

If anyone is wrestling with depression, I have good news for you: You're in the right place, for Romans 8 is the true antidote for depression. You see, when a person is going through depression, it is always in one of three areas. He is either haunted by something in his past, anxious about something in his future, or weighed down by something presently. Read on.....

Romans 8 is the perfect solution for each of these situations because verse 1 declares there is no condemnation concerning the past; verses 38-39 promise there can be no separation from God's love in the future; and verse 28 states that all things are working together for good in the present. Now if we believe this, then there's no room for depression, and if we'll embrace this truth, we will be free of depression (unless of course it is a true medical problem)

8:1 To the woman taken in the act of adultery, Jesus said, 'Where are your accusers? Go your way and sin no more, Jn. 8:10-11

So too, when we come in naked honesty before the Lord, saying, 'I know I'm a sinner, but I realize You are my Savior and what You did on the Cross is sufficient to pay the price for my sin,' then you can go your way.

'Wait a minute,' you protest. 'You're getting too grace-y, Jon. Yes, Jesus said, 'Go your way,' but He also said, 'and sin no more.' That's the key.'

Listen, precious people, I don't believe Jesus' tone with the woman taken in adultery was, 'I'll let you off the hook this time, lady. But next time – you'll be in big trouble, so don't do it again.' No, I believe His tone was, 'Go your way a free woman. By the Word I'm sharing with you, and the love I'm showing to you, I'm giving you liberation from your tendency to indulge your flesh, and freeing you to live in an entirely different lifestyle.' And I believe there was a smile on His face, not a frown in her face as He said it.

8:1 We're in Christ Jesus, folks. That's the key. The Lord said to Noah, 'Make a boat from resinous wood and seal it with tar, inside and out.' (Gen.6:14). The word "tar" or "pitch" is the same word used in the Old Testament for 'atonement', the ark is a perfect picture of our salvation – for when the rain began to fall, the Lord shut them in (Gen. 7:16) He didn't say, 'I'm going to put eight pegs on the outside of the ark, Noah. You and your family are to hang on for dear life, and as long as you hang on, you'll make it through.'

No, He said, 'I'm going to put you in.' So too with us. It's not a matter of holding on, hoping that if we can keep from sinning, we'll be OK. No, our Ark is Jesus Christ; and we are in Him. Therefore, there is no condemnation. No matter how rough the seas might be or how heavy the rain comes down, we're sealed, safe and secure.

So, we are "in Christ", with all of your sinful tendencies. Thus, when the Father looks on you, He doesn't see you with all your failing and shortcoming. No, He sees you robed with the righteousness of Christ Jesus (Is. 61:10) He doesn't see you in your sin; He sees you in His Son. Therefore, there's no condemnation whatsoever. I don't care where you've been, or how badly you've failed – whoever you are, wherever you are, there is no condemnation.

8:1 After realizing that only Jesus could set him free from the demands and the expectations of the Law (Rm. 7), Paul explodes with this understanding, as we'll see him mention the Spirit 19 times in Rom.8

8:2 The law of sin and death is comprised of 3 forces working in conjunction with each other: Satan, the flesh, and the world. Now in my own energy, I can take on any two. But I'm doomed by the combination of three.

If Satan and the world system were alive and well – but I didn't have a body, sin would have no pull on me.

If I have a body and if I am in the world – but there was no Satan, there would be no problem because Satan is the prince of this world (Jn 12:31), who activates the world system which plays on my flesh.

If I have a body and Satan is present – but there was no world system, Satan could not have access to me, because he would have no way to influence me.

If you are at the Tampa International Airport, you'll see planes sitting on the runway, not going anywhere because the law of gravity is keeping them on the ground. But as soon as their engines are turned on, the law of aerodynamics takes over. Gravity is still in effect, and still pulls on the planes, but there's a higher law, a more powerful force at work which allows them to overcome the law of gravity.

That's what Paul is saying. We're free from this law of sin and death by ...possibility thinking? No. By positive mental imaging? No. We're free by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. He lives in us, enabling us to fly high and overcome the law of sin and death.

8:3-4 The weakness of the Law lies in the fact that we can't keep it. Folks, you can write, 'I'm going to pray three hours every morning, in your journal. You can post, 'I will read my Bible three hours every night' on your fridge –but sooner or later you'll find the weakness lies not in those commitments, but in your own flesh. That's why Paul rejoices that God took care of the matter by sending His own Son – that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled not by us, but in us, and as the Spirit guides us spontaneously, leads us daily, corrects us constantly, and free us practically.

8:5-6 The question then becomes, 'Paul if this is so, if there's no condemnation, if we're free from rules and regulations, then why shouldn't I just continue on my carnal tendencies and fleshly activities?' 'Wait a minute,' Paul would say. 'To be carnally minded is death.' Want to know how to experience the stench of death in your life? Live carnally. What does it mean to live carnally? Jesus associated it with Gentiles who were concerned with nothing more than what they would eat, what they would wear and where they would go (Mt.6:31-32). A carnal person asks, 'Where can we eat now? What new hobby can we enjoy? What vacation can we take?'

You see, we think living in the flesh is synonymous with shooting heroin, or robbing a bank – but that's not the meaning primarily. To live in the flesh simply means to give priority to the things of the material realm.

Now why is that death? Because man was created in the image of God. God being a Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit – He created man as a trinity, only a lesser trinity. We are spirit, soul and body...

The spirit is the deepest part of you, the 'real' you. The soul is your mind and emotions. The body is the thing you live in temporarily.

When God created man, there was a beautiful connection between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God, as Adam and God walked together in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day (Gen3:8). But when Adam gave into his flesh and ate the forbidden fruit, he allowed his body –the material aspect of his nature - to assume predominance over his spirit, thereby severing his direct communion with God's Spirit.

8:7-8 With the soul – the mind- lodged between the spirit and the flesh, the question becomes; What is going to control my mind? Is it going to be the spirit, as my spirit is linked to God's Spirit? As the day unfolds, will I be a spiritual man? Or am I going to be a carnal, wondering, 'Where am I going to go? How am I going to be entertained? What am I going to eat?' Truly, if my body controls my thoughts, I am carnally minded and cannot please God.

'What's life about?' wondered Solomon. 'It must be about money.' So he gathered so much gold that even silver had no value in his Kingdom. Ever notice how it is the wealthy people in our society who end up taking drugs? Why is that? Because the ones who hit the top find out money isn't the answer, whereas the rest of us think that if we could just make more money, work harder, or invest more wisely we would be happy. Solomon knew better. He had more money than he knew what to do with, and still wasn't happy – so he thought happiness must lie in women.

He amassed 1,000 wives and concubines, but found they weren't the answer either. 'Happiness must be found in intellectual pursuit,' he decided. So he became a botanist, a biologist, an ichthyologist. He became so knowledgeable that his books were penned by the hundreds. And he became philosophical in such a way that people traveled from all over the world to hear him share his proverbs. But, after all this he concluded that much study wearies the flesh (Ecc. 12:12). The answer must be in partying, he

thought. So he brought in peacocks and apes from Africa, and the wine flowed freely during parties so lavish they would make Hollywood jealous. But it was still empty in his eyes. Deciding the answer to his restlessness must lie in power, he built his empire to be the most powerful empire of his day. Yet he remained empty.

Poor Solomon. Put yourself in his golden sandals. What frustration! All the power he could ever want, more money than he could even count, 1,000 of the most beautiful women at his beck and call, nonstop parties, education, philosophy – he had it all.

But here was his dilemma: It didn't satisfy. Whereas the average person thinks, 'I'm almost happy. If I can just get a bigger house, or a newer car, I know I'm going to be happy,' – Solomon was stuck. He was at the top. There was no bigger car to buy, no other woman to go after, no higher investment to make. He was at the top and he said, 'It's empty.'

And here little Paul comes along with his bowed legs, hooked nose, and bald-head, saying, 'it's real simple. To be carnally minded is death – but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.'

Brother Solomon finally did figure it out. After approximately twelve years of women, money, power, philosophy, he said, 'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man,' (Ecc 12:13) And from that time on, Solomon was known as 'The Preacher'.

I ask you this question; What has been ruling your soul? Has it been the flesh, or has it been the Spirit? If you're going to pursue the material and live for your flesh, you'll never be satisfied. But if you live for the Spirit, you'll know life and peace eternally and presently.

8:9 The word 'dwell' means 'to be at home'. Is the Spirit of God at home in you? Or is He grieved? If you're a believer, He's in you – without question. But is He at home in your life? Can He just kick back in the easy chair of your heart and say, 'I'm so glad to be in your life; I'm so glad you're Mine'? Or do you take Him to activities, listen to conversations, and involve yourself in stuff that makes Him uneasy? In writing about a believer who joined himself to a harlot, Paul said he was joining Christ Himself to the harlot (1 Cor. 6:15). So too, I suggest to you that, in these immoral days in which we live, Christians all too often rape the Lord, in a sense, by forcing Him into activities of which He wants no part. Would you think about this the next time you turn on TV, listen to that gossip, or go to that movie? Praise the Lord, there's no condemnation (Rom. 8:1) – but there needs to be a realization of what's going on. Not only will you experience death – missing out on life and peace, with your family paying the price for your carnality and its repercussions – but even more serious than that, you'll bring Jesus into the activity as well.

8:9 Now, although the Spirit may not be comfortable in your life, if you are a Christian, He is still in you. However, if Christ is not in you, you're not saved.

8:10-11 How are we to deal with these sinful tendencies, these carnal activities, habit and thoughts? Paul gives us the key: The Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead is in us, He'll love His life through us.

8:12-13 'I must mortify the deeds of the body,' some people say. 'I've got to crucify my flesh' – but it's impossible to crucify yourself. If you lay down on a cross and pound a nail through your wrist, even if you somehow endure the pain, you're only half crucified because you can't pound in the other nail. How do you mortify the deeds of the flesh? There's only one way: through the Spirit.

The Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant and had placed it in the temple of their fish god, Dagon. The next morning, the Philistine priests got up to find Dagon had fallen down before the Ark (1 Sam 5:3). They stood Dagon up and went their way. The next morning, they came in again, and there was Dagon, face down on the floor, with his head and hands cut off. Now, at this point, you would think the priests would have said, 'Something's fishy here. This isn't working.' But instead, they chose to side with Dagon. They stood him up, patched him together, and said, 'The ark's gotta go.'

Precious people, the way to gain victory over whatever it is you're struggling with is not to try to topple Dagon, but to bring in the Ark, for the Ark represents the Presence of God. Whatever you Dagon might be, here's the key: Bring in the Spirit of the Lord.

What does that mean? Just love the Lord. Get up tomorrow morning and before your feet hit the ground, drop to your knees and give your life to Him. When He whispers in your heart during coffee break, 'Pull away and talk with Me,' do it. When you're deciding which dial to press on your radio during lunch, just do what the Spirit tells you to do. Allow the Spirit of God to fill your heart, and you know what will happen? You'll lose interest in the stuff which dominated and controlled you – not because you worked on Dagon, but because you brought in the Ark.

That's why Romans 8 is so thrilling! Too many believers are trying to fight evil habits and tendencies on their own – and it's exhausting. If you walk into a dark room, you don't scream, karate chop, give teachings about, or rebuke the darkness.

You turn on the light.

8:14 Just as the Spirit of God gives you victory over the flesh, the Spirit of God will give you guidance in life. People struggle so hard with finding God's will, yet it's so simple.

They came to Augustine, saying, 'How do we find the will of God?' 'It's real simple,' Augustine replied. 'Love the Lord and do whatever you want.'

How could he say that? Because if we love the Lord, Ps. 37 says the Spirit will change the desires of our heart to conform to His will.

8:15-16 The word 'Abba' is Aramaic for 'Papa'. When Benjamin, my five-year-old says 'Dad, what do you want me to do today?' my answer is not, 'I'm not going to tell you.' Yet that's the way a lot of people see God. They think He gets a kick out of keeping us in the dark as long as possible.

'No,' says Paul. 'By the spirit of adoption, is our Papa. Therefore, there's no need to fear.'

8:17-18 As adopted sons, the suffering we experience presently is for the purpose of adapting us spiritually, and will one day disappear totally in light of the glory we will partake eternally.

8:19 The manifestation of the sons of God will take place when Jesus comes back, when we see Him, when we are made like Him when, at last we will be the kind of people we've longed to be.

8:20 The word 'vanity' means emptiness'. Pascal was right when he said there is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, for here, Paul tells us the creature was made subject to vanity, or emptiness, with a hole in his heart – and although we try to fill that hole with materialism sexual experience, or recreation, nothing can fill the emptiness but God.

8:21-22 Creation is hurting. Julie Andrews notwithstanding, the hills may be alive with the sound of music – but they're singing in a minor key.

Why? Because all creation was cursed when man sinned in the Garden of Eden. Consequently, the more you study nature, along with its beauty, the more you see its cruelty. We enjoy the delicate flower, but shudder at the devastating flood. Earthquakes and tornadoes, thunder and avalanches are as much a part of nature as gentle streams and rolling meadows.

That is why nature groans and waits for the day when the Kings comes back – for the day when the trees of the field will clap their hands (Is. 55:12)

8:23-24 Not only does nature groan environmentally, but we groan internally. Do you ever wake up in the morning, look in the mirror, and just groan? Our bodies are wearing out, folks. They're not what they once were, and not what they one day will be. We feel restricted, boxed in, because we are being prepared for the ages to come, for heaven.

8:26-27 I spent some time this week with a man in his early thirties who is on his deathbed. The body of this young man, once a good athlete and a vibrant father, is now racked by cancer. His family asked, understandably, 'Why? Why doesn't the Lord just take him home? Why the suffering? We prayed for his healing and that didn't happen. What's the Father doing?'

In those situations, you wonder. I understand the family saying, 'Take him home.' But what if, in these final days of our brother's difficulty and suffering, the Father is putting on the final touches of the inner person – shaping and molding what he will be for the next billion years in heaven? Is that what's happening? I don't know, for, like Paul, I know not how to pray. The only thing I do know is that I don't know.

Let us ever remember that while prayer is to be directed to God, it is not to be directing God. Most people, at least for part of their pilgrimage, try to direct the Lord, thinking that's what prayer is about. 'Let me explain the situation, Lord. Here's what you need to do...' we say with great piety and audacity. Jeremiah, a godly man to be sure, prayed, 'Save Your people, Lord. Restore the nation. Revive us.' 'Quiet yourself,' answered God. 'I will not hear your prayer, for I have determined that My people must be carried into Babylon, into captivity.' (Jer. 20:4) Thus, regardless how hard Jeremiah prayed, God had a different plan, for it was through their captivity that Judah was finally healed of her affinity for idolatry. 'We know not how to pray,' said Paul. We feel this as well, don't we?

Someone comes to us and says, 'Pray I'll get the job.' 'Pray this project will prosper.' Wait a minute. So many things I thought would be wonderful proved to be detrimental, a distraction, a curse; and so many things I thought would be terrible and awful proved to be a huge blessing.

The same is true nationally. It might be that the Lord wants to close us down. That's a possibility. Maybe the best thing that could happen to our country would be a collapse economically, politically, militarily – because that's what it might take to heal us spiritually. I don't know. I'm not God. Therefore, I'm not going to give Him direction on what He should or should not do. Instead, I just groan, 'Lord, You see what's going on in the nation. You see what's going on with that person. You see what's going on in the congregation. I don't know how to pray. I don't know what Your will is. But I just give it all to You to work out according to Your perfect and beautiful plan.'

Now, if we don't know how to pray, then why pray at all? Understand this; Prayer is not getting my will done in heaven. Prayer is getting God's will done on earth. It's not me giving directions to the Father, but rather me saying, 'Father direct me. I open the door for You to work. I hold up this need for You. I place this situation in Your hand'. I do this all through prayer because the Word tells us that God has chosen to work through prayer, and that if we do not pray we will limit what He would do, what He could do, what He desires to do (Js. 4:2)

Therefore, if I don't pray, I will never know if God got His way with Peter John, or in this congregation, or in our nation. But if I do pray and say, 'Lord, here's the situation. I'm not directing You, but I'm just looking to You to have Your will done' – then I can be at peace. Whatever happens, I know I played my part; I opened the door, and since the Father knows best, I can rest. The Spirit groans through me, the Son intercedes for me, and the Father will do what's right concerning me – but if I don't pray, I'll always wonder if things would have been different if I had.

8:28 We usually rewrite Rom. 8:28 to read; 'Most things', or 'Some things work together for good.' Paul says even though there's groaning and suffering as we're being adapted for heaven, know this; It's all working for good.

'We know all things work together for good,' said Paul. You see, it's not something we have to learn – it's something the Spirit witnesses in our hearts. No matter what's coming down, no matter what's going on – we know innately that all things are working together for good.

Jacob declared just the opposite. Famine was in the land. His wife, Rachel, was dead. He thought his beloved son, Joseph, was dead as well, His oldest son, Simeon, was being held hostage in Egypt. And the man in charge was saying, 'I will give you no more supplies until you bring your youngest son, Benjamin, to Egypt.' It was more than Jacob could bear. 'All things are working against me,' he said (Gen 42:36). But then what happened?

In the next chapter, he did indeed send Benjamin to Egypt. Why? I suggest it was because even though he was murmuring, complaining, and doubting, Jacob knew Benjamin would come back, that

things would work out, that everything would be OK. Otherwise, he never would have allowed Benjamin to go.

So too, in the time we have, like Jacob, said, 'Everything's working against me, even then we knew that wasn't true.

That's why Paul said, 'We know' – not 'I want you to know', not 'I'm going to teach you' – but 'We already know that all things are working for good.' By the Spirit we know this intuitively, and by our experience, we see how God has worked everything together for good previously. Therefore, we can trust Him to keep working for our good – and for His glory.

8:29-30 Suppose you had absolute foreknowledge. For you, playing the lottery wouldn't be gambling because you could pick the winning numbers with absolute certainty. So too with God. When He predestined you before the world began, He knew you would make it (Philip.1:6). Folks, God is not in heaven biting His nails saying, "Boy, I hope that gang in Calvary Chapel makes it." No, God foreknows, then He predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies.

It is tremendous news to me that when God looks at me, He sees a winner. Therefore, I know that everything happening to me is going to happen for good ultimately because of His perspective of me. Now, although He has predestined us, listen to what He says in Dt. 9 concerning His people: 'I'm choosing you. I'm going before you. I'm guaranteeing victory to you, but know this; 'It's not because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people,' (Dt.9:6)

What's a stiff-necked person? One who faces one direction, but walks in another. Thus, the Lord was saying, 'I know what you are, and when you come into the Promised Land and experience victories, watch out that you don't think they're because of your righteousness or spirituality. No, you are stiff-necked, hard-hearted, uncircumcised people. However, knowing you are but dust (and some are a lot dustier than others!)- I have compassion on you,' (Ps. 103:14).

I know God loves me. He's elected me. Therefore, He's going to see me through and usher me into eternity. At the same time however, I recognize it's not because of my righteousness or anything I am or have done which causes Him to elect me into the Kingdom. Quite the contrary. We are all trophies of His grace. Angels will scratch their heads with their wings and marvel perpetually at the grace and goodness God demonstrated in choosing a guy like me. You see, wanting to illustrate His grace to all of creation through all the ages to come, the Father chose not righteous people, but sinners and rebels and stiff-necked people like you and me.

'I don't get down on myself,' said Paul. 'I did that in my Romans 7 days when I was under the Law – religion, rules, and regulations. But now I realize I am a trophy of His grace, and that He, by His goodness and because of His big-heartedness, chose people like me in order that all eternity might marvel at His mercy.'

Well, if a person is indeed predestined, what choice does he have?' you ask. What about free will?' Picture with me two chess players...One is a master, the world's best. He knows hundreds of opening moves and closures. The other has played for only one week, and forgets which way the pawn goes, how the horse hops. These two players are engaged in a match – the master and the novice. Now, the novice has free will. He can move wherever he wants. But, by playing against the master, he's going to find that any move he makes is countered brilliantly. In the end, he will find himself boxed into a corner, surrounded by the master's men. Thus, although the novice is exercising his freedom – he really doesn't have a chance.

So too, as it relates to our freewill vs. god's election and predestination. Man has freewill – but he's boxed in because the Master will inevitably corner those He chooses and bring them into the Kingdom.

'Well, that's great,' you say, 'If you're apart of the chosen. What about the person who's not elected, not predestined?'

Jesus said in **John 3** ¹⁸"There is no judgment awaiting those who trust him. But those who do not trust him have already been judged for not believing in the only Son of God. ¹⁹Their judgment is based on this fact: The light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished. ²¹But those who do what is right come to the light gladly, so everyone can see that they are doing what God wants."

You see, the singular issue concerning predestination is not intellectual nor theological – it's moral. Through His fore knowledge, God sees the person who wants to continue to walk in darkness – and doesn't choose him. So too, before the foundations of the world. He saw those who, like you, wanted to walk in Light – and chose us.

8:30 As we saw in Romans 5, 'justified' means 'just as if I never sinned'.

8:30 The word 'glorified' is in the aorist tense – meaning it's taking place right now. This is great news! You see, Paul didn't say, 'Whom He justified, them He will glorify.' No, he said, 'Whom He justified, them He is glorifying right now'. Why? Because God – Who transcends the time/space continuum, God who is Light, God Who lives in the eternal now – sees our glorified state as if it has already taken place.

The implication for us? Suppose you knew the person sitting next to you was about to inherit 50 billion dollars next week. Not only that, but he would have the heart of a philanthropist as well. Wouldn't you be just a tad bit nicer to him? Understand this: The one you're sitting next to is richer than that. He or she is a joint-heir with Christ (Romans 8:17)

From our vantage, we all have a long way to go. But from God's perspective, our glorification is a done deal. Therefore, before we pick on each other, it would be wise to stop and look at each other through our Father's eyes.

8:31 In light of the fact that there's no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, in light of the fact that everything is working out for our good because of Christ, in light of the fact that we are already glorified from God's perspective, Paul finds himself speechless.

When Nathan told David that, although he wouldn't be able to build a Temple for the Lord, the Lord wanted to establish His royal line through David, David was amazed. 'What can I say?' he said (2 Samuel 7:18-20) – which was quite a question for David to ask, considering the Psalmist had a way with words, and was perhaps more skilled in expression than anyone else in history. Yet here he was, speechless in response to God's kindness to him.

Do you ever that way? The Lord touches you and ministers to you, gives you a verse in your devotional time, or impresses you with a truth as you're driving in your car, or looking at your grandchildren or wife – and you just become overwhelmed at the goodness and mercy of God.

I believe praise often reaches its highest point when we're speechless, blown away by His mercy and grace.

8:31 This verse literally reads, 'Since God is for us, who can be against us?' We have the tendency to think God is disappointed with us, Not true. God is for you. And He's for me. God views His people very highly, and loves His people very deeply. Why? Because He already sees the end product. We're already glorified in His eyes.

If God be for us, who would dare to be against us? Only one: Satan. But Satan is no problem because Satan is not God's counterpart. He's only a fallen angel, who equivalent is, perhaps Michael. God is so far above Satan, and so much greater than this world system that any power which comes against you, any problem which creeps up within you is no match for The One who says, 'I'm for you.'

God is for you- not because He has to be, but because He really likes you. 'Oh, you say, 'I know that sounds nice. It might even be true theologically. But you don't know where I've been personally. You don't know how weak I am.'"

About a week ago I was reading through the Gospel of John once more and I had to stop and chuckle. You see, the problem for a lot of us is, because we are so familiar with the stories in the Gospel, the Gospel loses its impact. I mean, think with me...

Two stories appear in John 2, both dealing with Jesus and a table. Around the first table, men have been drinking quite heartily – so much so that there was no wine left at the party. Around the second table, men were in the courtyard of the Temple, exchanging money into Jewish currency that they might buy doves, lambs and cattle to offer to Jehovah.

Jesus turned over the table in one of those vignettes. Which one? If you hadn't heard the story, you would say, 'It's obvious. He would be ticked off with the party-ers. He would overturn their table. He would drive them out.' But that's not what happened because everything Jesus did was opposite of what people expected Him to do. And the only reason His actions don't shock us is because we're so familiar with them. You see, if you didn't know the story, you would say, 'He dealt with the party-ers'. But in reality, He made them more wine, and overturned the tables of the outwardly –pious moneychangers.

Jesus is radical, folks. He caused the religious people of His day to be continually shocked and scandalized. They didn't know what to do with Him because He loved to be with real people – people who had struggled with life, people who knew they weren't all that great – people just like us.

8:32 The word 'spared' is used only one other place in Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. When Abraham took his 33 year old son, Isaac, to Mt. Moriah (today called Golgotha, or Calvary), God said, 'Abraham, lay not your hand upon the lad. Neither do anything unto him for now I know that you fear God seeing you have not withheld your son, My only son from Me,' (Gen 22:12). The word 'withheld' is the same word translated 'spared' here in Romans.

I suggest to you the reason God could pour out so many blessings on Abraham in so many ways was because Abraham was ready to sacrifice the one thing in His life that mattered most. In so doing, Abraham said, 'I'll plunge a knife into my son's chest, even through I don't understand because I love You, Father, more than I trust my ability to figure out what's going on.'

So too, if the thing that means the most to you – be it your wife, kids, house, car, job, future – doesn't matter at all to you in comparison to your relationship with your Father, God can pour out all kinds of blessings on you because they won't be distraction to you.

8:32 God is saying here, 'If I gave you My Son. I'm going to do what's good for you from this point on. You can be sure of that.'

Imagine giving your son \$10,000 a month for his allowance – and then one day him coming to you and saying, 'Dad, I need quarter for some milk at school.' If you are wealthy and generous enough to give your son \$10,000 – what would a quarter mean to you?

That is why Paul says, when God gave His Son, He proved His magnanimity, His generosity, His kindness. So why question what's going on presently? Anything He shares with us or withholds from us cannot begin to compare with what He's already given us in Christ.

8:32 Embedded in the phrase 'all things' is the idea 'all good things'. In other words, if it's a good thing, He'll give it to you, because He already gave you best in Christ Jesus.

8:33 "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." I'll tell you who will: Satan, the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10), points his finger at us constantly. (But not without God's permission.)

As Joshua, the high priest, stood in the presence of the Lord, his garments became filthy (Zechariah 3), because in God's presence, man's spirituality always appears as filthy rags (Is 64). Quick to exploit the situation, Satan pointed his finger at Joshua's sin. 'Is not this a stick I plucked out of the fire?' said the Lord, as Joshua's garments became dazzling white.

So too with us. We were little sticks headed for the fire of damnation. But the Lord plucked us out, robed us in His righteousness, and gave us the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Is.61)

'Look at his sin,' thunders Satan. 'What sin?' asks God. 'All I see is My Son.'

There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Then what were we doing on our knees this morning, confessing sin? Confession is the result of conviction, not condemnation. Conviction is the work of the Spirit. When He convicts me of sin, I say, 'Oh, Father, I realize this is wrong, I agree with You. And I thank You I'm forgiven.' Conviction draws me to the Father.

Condemnation, on the other hand drives me from the Father. Condemnation makes me say, 'I'm such a wretch. I can't pray and I sure can't go to church.'

When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, God asked him a simple question. He didn't say, 'Where were you? How could you? Why did you?' No, He simply said, 'Where are you?'

You see, the heart of the Father is always this: 'Where are you?'; not, 'Where have you been?'; not "what did you do?" – but 'Where are you right now? Take off those scratchy fig leaves and let Me cloak you with My righteousness.'

In Mark 16, we read that when Jesus ascended into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of the Father (16:19). This interests me because when you look at the Temple or the Tabernacle, you find no place for the priest to sit. There was a table to eat from, a lampstand to see by, a laver to wash in, an altar to sacrifice on – but there was no place to sit because the work of the Old Testament priest was never done. It went on and on and on.

But when the great High Priest, Jesus Christ died and said, 'It is finished' (John 19:30), He meant it. He went to the right hand of the Father and sat down.

When a person is tense and unsure of the outcome, he stands to his feet and paces. Jesus sits. The only record of Him standing in heaven is when He stood to welcome Stephen, the first martyr, home. (Acts 7:56). I love it!

8:35-37 Paul is telling you, and saying to me, 'God is for you. He'll never lay any charge against you. He doesn't come down on you. He'll give you every good thing freely because He already gave you the best in Jesus.' The question then becomes, why, if this be so, do we go through tribulation, famine, distress, nakedness, peril, sword? The answer is because we are like sheep (Ps 44). Sheep are easily picked off, easily put down, easily done in. It seems the Christian community has forgotten that it is comprised of lambs. We gear up, arm ourselves, and come out swinging. But the imagery is all-wrong. After all, which NFL football team goes by the Lambs? Which Marine corps unit would choose the lamb for its mascot?

'If they hated Me, they'll hate you,' Jesus said (Jn. 15:18). But here's the good news: In all these things we are more than conquerors. What does it mean to be more than a conqueror? It means that, instead of flexing our muscles politically, or marching in protest socially, we draw peoples' attention to an entirely different dimension spiritually. We're to influence positively – no question about it. But it's not our passion, our purpose, or our priority to conquer the system.

'Aren't we to be salt and light?' you ask.

'Yes, but salt is meant to be sprinkled. I had some clam chowder last night, and asked for some salt. Now, what if the waiter had said, 'You want salt? Here you go,' and proceeded to unscrew the lid and empty the shaker into my bowl. The chowder would have been ruined. So too with light. Do you appreciate it when an oncoming car shines its beams in your face? We wonder why the world doesn't listen to us. Could it be we put high beams in their face in our attempt to be light?

We're to be lambs. We're to be salt that's sprinkled to add flavor, create thirst, and bring healing. We're to be light that illuminates not dominates. And know this: from the world's perspective, we'll never win. If you don't understand this, you'll be frustrated, disillusioned, embittered. We're not conquerors. We're more than conquerors.

Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego were tossed into the fiery furnace. But while they were in it, even Nebuchadnezzar saw Jesus Christ in the fire with them! (Dan 3:25) Do the Nebuchadnezzars of this "world" look at us and say this about us, 'They went into the furnace without a fight, but somehow they're walking around! They're doing fine in their fire. We're the ones who are hurting', 'we're the ones who are in trouble'? Our testimony, the way we go through trials, tribulations have great opportunity to bring a multitude to Christ!

That's what it means to be more than conqueror!

8:38-39 Although we are 'accounted as sheep for the slaughter,' in the place of slaughter, we see the Savior and He will never leave us. We will never be separated from His love. Paul is elated by this – for if God be for us, who can be against us?