and they will. Levin will come in and there'll be various corruptive elements that will destroy what was begun.

So don't don't try to go over to Russia on the next airplane. The what the Lord is doing there is wonderful. They're young Christians.

I didn't meet a Christian over there who was a Christian more than 10 years. They've all been recently born again. They all love the Lord.

And every time I go and they give me a chance to share, I share about the life of Christ, about his purpose. If they catch some of that, then there's hope that if they don't understand the cross is going to work in their lives, then they'll serve God and serve in the flesh and serve as best they can and exhaust themselves one after another, after another. You know how those things happen.

It's happened so many times down through history before. It may God do something deeper there where he has begun to do this work since the days of perestroika in Russia. Now, once again, we want to come back then and say this, because this is a very serious matter, this matter of coming into sonship.

And we know that there are scriptures, but they all point to the same thing. The realization of sonship comes. As the cross works more deeply in our lives now, the thing about those who love the Lord with first love, just simple believers gathered together, you see, they have learned how to deny themselves, take up the cross and follow Jesus in an outward way, that is, they have sacrificed themselves.

They have preached the gospel. They have served and witnessed, even though some people say, you're not my friend anymore. You know, they have suffered for their witness of Jesus.

That is the that is, of course, what the Bible means as far as taking up the cross in its outward way. But the Lord, of course, to bring us into sonship, he has to bring us from the place where we're not just justified, made righteous by faith. But in order to be sons, we have to be righteous in our nature.

Not just righteous because we're clothed with the robe of righteousness of Christ Jesus, but righteous because his righteous life is abiding in us. And that's what Romans 6, 7 and 8 is all about. The Lord is not satisfied with Christians who just say, well, praise God, I'm saved by grace.

And even though I still do carnal things, live carnally, act carnally, God just forgives me. That's not good enough. The Lord intends to to produce the image of Christ in us.

And that includes a nature of righteousness. And that includes sons who are able to do righteous works and who are able to live righteously. This is a process.

You know, you could see that Paul is implying a process, even in those first verses in chapter one, where he says, for in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. That first faith we talked about, that initial obedience of faith that believe the gospel that stand on the finished work. That is the beginning faith for every Christian.

Do you stand on the finished work of Christ? Do you know you're saved because he died for your sins? Do you know you're saved because he rose again from the dead? Do you stand on that by faith? Now, in

order for the Lord to bring us into sonship, there is a process where we have to go from faith to faith, that faith that stands in his finished work. You never leave that, but you add to it the faith in his indwelling life living through you. Now, there is a process.

Paul gives us a little autobiographical process here. It is the cross working into us, or if you prefer Hebrews chapter 12 terminology. We must be disciplined as sons.

We have to be child trained as sons. We have to learn how to live by his life and not by our life. And this is a process that is this car wash, as I'm saying that we have to go through.

If we would truly be realized inward sons when we think about sonship. I don't know. What do you think of that ruling and reigning from the throne, possessing all your possessions, your inheritance in Christ? All of these are, in fact, the product of sonship.

And what is sonship? You see, this is where we have Jesus as he walked on Earth as our example. What is sonship? It's an abiding relationship with the father where I do nothing of my own initiative. And I do everything that the father tells me to do.

Sonship in the Old Testament was especially pictured in Isaac. Isaac has no claim to fame whatsoever, except he was Abraham's kid. He received everything from Abraham.

He had to learn how to be a receiver. You know, sometimes rich kids don't want to take from their dad, but they always have to. Isaac had to learn how to say, thank you, dad.

And everybody said, oh, Isaac, how you doing? How's your rich dad doing? And Isaac always had to take people talking in the background. Yeah, that's Isaac. Yeah, well, he's really rich.

Yeah, he got it from his dad. Sonship is being a receiver. Sonship is being a steward of all of the riches you received from daddy.

So Jesus, when he walked the Earth, I think there's in the Gospel of John, eight times, seven or eight times where Jesus says to his disciples, I do nothing of my own initiative. I do nothing out of myself. The words that you hear are not my words, but the father speaking through me.

The works that I do are not my works, but the father working through me. Have you, Philip? Have you been with me so long and yet you do not know that it is the father in me? He who has seen me has seen the father. The works that I do is the father working in me.

Don't you see it yet? The disciples were saying, show us the father. Show us the father. Nothing could be clearer here with the son.

How could you find the father? Just look at the son. The life that he's living, it comes from the father. The power that is exerting comes from the father.

The words that he's speaking comes from the wisdom of the father. He's living in that vessel of sonship life. That is what sonship is.

That's where the Lord wants us to do nothing of our own initiative. To speak what he speaks, to love when he loves, to do what he does. This is sonship as it's worked out day by day upon this earth.

And so there is a process, a necessary process of undoing in our life. That we might call discipline or the work of the cross, where the Lord has to take us away from our complete reliance upon ourselves. And so we go through a season of discipline.

A season of undoing. Which of course leads to a season of his doing. And our abiding.

And a realization where somebody can look at you now as a Christian, even before you're perfected finally in glory. And somebody can look at you as a Christian and say, I see somebody in there. We, by the grace of God, we're too fearful to say.

But if somebody says, well, who is Jesus? We should be able to say, well, look at me and you see him. Who dares say that? Any takers? Well, it's a bold step and we're so far from that we dare not say that. But you see, this is what the process and its goal is all about.

Now, this process is engineered by the all wise God. He has such a comprehensive work in our lives, we couldn't possibly talk about it. It's different in everybody's life, but it usually involves three areas that you're going to be undone and then redone.

All right, you're going to be concentrated and reconstituted. And those three areas are first. In church life, in body life.

The Lord has a tool for you, your brothers and sisters. They start hammering away on you. They start rubbing with your corners.

They start doing the job on you. Our brother Stephen was talking about it and you could see from experience. When you're in the body of Christ is a lot of this stuff going on in our life, which we always feel held back, held down.

You know, why does this brother still think I am just a kid? And such things that we always feel like it's the saints that are dealing with us. And it's always the head. You see, the head has to deal with us.

We're in the body so full of ourselves that he's got to work on us, you see. The second area, of course, is our personal spiritual life. And here's where Paul and we will look for a little bit here in Romans 6, 7 and 8. Here's where Paul talks about his life.

And then the third area is the area of ministry. However, we are to serve in the body of Christ. The Lord Jesus comes up to us, the lowly ox, and says, take my yoke upon you and learn of me.

And he's got his head in his part of the ox, the yoke. And there's a second hole for your head. And you, like a dummy, say, OK, Lord.

And you put your head in. Well, what you're going to learn is going to be something. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.

First, you're going to learn he's meek and he's lowly. But you know what you actually learn first when we put our heads in the yoke. OK, we're going to serve God.

OK, Jesus is OK. Put your head in my yoke and I will teach you how to serve. OK, because Jesus is the evangelist.

He's an apostle. He's a prophet. He's a teacher.

He knows how to work with children. He knows how to be a giver. He knows how to be hospitable.

He knows how to be a prayer warrior. He just put your put your head right in here. You put your head in.

Of course, the first thing you learn is not of him. You learn of you because he wants to go the straight down the path. And you want to go over and eat the daisies over on the left.

So you could you turn left. He goes straight. Guess what happens? You go straight.

And then, you know, you're such a worker, such a servant of God. You've been serving a half hour. You say, I've got to take a month off.

But Jesus paid the blue ox. He keeps walking forward. And so you just have your arms limp and he's dragging you.

We learn so much about ourselves. We learn about our preferences, what kind of daisies we especially like. We find out how often we like to roll in poison ivy.

We find out all kinds of things. And through that whole process of unlearning our way. Now, you know.

Brothers and sisters, I know I make a great jest out of this whole thing. But, you know. I don't know that I know any real servant of God who hasn't learned by being unlearned.

Because I guess a servant of God has a certain ego already. And so, of course, they move right into something, you know, I can do this. Oh, praise God.

You know, and we have all kinds of plans how we're going to preach or how we're going to witness or how we're going to do things, how we're going to pray. I remember the brand new Christian there in that church. They used to have prayer meeting on Wednesday night, you know.

And I was such a new Christian. I didn't know how to pray, but I had something they didn't have. Morning and evening by Charles Spurgeon.

So I would read the morning and I'd read the evening and I went to prayer and I would say, oh, thou who are the lighthouse in the midst of the sea. And I would pray Spurgeon's things. I was a great prayer warrior.

Of course, most of his analogies about, you know, the ship out at sea. If people say, well, what's he talking about? We're in North Carolina, you know, but we all say, oh, we're going to serve the Lord. I got a good way.

Oh, I read a great sermon. I mean, when I was in the seminary and I studied for this whole thing, believe it or not. And while I was in seminary, you know, of course, I had to read all this, you know, technical books and everything.

But I'd be in the library spending hours a day and I'd sneak over to the sermon part of the library. Now, this seminary that I was in, they had a library of all the sermons of every great preacher you'd ever heard of. But my favorite was I pulled down these big, huge volumes of Spurgeon's sermons, open them up.

And by next Sunday, I was preaching the same thing. I don't know how I did that. That's my message now.

I don't put my hand in my chest and talk like this. You know, the Lord loved me through all that. But I had to unlearn this kind of thing.

That's not me. I tried to be Billy Graham, and then I saw somebody else tried to be like him. Well, the Lord is going to teach us by that yoke gently, humbly, that his way is the way he wants us to go.

That's an unlearning process, you know. But what I want us to see here, most importantly, is this process of his exchange in our personal spiritual life. Now, it sounds incredible to say that the Lord saves us and then we start to serve him and pray to him and read our Bibles.

And he sort of has to take that whole thing through the cross in order to bring it into a spiritual relationship. And indeed, we're talking about something that's, in the end, a great mystery. What does that mean in Galatians 220? I am crucified with Christ.

Nevertheless, I live. Well, are you dead or alive? Nevertheless, I live. Of course, Paul means he lives.

You and I live. We're Christians. We live.

God doesn't kill us. He doesn't annihilate our souls. Nevertheless, I live.

Yet not I. What does he mean? How can you live yet not you? This is one of these mysteries that Lance, mercifully, didn't step all over last night as he was stealing all my stuff. How do we live by his life? How does somebody come to this? You know, it's individually tailored for everybody. But it basically comes through a season of failures, of struggles, of dealing with your flesh, of praying and swearing to God, you'll never do it again.

And you do it again. You ask forgiveness again. And you just seem to have your flesh seems to be out of control.

And oh, what a terrible time. You feel condemned. You see other Christians all looking victorious.

Of course, they're going through the same thing you are. But they look they've got better makeup than you do. And you're really condemned.

And you wonder if you're really a Christian at all. You know, for most people to really come into sonship, that is into a life where the Lord's life is actually your life. There's a lot of undoing that goes on.

And, you know, Paul himself confesses autobiographically. That's what happened to him. Could we just look at six, seven and eight? Now, I know that all of you have read these things.

And so I'm not going to spend a lot of time, but just to see this principle, as it were before us. The first thing that's very important for us to understand is. To the degree that you understand you are united with Christ and his death and resurrection from the very moment you're a Christian to the degree you understand that to that degree, his life comes through you.

And Paul talks about this wonderful process in chapter six that I'm just going to point out three words, because to me, they they define what what this obedience of faith is all about. First of all, verse six, knowing that your old man was crucified with Christ. When you were baptized, you there was a testimony

that your old man was crucified and now you're living in the resurrection life of Christ.

Even as Christ died, you died with him. Even as Christ rose, you rose with him. Even as Christ died, your old man died.

Now, this has a corporate interpretation. It has an individual interpretation, and I think both of them are legitimate. Obviously, the old man was Adam.

He's dead. The new man is Christ. He's alive.

Do you know that? Do you stand in that? I'm amazed how many Christians I say who are struggling with something. I say, well, now, do you know who you are? And they say, well, yeah, I'm me. I'm trying to be a Christian.

I said, no, no, no, no. Do you know who you are? Do you know you're in Christ now? You're living by his life. You're living by his nature.

You're grafted into Christ. You're no longer in Adam. You've been chopped off from there.

Now you're in Christ. Do you know that many Christians don't understand that? But that's the first place you stand. I am a new creation in Christ.

I live by the life of Christ. I died with him. I rose with him to never die again.

I live in Christ, knowing that the old man was crucified with Christ. Then we come down to the verse 11 with the old English word that I still like the best. Even so, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus, knowing that you're alive in Christ.

Reckon on it. Do business with it. Pray with that.

Commit based on it. That you're dead to sin, but alive to God. You write the checks out.

I know I'm alive in Christ. I write this check. I will obey you today, God.

If you know that you're united with Christ in his life and you do that, the Lord honors that. That's faith. And you live by his life.

And the third word, which we find mentioned several times, but beginning in verse 13, you present you present your members as instruments of righteousness. Now, here is faith, brothers and sisters. Faith is based on what you know.

That is, you live in Christ. Faith reckons upon that in its actions. And the specific action that you daily take is I present my hands and my feet and my tongue and my mind as instruments of righteousness to Christ.

I am a slave of Christ and no longer to sin. I live by grace. I'm no longer under the law and I live in Christ and no longer in sin.

We take that stand. We live that way. Do you know that you're alive in Christ? Do you reckon on it even when you feel dead? But do you reckon on the fact you're alive in Christ? Do you present your bodies to God every day as a living instrument for God to use as a Christian? This is where we start.

This is where we stand. If we're not standing there, we'll get confused in the process that we'll have to go through. We'll become condemned.

Some Christians, they think they're not even saved. But no, we start right there. No, I'm alive in Christ.

I was buried with him in baptism and I came out and I'm alive in him. I reckon on it and I present myself. This is so important as a first step.

Now, very practically, having taken this step, the problem is. We're so used to doing things our own way. In chapter seven, we find Paul dealing with this reality as a Christian.

If you look at chapter seven, I went through and Mark all the times he said I or me, and it's 38 times. And that's our problem. All right, I want to serve God, but I know what's good.

I intend to do this, but I can't do that. I can't. I can't.

I love. I hate. There's nothing good in me.

It's me. I my me. I. Right.

We all begin to sound like those operatic sopranos. No matter how much you want to serve the Lord, me is in the way. And the Lord has to show us the me that's wrong and the me that's right.

I have found that there is nothing good in me that is in my flesh. You see, there's a part of I that's alive and there's a part of I that's your flesh. It's got to go.

And only the Lord can sort that out. For Paul, the Lord did this by the active, powerful word of God. The active, powerful word of God came to him in the wall.

And simply said. Don't cover. And that did Paul.

Let's read it in chapter seven. Let's look at a few verses here. Verses four through seven.

Now, Paul, the Christian, at least I believe this is a passage regarding his Christian life. In verse four, he says, Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the law through the body of Christ so that you might be joined to another to him who was raised from the dead in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

But now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound so that we serve in newness of the spirit and not in oldness of the letter. What shall we say, then, is the law sin? May it never be. On the contrary, I would not have come to no sin except through the law, for I would not have known about coveting if the law had not said you shall not cover it.

But the law did say that Paul said, well, I'm a Christian. I'm not going to come. And the more he said, I'm not going to cover it, the more he said, I like that Mercedes-Benz.

There was something inside him to say, I agree with the law. I should not cover it, but there's something inside of me that says I want I want. Give me, give me, give me.

And there was a separating of soul and spirit and a revealing of the thoughts and intents of the heart. You no longer can fool yourself about your inward life by saying, oh, I'm all sold out for God, because now the word of God is going in and separating and you're beginning to see the difference between your flesh and your spirit, what's really going on in your life. And you know this story.

We really don't have time to go through it, but you see, Paul says in the end, you know, I've discovered there's stuff inside of me. I, I, I just didn't even know about there is this sin principle inside of me that it's like runaway inside of me. I can't even do anything about it.

I'm my spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak. I can't help it. I don't want to do it, but I do it.

And then there's this principle of death. It's always working to me. I said, I'm going to do something, but I can't do it.

He ends up saying, oh, wretched man that I am, who's going to deliver me from this bondage. What am I going to do? I'm a Christian and I can't live the Christian life. I'm a Christian, but there's stuff going on inside me.

That's a war with God's will. What am I going to do? And the reason he says in chapter eight, verse one, there is therefore now no condemnation is because that's a lot of times where a lot of Christians get to. They say, that's it.

I'm condemned. That's it. But there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

And for the law of the spirit of life in Christ, Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. And now this law of the spirit of life is a principle that begins to be learned in our lives as we abide in him. He begins to give us a law within and the grace to obey the law.

We begin to walk in the spirit. In other words, he tells us what to do. We walk in the spirit.

We begin to set our mind on the things of the spirit. I didn't even know I had free will to do that. I thought my mind just had to roll as it wanted.

No, I can set my mind where I want on the flesh, on the spirit. I can set. I can.

He says you can and you do. He begins to renew your mind as you're walking in the spirit. There are deeds of the body that you have to deal with.

And it says the Holy Spirit mortified the deeds of the body when you also mortified the deeds of the body. And there's this whole walk in the spirit. Now, brothers and sisters, to me, I saw something new as I'm reading the book of Acts, and I saw the difference between being filled with the spirit and being full of the spirit.

Now, the Christians at Pentecost were filled with the spirit as the spirit came down. No doubt about it. They had gifts of the spirit.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit. But when it came time to choose seven men from among them, their qualification was they had to be full of the Holy Spirit. Now, obviously, being full of the Holy Spirit is talking about a state of character and of life, and it's different from the filling of the Holy Spirit, which comes in service for anointing or whatever reason.

But being full of the Holy Spirit is somebody who not only has this outward power of the Holy Spirit, but they have the inward life led by the Holy Spirit. Those who are led by the spirit are the sons of God. And when people come to the place where they're walking in the spirit, setting their mind on the things of the spirit, where they're dealing with the deeds of their body by the power of the Holy Spirit, their body is being quickened by the Holy Spirit.

These are people full of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, how could they ask for that qualification in Acts chapter six? Everybody is filled with the spirit, is full of the spirit, right? No. People are filled with the spirit by the grace of God.

They become full of the spirit as they walk with the Lord, as they abide in the Lord. And so we see, if I could leave you with a thought that sort of to me pictures this thing completely, it's this. It's abiding.

Sonship is living a righteous life by abiding in his life. A person goes through the undoing, but it comes into the doing, it does. Step by step, issue by issue, perhaps, but it comes in and we begin to learn to live by his spirit indwelling us.

He prunes us, his word speaks to us, and we bear more fruit because we're abiding. We're abiding. It's not the sense of, oh, I've got it now.

I'm the spirit filled man. I don't have to. It's a daily sense of dependence, just like Jesus had when he said, I do nothing of my own initiative.

Everything I do, the Father is doing through me. This is sonship walked out here on earth, a righteous life lived by abiding moment by moment. Finally, there's just two consolations that to me are tremendous.

As we walk in this process of undoing and of abiding, there's two great consolations. Number one, it's the first thing that happens to us is usually in the moment of our despair. In the moment of our failure is where the Lord shows us how much he loves us.

It's at the moment of failure that we become captured by his love. It was when Peter had failed the Lord that the Lord said, do you love me? And Peter, even though he couldn't say yes in a positive way, you all know that passage. Jesus, in effect, said, you know, Peter, I need you, Peter.

Go feed my sheep. There's nothing more precious he could have said to this failure. Peter, I need you.

Go feed my sheep. It's when Elijah fell down, wanted to take his life and ran to the caves of God and just was so wrought in depression. It's then that the Lord said to him, Elijah, I need you.

Go down and anoint Ezekiel. Go down and anoint Jehu. Go down and anoint Elijah.

There's more work for you to do. What a wonderful thing. I thought I thought I'd failed.

I thought I'd be forsaken by God. I thought I was on probation and I blew it. I don't know many servants of God who at some point in their life don't feel that they were truly disqualified.

And yet the Lord comes and says, when I say I love you, I mean it. I don't quit on you. And, you know, the Lord doesn't quit on you.

You may fail, rebel, you may be in a place of rebellion right now. You don't even want to hear these things. You don't want to be dealt with by God.

Well, he's got you in the car wash. You're going through. But, you know, it's in these moments you'd be surprised how the Lord comes to you and said, oh, how I love you.

Don't you know, my love for you has never grown cold. Don't you know that those I love, I rebuke. Don't you know I'm dealing with you as a son? Come on, come on, abide in me.

Let me abide in you. Come on now. The Lord is we find as a great consolation, our encourager, even in these times where we feel perhaps we've lost it.

I think of John there in the book of Revelation. You know, there he is on the Isle of Patmos, and he felt some charge for these seven churches out there. And when he saw this glorious Lord standing before those churches, he fell down like a dead man.

But Jesus came and said, no, come on, come on, come on, come on up here. Let me show you some things regarding glory. You know, at the very time he felt so disqualified.

Doesn't that happen in your life? Don't you realize sometimes when you come to the end of yourself? He says, oh, no, I just love you. I've always loved you with an everlasting love. You are mine.

That's what he said to Jacob. Can you imagine that? I've loved you forever, undying love. You're mine.

You can't go anywhere. I've got you. He never quits on us.

The second great consolation is when we realize. Because of that, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Who is he who condemns? It's Jesus who justifies. He's even interceding for me. So go ahead and condemn me if you want.

Who brings a charge against God's elect? Go ahead. But he's the one who's chosen. Who can separate us from the love of God? Paul says nothing.

This is where a son comes to. And this is where first love is enhanced by what I'm going to call. Captured first love.

You love the Lord with all your heart, your mind, your soul and strength, and you know you've been captured and there's nowhere else you can go. Has the Lord dealt with you as sons? Has the Lord shown you that he loves you? And that's why he's pulling you through this thing. Do you see there's nowhere you can go? I'd like us to sing, O love that will not let me go.

And then perhaps just have a few prayers as you feel led just to say that back to the Lord. Some of you I know are in a process, very difficult time, sufferings, inexplicable. And the Lord's doing something glorious.

Let's stand up. Let's sing this song.

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