

The Simplicity of Belief Romans: Various

Romans 13
Romans 14
Psalm 89:1-11

Intro

This week I decided that instead of working our way through a specific passage in Romans we would maybe step back and take a broader view of a simple principle that Paul is teaching here, and this is something that for me at least has become a rallying cry of the faith, which is as the title of the message this morning says, "The Simplicity of Belief." It seems to me one of the biggest problems we have in the faith today, is an over complication of that faith. One of the major aspects in which we as believers tend to over-complicate the faith is in the very thing that Jim talked about last week. It is in the area of works, or perceived acts of obedience. It seems that we as humans, who live in this physical realm often struggle with the idea of the spiritual, we want to take spiritual things and make them tangible, make them physical. What I mean by this, is that it would seem that the predominate view within all of Christendom is focused upon what we can do for God. When the reality is, as Jim explained last week, we are called to rest, and trust in he who has accomplished our salvation and faith.

An Issue of Faith

I think we struggle with the concept of the spiritual indwelling of God's people. We as his chosen, are holy and blameless not because we are good, but because God has made us holy, righteous, and just, by the blood of Jesus Christ. In many ways there is this sense, that if we are not constantly striving, constantly pushing, seeking to live righteous holy lives then we have failed. But the reality is, in all things we have already failed, for even any perceived righteous acts can be driven out of selfish motivations. We see this most prevalent with our Reformed brothers and sisters, with their concerns of covenant keeping, being driven toward an understanding of the law and covenant that drives one to seek a semblance of holiness, but the real issue here for those who look to the law as a rule, and a guide in their christian life, is they are not relying on the spirit which God has given.

So it becomes an issue of trust, and issue of understanding the works of the spirit. A dear friend of mine struggled for years with this concept, and the core is a lack of trust in the spirits work. There is this idea, and concept that we need to set forth for ourselves limits, boundaries, and laws to suppress the sinful flesh, because without such our flesh will run wild toward sin. But I ask, where is the spirit in this? Throughout our entire journey through the book of Romans we have not seen Paul pushing the Gentile and Jewish believers toward the law, but rather the opposite, because, as he instructs them..they have the spirit.

The Heart of the Matter

Looking toward an outside source to reign in sin, or to guide in works of righteousness, is to not trust in the work that Christ has done fully and completely on your behalf, and at its core is a denial of the power of the holy spirit which God has given to all who believe. So, it becomes an issue of faith...and I don't mean that it is necessarily an issue of salvation itself, though, it very well may be, but what I am talking about today, is an issue of trust. Are you resting in what God has done, or do you still feel that you must strive to add to the righteousness that he has given you? Let me put it the way Paul puts it in chapter 13 that we read this morning, God's righteous law demands that there are certain things you shall not do, do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet, do not bear false witness, and there is away that each and every one of us can accomplish this rather simply...except Christ showed us that it is so much more then the physical aspect of this law, but what God is really looking at his the heart.

Matthew 5:21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that who ever is angry at his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. I think its pretty easy to not murder...but losing our temper, being angry at one another, not forgiving one another....that is something we are all guilty of. Verse 27 “ You have heard it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery, but I say unto you that who ever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” This is more then just a sexual sin, but includes lusting and coveting in general, desiring something we don't, or can't have, obsessing over the fact we can't or don't have it. The issue really isn't about whether or not we can follow the law as it is written, even unbelievers can do that...the issue is the heart, the motivation, and how that is played out in the lives of God's people. Paul doesn't point those who he is writing to, to the law...he says, in verse 9 of chapter 13, Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. Christian love is a reflection of the love which was first given to us, God has first loved us, that he sent his Son to die so that we may be reconciled, drawn, and brought into his presence, and we who have been given such a love, should be driven by love toward one another.

And where does this love come from? What is the driving force of this love for one another? Is it the law? Or the Spirit? Do you see this distinction here? This is not a redistribution of the law, but something entirely new, for God is working personally, in each and every individual for whom he has died, through the spirit to will and do that which is pleasing to him, out of a great love for him. No longer do we need an external list of regulations to guide us in this life, for we have the living spirit indwelling working through us and in us to love as God loves, a sacrificial love toward one another, a love that seeks the best in the other, not in ourselves. That is the whole driving point of Paul's teaching in chapter 13 and 14 here, putting yourself aside for the sake of your brother and sister. Out of love, and concern seek that which is beneficial for one another. Through these 2 chapters what does Paul point to as a rule and guide in dealing with these issues of dietary laws, sabbath days, things offered to idols? He points to the conscience of the believer.

What Feels Right

At a risk of sounding a bit trite, what Paul is saying here, is do what feels right. Now we are all sovereign grace people here, understanding that the heart is deceitfully wicked, and we have all seen the memes of the individual saying..just follow your heart, then the next picture is the heart...and the heart says...murder!” So if this is true, then how can Paul point us to our conscience as a guide? TO basically say, do what feels right? IT is simply because he knows and he understands that those who have been saved, have been given a new heart, a heart capable, willing, and able to love and serve God, and we have all been given the spirit who works in us to will and to do that which is right. Paul is resting on the simple fact that God's people will seek the best for one another, and that the spirit will work through our conscience to guide us in how we should act, how we should live, and how we should treat one another. The simplicity of the faith, is the fact that God works in us to will and to do that which he desires us to do. Look what he says in chapter 14, verse 2 “Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.” God is working through the conscience of each individual to determine the proper outcome. We touched on this a little a few weeks ago as we went through this passage.

As we read through such things we must remember that the core issue is not the action itself, but the heart from which that action flows. We are all individuals from different backgrounds and experiences each with our own struggles, our own sins, and temptations. What can be a temptation for one, may very well not be for another. The example here that Paul is instructing has to do with the eating of food offered to idols. Some are convicted in such a way that their conscience does not allow them to eat any meat that they know has been offered to an idol, then there are others who have no qualms about it seeing and understanding that an idol is nothing, therefore the sacrifice is nothing. But understanding that each person has their own struggles, there were likely some who had come out of that idol worship, and seeing that meat which had been offered to idols as being tied back to something that they want to have no part in, so they decide not to partake at all, for them it has ties back to festivities, feasts, and celebrations they once were involved in. The spirit knowing that this can have ties back to sinful behavior, ties back to the old life that they have been called out of, works in them conviction to flee this very thing that maybe a temptation for them. It is the principle that Jesus set up on the sermon on the mount, if your eyes offend, pluck it out for it is better to enter into the kingdom of God without an eye.

But there are those who have not come from that background, who do not have that history, who go to the store, buy the meat and carry on with their day. Neither is more righteous, neither is more holy than the other, both are God's servant and is operating as the spirit leads through the conscience of the individual. So Paul instructs all of us, because of love for one another, we must be wary and sensitive to these differences, for we should not through our freedom knowingly cause a brother or sister in Christ to stumble.

No Room for Complacency.

All that being said though, there is no room for complacency in the faith. It seems that mankind always tends towards extremes, seems to answer one problem by creating another. We must be careful that we do not fall into this trap of answering against one side or the other by responding to harshly. By that I mean, there can be a tendency of reacting to legalism, and a law centered belief system by thinking that nothing we do matters. If all has been fulfilled in God, then there is no need for us to strive for good works to please him...its the let go and let God mind set, or also known as the mindset that Paul refuted...should we sin so that grace may abound? But here is the kicker in all of this, if we have the spirit, it will fight against that complacency as well, God will not let his children sit idle, for it is the spirit working in us to will and to do. So the real danger of a person dealing with complacency in the faith, is the threat of no spiritual conviction, and if no spirit, no true faith. You see the issue here? On one swing of the pendulum you have the rigid legalistic law minded individual who has replaced the spirits work with rules and regulations to create a sense, or type of faithfulness. This system of christian understanding is in danger of creating a people who seek righteousness through their works, and may very well not have the spirit. The complete opposite falls into apathy and complacency believing they are free in the spirit...but there is no working of the spirit, again proving out a lack of true faith.

The Gift of the Spirit

Back in chapter 8 Paul says, "There is therefor now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit." So we can see Paul's rebuttal here against the law minded individual who believes they must do certain actions, and certain things to be right with God, eat certain foods, observe certain days, etc. But Christ has fulfilled all those things on the behalf of those who believe and has given each of his children his holy spirit.

Continuing on in chapter 8, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit. God has fulfilled the righteous requirements necessary to reconcile us to him, he has justified his children, by his righteousness, we are seen as righteous. But this righteousness is not been accomplished so that we may just sit back...no as Paul writes, we walk in the spirit...there is an action there, a movement. The spirit works within us, through conviction, and desires working in our hearts and minds so that we walk in this faith accomplishing the good pleasure of God's purpose and will for us. And this is what I mean by the title of today's message.. the Simplicity of the Faith. God requires movement, God requires his children to do things, though he has accomplished in and of himself all that is needed for our salvation, and our righteousness, he has not done so for us to just sit back and wait for his return

Though we may no longer need to strive to fulfill a physical law requirement, we not have the spirit and Christ written on our hearts that works in us to will and to do those things which are pleasing to him. There is a freedom in resting in that reality, understanding that we are all sinners saved by grace, who have no chance or ability to work in ourselves righteousness. Paul called the mosaic law, the ministry of death, in verse 2 here of chapter 8 he says it is the law of sin and death. We are no longer bound under the judgment of God's righteous law, we have been set free from its necessity, and its condemnation for one greater than Moses has come and fulfilled it on our behalf, and laid to the account of his people the necessary righteousness to be reconciled to God. As I have already stated this morning, I am not arguing for this idea of sitting on the sidelines and letting this world just pass by, but I think that most of Christians today do not understand, nor trust the work of the spirit enough. Almost every church gathering across every denomination focus' upon your works, drives you try harder, be better, do more because it is your necessary good work for righteousness. And in one level they are not entirely wrong, we should strive to those things, but our striving is not based on our physical ability, but on the spirit working in us to do so.

The Spirit's Work

We need to trust and rest in the spirit of God, knowing and understanding we have working in us the very presence of God himself, a direct communion with him. I remember Pastor Vic telling of his own conversion experience, and the key point in his retelling is the incessant nagging, and grip that the holy spirit had upon his heart...he couldn't flee the conviction, and even after that work of grace, the spirit's work continued, driving him into the ministry, he said no matter how much he may not have wanted to he could not escape the call that God had put on his heart. My experience is similar, I wrestled for a time against standing up here and preaching... I argued who am I to do this? I am forgetful, shy, introverted... I can't possibly take on the role of a pastor. But I would hear, in my own voice in my head the counter argument...who else is going to? You can do this because God will give you what you need. Then the story of Jonah would pop into my head, and I would realize I was fleeing what God was calling me for...the spirit was working in my to will and to do according to God's purpose and calling. The spirit, if you have it..will not let you lay idle and complacent, and we as believers need to rest and understand that the spirit is active, and works in the lives of God's children.

We don't need to force good works out of anyone, we don't need to push anyone toward works of righteousness, if a person is a true believer, they have Jesus Christ himself through the spirit working on their hearts and minds. Another example I have of this very thing, is a dear friend of mine, the same who struggled with the concept of resting in the spirits work, who sought rules and regulations as a buffet against sinful desires and actions, would at times feel the need that maybe somewhere else had the answers he was seeking, and he began looking elsewhere, Joined the Catholics for awhile, then came back when the emptiness was revealed, he went and joined one or 2 others over the course of a few years...and each and every time my answer to him was, I will not pursue you to seek to persuade you back, because I trusted that the holy spirit would do that work. I saw these moments as tests of the faith as he was seeking to find some answers..but ultimately it was learning to trust in the spirits work. I did not need to argue with him against those belief systems, I remained a friend, listened, and talked, praying and believing that God would work in his heart that he would see the errors of that action..and it never took long and he would return. I think God used all of these experiences to help him learn the role and work of the spirit in his own life, so he can now understand, and rest in that, no longer seeking a system that drives him toward a semblance of righteousness, but rather rest in the righteousness he has been given by Christ.

God Calls us to Himself

And that is the whole point here, God calls us to himself, and works in us to will and to do as he purposed and planned. He enables us to believe, and gives us the desire to do that which is pleasing to him. For the believer, this is not a forced issue, but a desire. Those who love God will seek to serve, and seek his purpose and will because we love him who first loved us. In this faith there is an exhortation, a call to good works, but it is not to gain merit or favor, but rather they flow naturally from a heart that loves God...and it is God working through you to do so as Paul wrote in Philippians 2:13, I was going to just go over there and read that verse, but as always its best to look at full context and as I was looking to where to start reading we just have to go back to verse 1, because it is all just so good. (read Philippians 2:1-13) Our consolation, our rest, is in the work that Christ has done in our behalf, and he did not do that work to just leave us on the sidelines, but continues to work in us to will and to do according to his good pleasure. This is the key to understanding our faith and the spirit's work in the lives of each of God's children. Though we rest in him, and though we can rest in the spirits work, there is still work to be done, but that work is done by the spirit, out of love for Christ who died so that we may be brought into the presence of God.

The Call to Believe

So we are to simply repent and believe, and the same God who works in us his salvation, grants us a new heart able to reflect the love that was given to us to those around us as a beacon of God's righteousness and love reaching out to a dark and sinful world with the same call that the spirit worked in us, repent of your sin and rebellion against God and believe. Lay aside your works, and striving for righteousness and rest in the one who has given his righteousness to you. I can say that knowing that in each of Gods children the spirit works in us to not be complacent believers, and hearers, but doers also. May God be pleased to give you this rest, to see the simplicity of this faith, may he grant repentance and belief to those who may not fully trust or understand his mercy and grace, who have not yet been brought near and into this rest.