

# New Life: Integrated Not Separated

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Preacher: Rev. Jim Salladin

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Pray together as we stand. Father, as we come to your word, you set before us things that are so wonderful that their beauty surpasses our ability to grasp them.

And we ask that by your Holy Spirit, you would grant us just a little sense, a little vision, a little taste of your grace and of your glory and of your goodness, that our hearts may delight in you and that we may rejoice in you.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, friends, please take out your Bibles and turn them to page 944, Romans chapter 8 that was just read for us.

The passage that we're looking at tonight, the latter portion of Romans chapter 8, excuse me, is, it really has to be one of the most astonishing parts of the Bible.

You know, I mean, preachers are always saying that, but as I've been studying this chapter this week and over the last few weeks, I'm just again and again astonished by what's here in a way that's perhaps more profound even than is normally the case.

[ 1 : 3 5 ] And part of the reason that this passage is just so astonishing, there's lots of reasons. We could spend all day. We won't, but we could. One of the reasons that this passage is just so astonishing is that by the end of our reading, the Apostle Paul, who wrote the letter to the Romans, by the end of the reading, the Apostle Paul has taken some of the worst fears that plague us, just some of the worst fears that could possibly plague humanity, and he's set them aside.

I mean, if you read through it, fear of suffering, fear of death, fear of condemnation and judgment, fear of supernatural forces arrayed against us, fear of the past, fear of the future, all of them.

All of these fears that just plague us so often, that plague humanity, Paul just takes them, and he's able to set them aside. And the thing that's left in their place, I mean, you can't miss it as you read through, particularly verses 31 and onward.

The thing that replaces them is joy and gratitude and confidence and just this astonishing level of security before the Lord and courage, courage facing horrible, horrible suffering.

I mean, just glance down. Let me show you what I mean. I think you probably already know, but look at verse 31. What then shall we say to these things?

[ 3 : 1 8 ] If God is for us, who can be against us? Look at verse 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Verse 37. No, in all of these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure, I am certain, I am assured, and confident that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else, in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I almost want to just stop there. Because you listen to that and you hear the joy. I mean, do you hear the confidence? Do you hear that security? Do you hear the courage?

And part of what's going on here is that Paul's vision, Paul's clear perception of God's grace was so glorious and so profound before his eyes that they came to eclipse the things that naturally plague us and frighten us.

Paul's vision of the fact that God is for us, his clarity about that truth was so real and so profound that he gained such clarity and confidence about it that it was able to fill him with a security and therefore a courage that motivated the rest of his discipleship.

[ 5 : 07 ] And so as we come to this passage, part of what God is up to for us today is that we would see the way in which God is for us, the way in which God's grace is so much more powerful than all the things that frighten us is so that when we see it clearly we would be empowered to follow Christ with a kind of unprecedented courage.

So, as we look at this passage I want to ask three questions. First of all, what's God's goal for us? Where does God want to take us? Second question, how is he going to get us there?

Third question, how do we respond? Okay, so first of all, what's God's goal for us? You're never going to be able to understand why it is that Paul could be so joyful, so confident, so secure in the face of real suffering until you understand where God wants to take us.

Look at verse 29. Paul writes, for those whom God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that we might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Okay, what does that mean? It means at least this. It means that God's vision for humanity, for you, God's goal is the total renovation of humanity after the pattern of his Son, Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 38 ] Let me try to explain this just a little bit. You remember back at the beginning of the Bible, Genesis, Genesis chapters 1, 2, and 3, God created Adam and Eve, and Adam and Eve were meant to be, well, they were prototypes for humanity.

And God designed the prototypes for humanity with at least two objectives. One, Adam and Eve were designed to have just unfettered access to God relationally.

They were designed to love God entirely, and they were designed to be uniquely able to receive God's love with unfettered access.

The second thing that they were designed for is they were designed to be able to reflect God and reflect God's love to one another and to reflect God's love to the world around them.

Now, if you know the story of the Bible, you know that Adam and Eve rejected God, and that just messed everything up. It created this terrible breach between humanity and God.

[ 7 : 45 ] It created a wedge of separation between God and humanity. And because humanity was then cut off from God's love, humanity became unable to reflect God's love to other people and to the world.

And so what happened is the tragic story that we all know of humanity's history that it's just been kind of a string of broken, abusive relationships ever since. Now, when we get to the New Testament, when we get to Jesus, Jesus is God's second prototype for humanity.

The new model is much, much better than the first model. It's kind of humanity 2.0 or something like that. And when Jesus shows up, Jesus is the one human being who has unfettered access to God.

I mean, he's the eternal son of God. He loves God completely. He's able to live under the love of God completely. And because of that, Jesus is able to reflect God and represent God to the people around him and to the world.

And if you look through the ministry of Jesus, those two things will explain a lot of the phenomenon that happened around Jesus as he went about his ministry. All of that's background, but go back to verse 29.

[ 9 : 04 ] What's God's goal for humanity? What's God's goal for your life? It's this. God's goal for your life is to renovate you so that you are reshaped into the image of Jesus.

And on a broader scale, God's objective in salvation is to create a kind of new type of humanity. And it's a new type of humanity that's not patterned after Adam.

It's patterned upon Jesus. It's patterned on who Jesus is, his perfect access to God in love and his ability to reflect God's love to the people around him.

You kind of think of it this way, that the Son of God became what we are in order that we might become what he is. And now just stop there and consider that vision.

Consider that vision for your life. Consider that vision for humanity because it is quite simply the most glorious vision that could possibly be conceived for humanity. Because within humanity all through our story there has been this sense that we are created with this glorious dignity but at the same time a sense that we are ever reaching for something we cannot attain.

[ 10 : 18 ] There's this sense to which we reach for our goal, we reach for our purpose and we are always coming up short. And now our purpose is revealed.

God has said he comes to us to reshape us and renew us so that we can be a new type of humanity that lives in that perfect relationship of love with God and that perfect relationship of reflecting his glory to other people.

It's a glorious vision for humanity. It's a glorious vision for your life. And it starts now but it will not be completed. Now it will be completed in eternity and we will never tire of pursuing that goal.

Okay, so that's God's goal for our lives. How is he going to get us there? And here's the thing. Here's where you begin to see in this passage how Paul's confidence and assurance and security begins to just bubble over.

If you look at this passage God's strategy for getting us to that end goal is this. God invests everything he is in getting us there.

[ 11 : 34 ] The line that was going through my head all week is that I don't know if this will communicate but God's got skin in this game. God is fully invested.

The Father is invested. The Son is invested. And the Spirit is invested. Let me show you. First of all the Father. Look at verse 29 again in just the first few words.

For those whom he foreknew God also predestined. Focus on that word foreknew. I just think this is wonderful. When it says that God the Father foreknew us it doesn't just mean that God knew the future and knew there would be a group of people that would want to follow him.

It means something much more than that. It means something more glorious than that. It means that God knew us not just knew about us not just knew information about us but God knew us relationally.

It means that God didn't just foreknew us he foreloved us. He loved us before there was anything to love about us.

[ 12 : 42 ] God it means it means that long before the world was made and long before anything existed that we could call time somehow somehow in the mysterious reality of God God peered down the corridor of time and he saw his people if you belong to Jesus he saw you he saw his people and looking at his people there was something in God that moved him to love his people and it was that love that undeserved love before there was anything that we had done either to deserve it or not deserve it or to provoke it in any way God saw us and he was moved in love for us and that love for his people moved God to make a resolution that love in God moved him to decide to resolve to do everything necessary to save his people to do everything necessary to rescue them from their sin to do everything necessary to renovate his people and reshape us into the image of his glorious son Jesus Christ and that's why

Paul look at verse 30 that's why the confidence just begins to roll down this is like a staircase it's like a steep hill you get the snowball rolling just a bit and it just rolls down and those whom God predestined once he made the decision he also called them and those whom he called he also certainly justified and those whom he justified he also he saw them to the end he glorified them you see when God the Father resolves to do something he doesn't give up he gets it done and nothing stands in his way but it's not just the Father's plan it's also the Son look at verse 34 Paul asks the question who is to condemn Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of the Father and who indeed is interceding for us you may have heard of a guy called

John Bunyan he's the author of Pilgrim's Progress hopefully you've read it if you haven't put it on the list for years and years John Bunyan just wrestled with the fear of condemnation just in a deep part of who he was for years and years he he he was clear that God could never accept a person like him and so he was forever afraid frightened of judgment until one day one day he realized the reality of verse 34 and it changed his life for forever why did it change his life forever it changed his life because he realized John Bunyan realized that Jesus defends us from all condemnation that's what it means that Jesus is interceding for us go back to verse 34 think with Paul think through the logic who is to condemn us well Jesus

Christ is the one who died which means Jesus took upon himself all the condemnation that could possibly be attributed to us more than that Jesus Christ is the one who was raised back to life which means that Jesus defeated sin he defeated guilt he defeated death and more than that even Jesus is now sitting at God's right hand which means that Jesus holds within his hands all power and all authority over everything which means nothing can happen without his permission and when you put all that together if Jesus stands at the right hand of God as our defense then friends we have a strong and perfect plea it means that there is no one that could possibly condemn us if you belong to Jesus there is no one who could possibly succeed in condemning you Satan can't the law can't your own conscience can't nothing can because beside God there is

Jesus our great high priest and he guarantees us he guarantees if you belong to him that his status as the innocent son of God is continually transferred to you every moment that you breathe now can you see why John Bunyan's life was transformed because when he saw this reality the way he put it is my righteousness is in heaven when he saw that reality all fear of condemnation left and he was filled with courage to follow the Lord okay so the father's plan the son's defense and then the spirit's help look at verse 26 likewise the spirit helps us in our weakness for we do not know what we ought to pray but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words friends when you look at that verse i wonder if you can see just just how merciful our god is i say that because god has left nothing to chance here i mean you've got the father with this cosmic plan right and you've got the son defending us from all condemnation and as if that weren't enough as if that weren't enough the spirit comes alongside us and helps us in our most individual and smallest weakness i mean in the individual weakness of our lives the spirit comes and he helps us even there not just on the cosmic level but in our very personal individual level i mean if you know your heart at all and i hope you know your heart if you know your heart at all you know that you are not strong enough you are far too weak to follow the lord for any kind of length of time any kind of consistency and it seems to me that most christians feel tell me i don't know if you agree with this but it seems to me that most christians feel your weakness most most acutely when you try to pray you know i mean you don't know how to pray you end up babbling something silly i fall asleep all the time you know i don't know anybody that's satisfied with their prayer life but even in our weakness i mean even in our week and our silly prayers god's made provision for us god's spirit comes alongside us and he helps us in our most human weakness and how does he help us well look at verse 27 it says the spirit he searches the hearts to whom all hearts are open all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid that's what we prayed earlier the holy spirit knows our hearts intimately but at the same time he also knows the will of god the father and so the spirit comes into our hearts at the very deepest level of who we are at a level deeper than we can even articulate where with groanings too too deep for words the spirit is at work within our hearts reorienting us so that we come to desire the same things that god desires so that even when we don't know what to pray at least the christian can kneel down and pray that essential prayer that from which all other prayer comes forth thy will be done not my will but thine be done you remember jesus in gethsemane father take this cup from me i don't want to go through this but then comes that essential prayer nevertheless not my will but thine be done that's exactly what the spirit works within our hearts the spirit one of the ways the spirit conforms us to the image of jesus is by reorienting us so that our desires

[ 20 : 58 ] matches jesus's desires and the first thing that first place you see that happening in your life is in prayer okay can you begin to see why paul is so confident because when you put together the father's plan the son's defense and the spirit's help when you put all of that together you see that when this passage says that god is for us it's not just rhetoric god is all in in order to save us and what god decides and resolves to do and what god puts into action cannot be thwarted and that's why if you belong to jesus there is nothing that can ultimately stand against you so how do we respond friends we respond the same way paul did this is the dynamic that motivated him toward a courageous type of discipleship when paul saw the grace of god and the generosity of god that god is for us it provoked within him instead of fear and all of the things that paralyze us it provoked within paul and within the christian a joyful grateful courage to pursue god and god's purposes with everything inside us friends that i can put it this way the response the response when you see god's mercy is to invest everything you have in god's purposes it's the best investment that could possibly be made why do i say that two reasons first reason is this all the risk in following god and his purposes for your life all the risk is short term and all the gain is certain all the risk is short term look at verse 35 who shall separate us from the love of christ shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword we have to be very clear here according to paul if you follow jesus if you follow jesus you can be certain that you will suffer and i'm aware that there's a lot of us here right now who are suffering profoundly and the none nothing in these verses is meant to minimize the reality and the severity and the pain and even the evil of suffering and yet by the same token this passage is meant to show us that all the suffering that is so intense right now that is so horrible none of it will ultimately win if you belong to jesus it will not have final say ultimately it will be temporary and it's not only that it will be temporary it will have no power to ultimately separate us from the love of christ but even beyond that according to this passage god will actually use suffering one of the ways god redeems our suffering is by using it to reshape us into the image of jesus think about jesus for a moment did jesus's sufferings ultimately thwart god's plan for his life no no in the in the wisdom of god somehow jesus's sufferings god was powerful enough to use jesus's suffering to actually promote and contribute to god's final end for jesus and if you belong to jesus that is true for you as well when we suffer god will redeem it in part by using it to renovate our hearts and that's the point of verse 28 verse 28 is not meant to minimize or cheapen suffering

it's meant to give us hope in the midst of it for we know that for those who love god all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose and that leads us to the second reason why the response to all this is to fully invest in god's purpose all the long term gain is certain let me just read verse 37 to 39 again know in all these things if we belong to jesus we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for i am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of god in christ jesus our lord all the long term gain is certain nothing can thwart god and therefore if you belong to jesus nothing nothing can thwart god's purpose for your life he will get you if you belong to him he will get you to the point where one day in eternity you will perfectly receive god's fatherly affection and you will perfectly love him and all your deepest desires will be will be satisfied and you will perfectly reflect god to those around you and you will contribute to others joy as they contribute to yours the long term gain if you follow jesus is certain i said at the beginning that this passage is remarkable partially because paul takes some of the worst fears that plague us and he's able to set them aside not because they're not real not because they're not significant not because we do not because we somehow avoid these things but he's able to set aside fear of suffering and death and condemnation and fear of supernatural realm and fear of the future and the past he's able to set all of them aside because he can see that with god is for him god and his grace and his mercy and his gospel is far more powerful than all of those things and if you belong to jesus that is true for you and let by the power of the holy spirit allow your heart to rejoice in that allow your heart to rejoice in that and allow it to motivate you to follow jesus with everything inside you with a kind of joyful courage looking for that day when we will see him and in that day we will become like him and if you do not know jesus consider just consider you've got to find out if this is true because there is no greater purpose that you could possibly possibly design for yourself than to know god and his love and to be united with his son jesus christ forever let's pray please keep the