

**SAFE AND SECURE
PURE CONSCIENCE**

Romans 8:5-17

I have titled this message “Pure Conscience.”

Romans 8:5-17:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

“Safe and Secure” -- that’s the name of our present teaching series. Seven messages, all from Romans 8 -- **How to live securely in an unsafe world.** We are taking note of this massive teaching in scripture – Romans 8 – this mountain peak, if you will, in all of scripture, where **Paul makes an all-out assault on insecurity.** Every form which insecurity can take is dealt with in this chapter: external insecurity, internal insecurity, emotional, spiritual, physical, past, present, future. And it’s all brought

to a perspective of “now,” that you would not just theoretically know about security, but that you would experience it as children of God in this moment.

Here is the key to understanding the “nowness” of this teaching. The Holy Spirit is dominant throughout this chapter. Wayne Grudem gives us a wonderful definition. He tells us that the Holy Spirit manifests the active presence of God. Let me say that again. It’s important. **The Holy Spirit manifests the active presence of God.**

We understand that God is present everywhere. God is always with us. God is always present. There is nowhere we can go where God is not. Yet, we are not always aware of his presence and he’s not always manifesting his kingdom. But the Holy Spirit manifests his active presence.

Understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit, living in the fullness of the Spirit of God helps us to experience all that God intends to do and all that we are in the Lord. That’s what’s really evident in the verses that we just read.

We are dealing with this overall theme of security. The Holy Spirit manifests the presence of God. My goal in each of these messages is to give you a mental trigger. Last week we laid the foundation. It was a bit of a thicker message. Today will be shallow, I hope. You’ll just be able to skim along. That was supposed to be a little funny, okay? I’ve already lost you. Stay with me.

Don’t miss the impact of last week’s teaching and that truth, because it’s foundational and it’s so significant. Look at the notes. I’m not recommending that because I taught it, but verses 1-4 of Romans 8 are foundational to our daily life. Here’s a simple truth: **At the heart of all insecurity is condemnation, and that condemnation in every form is removed in Jesus Christ.**

So, you feel insecure in your marriage? There is a threat of condemnation that that marriage will be condemned? Condemnation is removed in Christ. You say, “Oh, you are guaranteeing that my marriage will be saved?” No, no, it’s not that simple. We are going to deal with some of that this week and in our next study. But understand that all of the fear that rolls in upon us when we experience condemnation is *literally* removed in Jesus Christ.

So, a mental trigger. This week: “A Pure Conscience.” **I want to connect the idea of how the Holy Spirit uses our conscience to help us live out our identity in Christ.** That’s a mouthful. Some of our Riverside people just went to Israel. Our missions team leaders, Berthude and Priscilla, went with Mark and Grace and some family members. They had an amazing time. They came back and told me about the Jerusalem Syndrome. Have you heard of the Jerusalem Syndrome? This is a real

condition, where people go to Jerusalem and when they leave they think they are literally Jesus. There are thousands of people who go to Jerusalem, they leave, and they think they're Jesus. So Bertrhude and Priscilla told me when they got on the plane to leave, they were like, "Who are you?" They did a little identity check.

I was thinking about this. You know, it's not far off from something really valuable. We want to act like Jesus. Wouldn't it be great if everyone who comes to Riverside and gets involved in our community acted like Jesus? We'd have this "Riverside Syndrome?" Here's the problem: We don't want you to literally think you are Jesus, because then you're crazy. But we want you to be Christ-like. We want you to be full of the Spirit of God, living and acting like Jesus. That's really what's at the heart of this passage. It's about identity. It's what Jesse was talking about when he was saying that's one of the three main targets for our young people -- to help them know who they are in Jesus Christ.

Well, Paul instructs us here that the Holy Spirit is living in the Christian. The Holy Spirit is bearing witness with the heart of the Christian saying, "You are loved by God. You are a son. You are a daughter. You are a co-heir with Jesus." I don't want you to be offended, ladies, by the idea of sonship, or that Paul calls us all sons. There is really a legal reason for that, because in ancient times that brought you into the full inheritance. That's what Paul is saying.

But last week he was saying in verses 1-4 that legally your status with God has changed when you come into Christ. **When you trust in Jesus Christ your position with God changes. You are brought into peace with God, Romans 5:1. You are seen in God's eyes as righteous in Christ Jesus, no longer condemned because of sin. But these verses build on that foundation to talk to you about how to experience that identity - how to take your legal status and move from that new position into the experience of living out your true identity in Jesus Christ.**

Very simply, Paul challenges us and says with this new identity you have a new mindset. Look at verse 5, where he sets this theme: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." The Christian no longer has his or her mind set on the things of the flesh. **What does he mean by flesh?** There are three biblical uses of the word, flesh. It's very simple. It's not complicated.

- One is your physical tissue. Sometimes when you read the word "flesh" in scripture, it's just talking about your cells.

- Secondly, sometimes it's talking about all that is human, merely human; not supernatural, not spiritual, but human. The phrase "flesh and blood" – when you find that in scripture, it's emphasizing the humanness of it as opposed to the spiritual or the supernatural.
- Then there's a third use, which kind of builds on the first two. It's the sinful inclination of humanity; our sinful nature, our inclination to, our desire for, or propensity toward sin.

I think it's that third definition that Paul is using here in Romans 8. He is saying, "Set your mind, not on that which is human and inclined toward sin, but set your mind on the things of God, on the things of the Spirit."

During Christmas I talked to my brother. He was telling me about this coffee mug that he got. It's called an Ember. Have you heard about an Ember? He actually has an app on his phone where he sets the temperature of his coffee in his coffee mug. He puts his mug on a charger, he downloads an app, and he tells me now (I had no idea) that the perfect temperature for coffee is 137 degrees. But he said he likes his at 139, so he sets his phone.

I thought this was amazing, so I wanted to give one to Adam Greenfield and Adam Pizarro, because they are like family to me. Then I found out how much they cost. But one day I was in Starbucks and I found them for half off, so I bought one and thought they could share it. It's in my office. Then I felt guilty, so I said, "No, I've got to get a second one." But when I went back, it was such a good deal that they were gone. So if someone wants to give a second one to Adam and Adam, I'll give the first. Just kidding. Someone will probably go do that. Don't do it. Set your mind.

I use this illustration because I don't want to say that it's fleshly to be so consumed with our coffee intake that we have to control the temperature from beginning to end. I don't want to say that, because my brother actually owns two – one for the office and one at home. But just maybe it indicates that we are really consumed with the flesh. Obviously, there's nothing wrong with it. We'll enjoy it. We'll laugh about it. I am fussy about what mug I drink my coffee from. I get it. I'm fussy about my coffee, not nearly as precocious as Adam Pizarro, but close. I love you, Adam. Set your mind.

Now, stay with me here, because if I tell you right now at this point: "Set your mind on the Spirit," it could be misleading. In a sense, verse 5 tells us that. But when Paul builds out the argument, the nuance is a little different. More accurately, this is what Paul says. You only have two options. Your mind is either set on the Spirit or set on the flesh. If you are in Christ, it is set on the Spirit. You have

a new mindset. Then he makes it vividly clear. He says, “If you are in Christ, the Spirit is in you, and if the Spirit is not in you, then you are not in Christ.” What he means by that is: You can’t come to faith in Jesus without the Holy Spirit coming in and giving new life, new breath.

Paul’s assumption is not that the Christian now has a choice to make. He doesn’t want to give you that choice. His assumption is that the Spirit is in you and your mind is set on the Spirit. But at the same time (and this is the nuance of it) he is pushing you to evaluate: **Are you living according to your identity? Are you walking according to the Spirit? Is your mind set on the things of the Spirit?** That is why I have titled this message: “A Pure Conscience.” Because I think this is the easiest way for us to understand the passage. This is certainly the easiest way for me to get ahold of this passage and apply it. Here is the application I want to make.

We have within us a conscience, given by God, telling us right from wrong. And when we come to Christ, and we put our faith in him, our conscience is cleaned. It’s washed. The condemnation that is on us is removed because of what Jesus has done. The judgment I deserve because of my sin is removed because Jesus has paid for my sin. My conscience is cleansed.

Now, it’s not a perfect device within me, but the Spirit of God breathes on my conscience and it’s being renewed as I grow in him. My conscience is coming more and more every day to really reflect the will of God. It is so helpful for me to say, “I want to keep a clean conscience.”

- **Step #1: My conscience is clean because of what Jesus has done.**
- **Step #2: As I live, I just don’t want to tolerate any rebellion against God, even a low grade attitude of sin or lust or greed. When the Holy Spirit comes in and prompts me and pushes the conscience to say, “Don’t go there, don’t do that, don’t look at that,” I want to obey that. I want a mind that’s set on the Spirit.**

What happens is, the moment we disobey, the conscience is grieved. We are not going through these mental steps, but our minds are not set on the Spirit practically and functionally. Then it’s amazing how we kind of live at a place where our identity is still in Christ, we are still saved, it’s not like we are no longer Christians, but we are not experiencing and living out the sonship that is really ours.

You say, “Well, Brian, is this like works?” No, it’s not like we’re earning it. **We are going to fail.** We are going to violate our conscience. We are going to sin. I’m not encouraging it, but it will happen,

right? So what do we do? **Well, we go back to Step 1: There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. I confess my sin. I receive forgiveness. Then I say, “No, no, no. I am going forward. I’m going to keep walking with the Lord with a clean conscience.”**

I’m giving you three points, just an overview of this section. Here they are:

I. The Vision.

II. The War.

III. The Delight.

I. The Vision (verses 6-11).

The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. When we walk with God, full of the Spirit, the blessing of God is life and peace. I believe that means peace in our relationship with God, but also Paul is really trying to drill down here and help us experience it right now. He’s talking about a wholeness that we experience, and a vitality that we experience by the indwelling presence of God.

II. The War.

“...if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” He tells us that there is a battle that’s still going on, and that we put to death sin, and we do it by the Spirit of God. We don’t do it in the flesh. We don’t do it with our human power, our human abilities. We do it with the power of God. Then #3:

III. The Delight.

“You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons.” The Holy Spirit is in you. This is your identity. I am loved by God. We sang it today. He is a good, good Father. I cry out, “Abba Father” in the most

intimate terms. I am worshipping, knowing God as my heavenly Father, and that is the delight of my identity as I live and walk it out.

I. The Vision.

Let's turn to Proverbs, chapter 3, verses 1-2.

*My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments,
for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you.*

What do you see there in verse 2? **Life and peace.** Do you see those two words? You can circle them in your mind, circle them in your Bible. Now, how do you get that life and peace, according to Proverbs 3, verses 1-2? By keeping the commandments of God. Oh, wait a minute! Okay! Romans 8:1-4: What the law, what the commandments were powerless to do because of the weakness of my sinful nature, God did by the power of the Spirit in me. Do you see it?

In Old Testament times, God's law was given to us. The Old Testament recipient was to take that law by faith, and trusting in God, that was the revelation he or she had to live out to follow God and experience life and peace. Now, the Holy Spirit is in you, doing what's described here in Proverbs 3, verses 3-4:

*Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favor and good success
in the sight of God...*

That, my friends, is exactly what the Holy Spirit does when he comes in. He takes the truth of God. He binds it around your neck. He writes it on your heart. **You have a new identity in Jesus Christ, and that identity is the Spirit of God living within you, bearing witness that you are a child of God. You belong to God.** You are a co-heir with Christ and his truth is written on your heart. Your very desires, your deepest affections are being impacted, molded, renewed, and shaped by the Spirit

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of God. Verse 4: “So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.” He is describing here life and peace. Verses 5-8:

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Be not wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.*

You could just lay this over Romans 8. This is the activity of the Spirit of God in you. The flesh cannot please God. It's hostile to God. But the Spirit of the Lord in you leads you to live a life pleasing to God, fearing the Lord – that is a reverent worship of desiring to honor him with your life. Moving forward, verses 8-10:

*It will be healing to your flesh
and refreshment to your bones.
Honor the LORD with your wealth
and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
then your barns will be filled with plenty,
and your vats will be bursting with wine.*

He is saying to trust God with all that you are. Follow him and you'll know his life and peace. The problem is, because of the weakness of the flesh, because of the weakness of the sinful nature, we weren't able to do this. The good news is that Jesus Christ came in human flesh to take our sin upon himself to free us from that bondage. So in Romans 8, Paul can say, “You did not receive the spirit of slavery, but the Spirit of sonship.”

Friends, think about this for a moment. To walk in the Spirit, your identity is changed. You are already in Christ. **You need a vision for life and peace.** If all I give you is a command, if all I do is tell you that you have to pray, you cannot do this, you cannot go here -- it will not bring life. **The Spirit of God wants to birth in you, wants to bring to fruition, a vision for life and peace as his Spirit lives in you.** That's the first point. The second is:

II. There is a war going on.

“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” “So, Brian, you are telling me the Spirit is in me. He is writing God’s truth on my heart. He has given me a vision for living according to my new identity. It’s a vision of life and peace. Okay. Does that mean everything always goes well for me?” No. In fact, the very last verse we read today, verse 17, tells us: “... provided you suffer with Christ so that you might be glorified with him.”

Let me just pause here for a moment and fill out this little gap so that there’s no misunderstanding. Here’s what happens. If you are in Christ, all sin in your life committed by you and committed against you is paid for. The condemnation is removed. Now, we are still called on to share in the sufferings of Christ. There are times where God calls on us. He brings us to a point and says, “Listen, I have a redemptive purpose to work out through you, and there is going to be difficulty that I call you to go through. But the good news is it’s not random. It’s not without meaning. It’s according to my purpose, and it has a redemptive purpose.”

So that brings us to the war, which is: “Okay, if God’s Spirit is living within me, writing God’s truth on my heart, I still have to put sin to death on a daily basis. That is a battle and it’s a war and it’s one I can’t do in my human ability.” I have about three minutes to finish this message and I want to challenge every person right now on this second point. If there is sin in your life, a stronghold like sexual sin, pornography, sexual addiction, if there is a stronghold in terms of the love of reputation, success, greed, love of money – whatever that area may be -- if you got alone with me and really got honest and said, “Brian, listen, the truth is that I feel powerless against this foe,” I want to tell you that is completely biblical.

The enemy of your soul cannot be defeated by your own power. The good news of Romans 8 is not: If you will defeat that enemy, then you’ll be a child of God. **The good news is: Jesus Christ has defeated that enemy.** You are no longer condemned and now you want to live it, right? “I don’t want to live in slavery to this. I don’t want to live under this. But God, I can’t get free of it. Help me!” **Learning to wait on the Spirit of God and to trust in God and to understand it is by the power of God that we overcome is what it means to be a son or daughter.**

I have a very powerful Father. When my oldest son was a little guy I used to jog. Those days are long gone. But one day I was out jogging with him in a baby stroller and a pit bull came after us. I

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had a spiritual experience in that moment. It scared me so badly. The owner came out and chased the dog. This dog was coming after me. I ran like a three minute mile, pushing a stroller. When I got home I said, "Son, are you okay?" He was fine! I asked, "What were you thinking?" He was like, "I knew you would take care of the dog." I was thinking, "No way was I taking care of that dog. That dog was going to eat me for lunch!"

Well, you have a Father that takes care of the dog. **Everything happens according to his plan. His ways are perfect in your life.** But Christian, please, many of us are living this lie. Because of time, I'm going to stop here. I think that maybe this is the pivotal point for you and me. **Don't fall into the trap of thinking, "Okay, I have to defeat this sin in order to be a child of God." Christ has defeated it. You must learn that your victory is found in Christ. You are killing it. You are fighting it with all that you are, but you understand, "I can't win this in my fleshly power. I'm going to wait on God. I'm going to trust in him. I'm going to keep seeking him. I'm not going to make peace with the sin. I'm going to fight it, but understand that my victory comes in the gospel, in Christ. That is critical to me, because I want to live and experience and walk out my identity."**

I want to ask you to bow your head.