

Week 10 Sermon Series In His Footsteps/ Jesus Brings Freedom

September 6, 2025

Opening Monologue

Welcome back to our sermon series, “Walking in His Footsteps.” The Gospels of Jesus Christ are the cornerstone of the New Testament—without them, Christianity stands on nothing. Praise God, Jesus is alive!

This week’s sermon, titled “Jesus Brings Freedom,” explores a profound question: Why did the Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years when the journey to the Promised Land should have taken only 30 days? The author of Hebrews provides the answer: “So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, “Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.”’ So, I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest.”’ (Hebrews 3:7-11)

Here’s the raw and real truth: Sin will never let you rest. It grinds you down, wearing you out physically and emotionally. This Sunday, we’ll meet a woman from John 8 who was trapped in sin until she encountered Jesus. The religious leaders wanted to stone her, but Jesus intervened, and one by one, her accusers walked away.

Join us this Sunday as we explore what it means to walk in freedom and stay vigilant against the enslavement of sin. Be encouraged and challenged by the transformative power of God’s Word!

As Jesus said: “I do not condemn you... go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:11).

Blessings in Christ!

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Key Sermon Texts

Hebrews 3:7-11

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews%203%3A7-11%20&version=NIV>

John 8:6-11

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%208%3A6-11&version=NIV>

John 3:16-17

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203%3A16-17&version=NIV>

Romans 7:14-24

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%207%3A14-24&version=NIV>

Deeper Reflection on Freedom in John 8:1-11 and the Broader New Testament

The story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 is a profound snapshot of Jesus' ministry, encapsulating His revolutionary approach to sin, grace, and human dignity. At its core, this encounter reveals Jesus as the embodiment of God's mercy, challenging the rigid legalism of the religious leaders while offering a path to genuine liberation. The Pharisees and teachers of the law drag the woman before Jesus not out of zeal for justice, but to trap Him—testing whether He would uphold the Mosaic Law's prescription of stoning (from Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22) or defy Roman

authority by endorsing execution. Jesus' response is masterful: He bends down to write on the ground (a gesture whose exact meaning remains mysterious—perhaps symbolizing the finger of God writing the law, as in Exodus 31:18, or simply a pause to diffuse tension), then declares, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” This flips the script, exposing the hypocrisy of her accusers and forcing them to confront their own sinfulness. One by one, they depart, leaving the woman alone with Jesus.

In this moment, Jesus' words to her—“Neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin”—strike a delicate balance. He does not minimize her sin; adultery is a serious breach of covenant and community, reflective of deeper spiritual unfaithfulness (as echoed in prophetic imagery like Hosea). Yet, He refuses to condemn her, aligning with His mission statement in John 3:17: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” This non-condemnation is not cheap grace—it's an invitation to transformation. Jesus frees her from the immediate threat of death and the weight of public shame, but He calls her to “leave your life of sin,” implying a break from the patterns that ensnared her. Here, freedom isn't license to continue in wrongdoing; it's empowerment to walk in newness, unburdened by the past.

This episode ties seamlessly into the broader Gospel narrative, where Jesus consistently demonstrates that true freedom comes through encounter with Him. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), we see parallels in stories like the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12), where Jesus first forgives sins before physical restoration, showing that spiritual liberation precedes outward change. Or consider the woman at the well in John 4: a Samaritan caught in serial relationships, whom Jesus confronts with truth (“You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband”) yet offers “living water” that quenches eternal thirst. These encounters reveal Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 61:1-2, quoted in Luke 4:18-19): “The Spirit of the Lord is on me... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and release for the oppressed.” In John's Gospel specifically, this freedom motif escalates in the same chapter: John 8:31-36, where Jesus declares, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Sin is portrayed as slavery—a “stronghold” that deceives and dominates, much like the NT later describes demonic influences or fleshly desires

as fortresses to be demolished

2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Jesus contrasts this with the freedom of sonship in God's family, where truth (His word) liberates from deception.

Expanding to the entire New Testament, this concept of freedom from sin's bondage is a cornerstone of apostolic teaching, rooted in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Paul, in Romans 6-8, unpacks it vividly: Through baptism into Christ's death, believers die to sin and are raised to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Sin's power is broken because "the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). This isn't freedom to sin, but freedom from its mastery—strongholds like addiction, bitterness, or lust lose their grip as the Holy Spirit empowers righteous living. Galatians 5:1 echoes this: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Here, Paul warns against reverting to legalism (the "yoke" of the law) or license (indulging the flesh), advocating instead for a life led by the Spirit, producing fruit like love and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

In Hebrews, freedom is tied to Jesus as the perfect high priest who offers "once for all" atonement (Hebrews 10:10-14), cleansing consciences from dead works to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). This liberates from the fear of death and ongoing guilt (Hebrews 2:15), which often fuel sin's cycles. James adds a practical dimension: True religion involves keeping oneself "unstained from the world" (James 1:27), while 1 Peter urges believers to live as free people but not use freedom as a cover for evil (1 Peter 2:16). Revelation culminates this theme, portraying ultimate freedom in the new creation, where sin's strongholds are eradicated, and God's people dwell in unshakable liberty (Revelation 21:3-4).

Ultimately, this NT vision of freedom is holistic—spiritual, emotional, relational. Like the adulterous woman, we're all caught in sin's web (Romans 3:23), deserving judgment yet met with grace. Jesus doesn't condemn because He will bear that condemnation on the cross (Isaiah 53:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Our response? To "go and sin no more," not out of fear, but gratitude. This freedom dismantles strongholds by

replacing them with God's stronghold: His love, which casts out fear (1 John 4:18) and empowers victory (1 Corinthians 15:57). In a world of shame and chains, this truth invites us to step into light, uncondemned and unbound. (1)

Commentary on Main Scriptures

John 8:1-11

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. Scribes (the teachers of the law) often gathered in the outer court of the temple to teach the crowds of worshipers, so it was natural for Jesus to be there. The religious leaders did not bring this woman to Jesus to promote justice; they used her to try to trap Jesus. (The others involved in this attempt simply mingled with the crowd; see a similar trap in Mark 12:13–17.) Though indignant toward this woman's sin, the religious leaders brought her to Jesus with political, not spiritual, motives in mind. They forgot the obvious fact that catching someone in the very act of adultery involves catching two people. Their devaluation of the woman (while ignoring the man's sin) made her no more than a pawn in their efforts to trap Jesus. How unfortunate that they were so quick to point out the sins of another and so blind to their own sins—especially the sin of not recognizing and accepting their own Messiah. But Jesus was about to teach them a lesson they wouldn't forget.

DOUBLE STANDARD

The details of this event are painfully common. Traditionally, women have borne an undue burden of blame for sins in which men participated equally. Today, radical feminism shifts the balance of blame to men. However, placing more blame on one person than the other covers a hidden motive: blaming others shifts the load of our own guilt. God stands against double or separate standards for women and men. He rejects the hypocrisy that holds others to a different standard than we hold for ourselves. When we accept our own blame, we take the first step toward experiencing forgiveness.

8:4-6 They said to him, “ ... the law ... commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to

test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. The Jewish leaders had already disregarded the law by arresting the woman without the man. The law required that both parties to adultery be put to death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22) and specified stoning in the case of a betrothed virgin (Deuteronomy 22:23, but see 22:24 for an important condition). But the proceedings before Jesus had little to do with justice. The leaders were using the woman's sin as an opportunity to trick Jesus and destroy his credibility with the people. If Jesus were to say that the woman should not be stoned, they could accuse him of violating Moses' law. If he were to urge them to execute her, they would report him to the Romans, who did not permit the Jews to carry out their own executions (18:31). But Jesus was aware of their intentions and did not give either of the expected responses to the dilemma they placed before him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

What was Jesus writing in the dirt on the ground? Many have speculated: maybe he was listing the names of those present who had committed adultery (and scaring them to death that he knew it); he might have been listing names and various sins that each person had committed; maybe he was writing out the Ten Commandments to point out that no one could claim to be without sin. In any case, Jesus made the accusers uncomfortable.

8:7-8 "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." The religious leaders could have handled this case without Jesus' opinion. Jesus was fully aware that the woman was only brought to him so the Pharisees could test him. They thought they had him in a no-win situation: no matter what he said, he would offend someone and thus give them a crime of which to accuse him. But Jesus' calm words caught them completely off guard. They never anticipated his turning the tables on them.

Jesus' statement of permission balanced several crucial points of truth. He upheld the legal penalty for adultery (stoning), so he could not be accused of being against the law. But by requiring that only a sinless person could throw the first stone, Jesus exposed what was in the accusers' hearts. Without condoning the woman's actions, he highlighted the importance of compassion and forgiveness and

broadened the spotlight of judgment until every accuser felt himself included. Jesus knew the execution could not be carried out.

How are we to apply Jesus' statement about only sinless persons rendering judgment? Jesus was not saying that only perfect, sinless people can make accurate accusations, pass judgment, or exact a death penalty. Nor was he excusing adultery or any other sin by saying that everyone sins. This event illustrates that wise judgment flows out of honest motives. Jesus resolved an injustice about to be committed by exposing the hypocrisy of the witnesses against the woman. By making the accusers examine themselves, he exposed their real motives.

Jesus did confront the woman's sin, but he exercised compassion alongside confrontation. As with the woman at the well (chapter 4), Jesus demonstrated to this woman that she was of greater importance than what she had done wrong.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The religious leaders who tried to trap Jesus were treating neither the sin nor the sinner with the necessary respect. The same blindness that caused them to not see their own sins made them unable to recognize who Jesus was. Behind their diligence to "keep the law" lay hidden the drive to protect their power. Their conflict of interest made them inept judges.

Sin calls for compassion as well as judgment. But final judgment is God's prerogative alone. Sins may be abhorrent, but sinners have been offered forgiveness in Christ. When we must confront sin, we ought not condemn, but rather present the need and opportunity for forgiveness.

After Jesus made his statement, once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. Jesus allowed the blunt truth to sink in and have an effect. There was no further need for argument; the sides had been clearly drawn. The trap snapped shut, and those who set it found themselves caught!

8:9-11 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. When Jesus invited someone who had

not sinned to throw the first stone, the leaders slipped quietly away, from oldest to youngest. Evidently the older men were more aware of their sins than the younger. Age and experience often temper youthful self-righteousness. Each person, no matter what age, should take an honest look at his or her life. We all have a sinful nature and are desperately in need of forgiveness and transformation. None of us would have been able to throw the first stone; none of us can claim sinlessness. We, too, would have had to walk away.

The accusers slinked away **until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.** After everyone had left, Jesus stood and spoke to the accused woman, “Has no one condemned you?” Apparently no one could claim sinlessness so as to stone this woman. Imagine the scene: anyone who tried would immediately be condemned by someone who knew of a sin that person had committed. Even those pious religious leaders—“the teachers of the law and the Pharisees” (8:3 NIV) who brought this woman to Jesus—could not save face. Jesus had exposed their hypocrisy and embarrassed them, and there was nothing for them to do but go back and try to think of some other way to trap Jesus.

HYPOCRISY

How quickly and self-righteously we bring before Jesus the sins of others while overlooking and denying our own sins. These hypocrites were guilty of sin in their own lives and were unwilling to face it. They claimed concern for truth and justice, but were arrogantly using the woman who had fallen into their hands. In their anger at Jesus they made her life cheap.

When you find yourself enraged at others, you may be on the verge of a healthy discovery. You should examine what is behind the rage. Are you covering sins or excusing faults that have made you unusually sensitive to the faults in others? What wrong motives are you masking by your anger?

No one had accused the woman, and Jesus kindly said, “Neither do I condemn you.” But there was more—she was not simply free to go her way. Jesus didn’t just free her from the Pharisees, he wanted to

free her from her sin, so he added, “Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” Jesus didn’t condemn the woman accused of adultery, but neither did he ignore or condone her behavior. Jesus told the woman to leave her life of sin.

Commentary on John 8:1-11: The Woman Caught in Adultery

John 8:1-11 is one of the most beloved and debated stories in the New Testament. It captures Jesus’ compassion, wisdom, and challenge to religious hypocrisy. This passage isn’t found in the earliest manuscripts of John’s Gospel, leading some scholars to suggest it might have been added later, perhaps from oral tradition or another Gospel source. Despite this, it’s widely accepted as authentic to Jesus’ ministry because it aligns so perfectly with His teachings on grace, sin, and forgiveness. The story takes place in the temple courts in Jerusalem, during what seems to be the Feast of Tabernacles (from John 7), where crowds gathered to hear Jesus teach.

Verses 1-2: Setting the Scene

“But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.”

Jesus often retreated to the Mount of Olives for prayer and rest (as seen in Luke 21:37). This creates a peaceful contrast to the drama about to unfold. Early morning in the temple was a time for teaching, and Jesus positions Himself as a rabbi, sitting to instruct the crowd. This shows His accessibility—He’s not aloof but engages with everyday people. The “all the people” highlights His growing popularity, which likely irks the religious leaders.

Verses 3-5: The Trap is Set

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?’”

Here come the antagonists: the scribes (experts in Jewish law) and Pharisees (strict religious observers). They drag in a woman “caught in the act,” which raises questions—where’s the man involved? The Law of Moses (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22-24) required both parties to be punished, suggesting this is selective justice, perhaps a setup to trap Jesus.

Their question is a no-win dilemma: If Jesus says “stone her,” He violates Roman law (Jews couldn’t execute without Roman approval, as in John 18:31) and contradicts His message of mercy. If He says “let her go,” He appears to dismiss the Mosaic Law, giving grounds for accusation. They’re not seeking truth; they’re plotting (verse 6 notes this explicitly as a “trap”). This reflects broader tensions in John’s Gospel, where Jesus clashes with religious elites over interpreting the Law (e.g., John 5:18).

Verse 6: Jesus’ Mysterious Response

“They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.”

Jesus doesn’t react impulsively. Instead, He stoops and writes on the ground—the only time in the Bible we see Him writing. What did He write? Theories abound: Some say the Ten Commandments (reminding accusers of their own sins); others suggest names or sins of the Pharisees (like Jeremiah 17:13, where God writes the names of the faithless in dust); or perhaps it was just a doodle to buy time and calm the situation. The ambiguity invites reflection: Jesus shifts focus from the woman’s shame to something deeper, perhaps symbolizing the temporary nature of human judgment versus God’s eternal word (contrast with God writing the Law on stone in Exodus 31:18).

This act also echoes Roman custom where judges wrote verdicts before announcing them, showing Jesus as the true Judge.

Verses 7-8: The Challenge

“When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, ‘Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.”

The pressure builds—they “kept on questioning.” Jesus stands and delivers a mic-drop line: “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first.” This isn’t saying only perfect people can enforce justice (that would paralyze society). Instead, it exposes hypocrisy. Deuteronomy 17:7 required witnesses to throw the first stones, so Jesus calls their bluff: Are you sinless enough to start?

By invoking “without sin,” He references the broader Law, reminding them that all fall short (as Paul later echoes in Romans 3:23). He resumes writing, giving space for conviction. This is Jesus at His wisest—using the Law to uphold the Law, while infusing it with grace.

Verse 9: The Accusers Depart

“At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.”

Conviction hits. The older ones leave first—perhaps wiser, with more sins to recall, or simply leading by example. The crowd thins until it’s just Jesus and the woman. This reversal is powerful: The accusers, who started with power, slink away in shame. It fulfills Jesus’ words in John 3:19-21 about light exposing deeds.

Verses 10-11: Grace and Truth

“Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”

Now, the tender climax. Jesus addresses her respectfully as “Woman” (same term He uses for His mother in John 19:26, implying dignity). He points out the obvious—her accusers are gone—then offers freedom: “Neither do I condemn you.” This echoes John 3:17: Jesus came to save, not condemn.

But grace isn’t cheap. He adds, “Go now and leave your life of sin.” This is a call to repentance—a new start. Jesus sees her not as a sinner defined by one act, but as a person capable of change. It’s balanced: No condemnation, but no condoning of sin either.

Historical and Cultural Context

In first-century Judaism, adultery was a grave sin, symbolizing

covenant-breaking (like Israel's "adultery" with idols in the prophets). Stoning was prescribed but rarely practiced by this time due to Roman oversight. The temple setting amplifies the drama—it's God's house, where purity matters, yet Jesus reveals God's heart for the broken.

Women had little power then; this woman is objectified, used as a pawn. Jesus restores her humanity, contrasting with cultural norms. The story also fits John's theme of Jesus as "light of the world" (John 8:12, right after this), illuminating truth amid darkness.

Theological Insights

- **Grace Over Law:** This passage bridges Old and New Covenants. The Law exposes sin (Romans 7:7), but Jesus fulfills it by offering mercy through His future sacrifice (Matthew 5:17).
- **Sin and Hypocrisy:** Everyone's a sinner—accusers included. Jesus levels the playing field, as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:1-5, judging others).
- **** Forgiveness and Transformation:**** True freedom isn't just pardon; it's empowerment to "sin no more" (echoed in Romans 6:1-2). This prefigures the cross, where Jesus takes our condemnation (Isaiah 53:6).
- **Jesus as Judge:** Ironically, the only sinless one (Hebrews 4:15) chooses mercy, foreshadowing His role in final judgment (John 5:22).

Modern Applications

This story speaks to us today:

- **Against Judgmentalism:** In a cancel-culture world, it reminds us to check our own hearts before condemning others. Have you "thrown stones" online or in relationships?
- **Hope for the Broken:** If you've messed up—addiction, infidelity, whatever—Jesus offers a fresh start without shame. But it requires turning away from sin.
- **Balanced Grace:** Churches sometimes swing to extremes—harsh legalism or permissive anything-goes. Jesus models truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
- **Empowering Women:** It challenges misogyny, affirming women's worth in a patriarchal society.

In summary, John 8:1-11 isn't just a feel-good tale; it's a profound revelation of God's character through Jesus—merciful yet holy, wise yet compassionate. It invites us to drop our stones, receive grace, and live transformed. If you're studying this, reflect: Where do you see yourself—the accuser, the accused, or the Savior? (1)

Romans 7:14-24

7:14 The law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual. Here Paul abruptly changes from writing in the past tense to writing in the present tense. By using the past tense in verses 7–11, Paul considered the effects of the law somewhat dispassionately. Then in the last two verses (7:12–13), he again strenuously defended the law's goodness. Paul's intense desire to view the law with high esteem helped fuel his next thoughts. He was making every effort to clarify the tension between the "holy and just and good" (7:12) law and the sin that uses the law for its deadly purposes. The law comes from God, has his character, and tells his will for his people. But as the majesty of the law fills Paul's mind, along with it comes the vision of his own standing before the law. Paul wants to make the point that sin does not besmirch the law. But he also realizes that he must clarify his own ongoing relationship to the law.

How can we be free from sin and yet continue to do wrong? In Christ, we are free from the penalty of sin (judgment) and the power of sin (hopelessness). But while still in the flesh, we are not free from the presence of sin (temptations) and the possibility of sin (failures). Paul never claimed that being under grace instead of under the law meant that a believer was somehow above the law. In fact, having described such a great distance between the law and sin, he realized that he was still far more acquainted with the reality of sin than the righteous standard of the law. Being under grace does not eliminate the law—it changes the purpose of the law in our lives, from a source of judgment to a source of guidance, from an unattainable moral standard of our judge to a character study of the one who loves us. So, Paul writes, the law is spiritual (*pneumatikos*); but I am unspiritual (*sarkinos*), "of the flesh," carnal. As such, he can write, sold as a slave to sin. The expression is literally "being sold under sin," which is equivalent to saying "being given over to slavery." At one time sin was tyrannical in Paul's life. The law has an uncanny capacity for reminding us of what

we once were, and of how captivating that old life can still appear. Our hope never shifts back to the law. We must daily focus on Christ.

7:15 I do not understand. Or, “I don’t even recognize as mine some of the work I do!” By introducing his personal dilemma, Paul invites us to consider how well we understand our own behavior.

I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. As long as believers live in this world as men and women of flesh and blood, they will face a constant tension—the conflict between their sinful nature and their new spiritual life. Paul wrote to the Galatians, “The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:17 NIV). In 7:6, Paul described conversion as being “released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit.” This new service in the Spirit is not compulsory, but the longer we are in this way, the clearer we see its necessity. This growing awareness is itself a work of God’s Spirit, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13 NIV).

Paul shares three lessons that he learned in trying to deal with his old sinful desires. (1) Knowledge is not the answer (7:9). Paul felt fine as long as he did not understand what the law demanded. When he learned the truth, he knew he was doomed. (2) Self determination (struggling in one’s own strength) doesn’t succeed (7:15). Paul found himself sinning in ways that weren’t even attractive to him. (3) Becoming a Christian does not stamp out all sin and temptation from a person’s life (7:22–25).

Being born again starts in a moment of faith, but becoming like Christ takes a lifetime. Paul compares Christian growth to a strenuous race or fight (1 Corinthians 9:24–27; 2 Timothy 4:7). Thus, as Paul has been emphasizing since the beginning of this letter, no one in the world is innocent; no one deserves to be saved—not the pagan who doesn’t know God’s laws, nor the Christian or Jew who knows them and tries to keep them. All of us must depend totally on the work of Christ for our salvation. We cannot earn it by our good behavior.

Accepting the approach that Paul is speaking from personal experience in these verses presents us with another problem. From

what time in his relationship with God do these reflections come? Or, How realistic is it to think that the thoroughly converted Paul might actually have struggles that seem so strikingly familiar to our own?

Here are three possible answers:

1. Paul is reflecting on his preconversion state of mind.

Defense—To accept this passage as a report of experiences Paul is having as a believer exposes him to the charge that he doesn't practice what he preaches, such as in Romans 5:1–5. Did or didn't Paul have peace, joy, and hope? It also seems to present one of the greatest Christian minds in a rather weak and frail condition.

Response—Remember, Paul is human. Rather than fearing that Paul's struggle somehow makes his faith less vital, we need to see this as rounding out our view of him. Paul is surprisingly human elsewhere, too! (See 2 Corinthians 12:1–10.) And as for Romans 5, isn't it possible that anguish over our own frailties might come under "sufferings" that must be passed through on the way to perseverance, character, and hope?

2. Paul is representing the immature, carnal, or even backslidden Christian.

Defense—Believers who are serving in the Spirit and are yielded to God simply do not experience what Paul is reporting here. And since Paul is not appealing to the Spirit and getting immediate relief, the problem must reside in him.

Response—In modern terms, who is in denial here? The history of the Christian church is full of godly men and women who have reported struggles remarkably like these. If there is one distinguishing characteristic of immature, carnal, and backslidden Christians, it is that they are devoid of these struggles until the moment when they take up the cross again.

3. Paul was experiencing and reporting the normal Christian life.

Defense—This is the most straightforward reading of the text. The first person, present tense resonates with the reader. There is a heightened respect for the law of God. Its shocking openness is matched by its trusting conclusion. Its broader context (the entire letter) presents the experiences as part, but certainly not the whole, of

Christian life. The depth of honesty highlights the magnificent message of 8:1, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Response—If the ongoing struggle with sin is real, the temptation never to accept the gift of grace is also real.

Those who are really under grace take sin seriously. Sin is no longer their master, but it is still a powerful adversary. If we don’t take sin seriously, we fall into it. If we don’t take victory seriously, we fail to utilize the Holy Spirit’s help.

Peter’s words do not lead us to expect an easy Christian life; “Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (1 Peter 5:8–9 NIV). We may be slaves of a new master, but we still live in enemy territory. The unique balance of the Christian life was described by Jesus himself when he said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NIV). Whatever the experience of each day, our hope is only real “through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (7:25).

7:16–17 If I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. We want to obey God’s law, yet we still fail. Our failure is not the law’s fault, nor is it our own fault: It is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. If sin did not exist, then the law would give us guidelines for living perfectly. But sin perverts everything. Paul is not abdicating responsibility for his sin; instead, he is making the point that his desires and the sin within him are in constant conflict. Sin is a power that, at times, can still win because his redemption is not yet complete.

The saints in the Old Testament expressed this struggle exquisitely. Jeremiah cried out, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV). David prayed, “Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression” (Psalm 19:12–13 NIV).

One of the ongoing duties of God's Spirit is to convict us of our potential for wickedness. Serving "in the new way of the Spirit" (7:6) includes regular encounters with the Spirit's convicting ministry in our life (see John 16:7–15). When we are made aware of sin, we have a clear responsibility: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 NIV).

7:18-19 Nothing good lives in me In our sinful nature, there is nothing good. Paul sees this as part of being human. Although we belong to Christ and have died to sin, we still live in a sinful world and have a sinful nature. Picture the highly trained commander of a modern tank equipped with laser guidance systems, electronic wizardry, and atomic power. In preparation for a crucial battle he:

- loaded up with the wrong fuel
- filled his magazines with the wrong caliber ammunition
- picked up the wrong maps and directions
- left most of his crew in their bunks

How effective would he be under fire? Yet how often do we undertake spiritual warfare in our own strength, using our own tools and resources, and making up our own directions as we go along? We shouldn't be surprised if Satan quickly puts us out of commission! The tension continues—What I do is not the good I want to do ... the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Paul describes the person who knows what is good and might even desire to do it, but this person lacks the power. Without the Holy Spirit's help, the person is dominated by the power of sin and continues to do evil when he actually desires to do good.

7:20 It is sin living in me that does it. Paul repeats his words from verse 17. Believers still have a sinful nature that pulls them to do what they do not want to do. The seeming contradiction of "I do—I don't do" emphasizes how difficult it is to identify the sources of our sinful behaviors. One way to think of it is, Until I was under the grace of God, sin owned me. After I was under the grace of God, I admit that I still owned sin. Before Christ, I was responsible for being a sinner. Once Christ saved me, I'm still responsible for my sins.

EXCUSES

“The devil made me do it.” “I didn’t do it; the sin in me did it.” These sound like good excuses, but we are responsible for our actions. We must never use the power of sin or Satan as an excuse because they are defeated enemies. Without Christ’s help, sin is stronger than we are, and we will be unable to defend ourselves against its attacks. That is why we should never stand up to sin all alone. Jesus Christ, who has conquered sin once and for all, promises to fight by our side. If we look to him for help, we will not have to give in to sin.

7:21 This law at work. The law, or principle, at work here is the reality that evil is within us, even when we want to do good. In fact, it is when we most want to do good that we become most acutely aware of our propensity not to do so. A swimmer has no idea how strong the current is until she tries to swim upstream. When she faces the current, she finds this law at work: the current is against her.

7:22 In my inner being I delight in God’s law. Believers take delight in God’s law (i.e., the path of obedience to God that the entire Old Testament presents) because they long to know it and do it and thus to please God. This is one of the marks of wisdom: “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2 NIV). The problem is that there is ...

7:23 Another law at work in the members of my body. This other principle that is at work is the law of sin. Sin is constantly at war. We are at war because sin will not give up the control over us that it lost when we came to faith in Christ. Sin fights against the law of the mind because our mind is where we make our decisions and our moral judgments. We are prisoners of the law of sin at work with us. We cannot resist our sin nature in our own power. When we try, we will be defeated.

Paul does not say that these powers are equal, but he knows they are both there. We must do the same. One power must be resisted while relying on the other. When we fail to rely on Christ’s strength for our daily strength, we in essence provide sin with more power over us. Sin’s power will not have grown, but our relative weakness will make it seem that way. Sin’s power is not an excuse for us to drift spiritually, or openly give in to temptation. Believers must not forget that “You,

dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4 NIV).

WE MUST FIGHT!

All Christians struggle against sin. We must never underestimate sin’s power; and we must never attempt to fight sin in our own strength. Satan is a crafty tempter, and we have a great ability to make excuses. Instead of trying to overcome sin with human willpower, we must take hold of the tremendous power of Christ that is available to us. This is God’s provision for victory over sin—he sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and give us power. And when we fall, he lovingly reaches out to help us up.

7:24 Who will rescue me from this body of death? Our bodies are mortal; they are bodies of death. As long as we live on this earth in our human bodies, we will face this conflict with sin. Our place of residence is our place of least resistance. And, as seen above, as long as we are confined to this world, we will experience a measure of struggle and defeat. But, we are not left in defeat—rescue will come!

Sooner or later, almost every person asks this desperate question. How sad for those who cannot answer as Paul answered. His answer must also be ours, and we must share this truth with others. Paul made sure the Romans knew that he believed the gospel to be the answer.

7:25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! The triumph is sweeter because the struggle is real. In the last few verses, we have glimpsed the struggle of a genuine believer. Now the answer is shouted in exclamation.

Many who claim to know Christ never see themselves well enough to appreciate as deeply as Paul did what they actually have in Christ. Because of Jesus Christ, we are assured of a great future. We will one day join him in eternity with a new body that is free from sin. In the meantime, however, we must realize that while in our mind we are slave to God’s law, we still have a sinful nature that will remain a slave to the law of sin.

The battle ends with a shout of victory. The winners know who really

won. The winners also know the war isn't over. But in the meantime, there are more lessons to learn, and there is more freedom to experience.

AM I REALLY A SLAVE?

There is great tension in daily Christian experience. The conflict is that we agree with God's commands but cannot do them. As a result, we are painfully aware of our sin. This inward struggle with sin was as real for Paul as it is for us. From Paul we learn what to do about it.

Whenever he felt overwhelmed by the spiritual battle, he would return to the beginnings of his spiritual life, remembering how he had been freed from sin by Jesus Christ. When we feel confused and overwhelmed by sin's appeal, let us claim the freedom Christ gave us. His power can lift us to victory.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1995, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Barton, Bruce B. 1996, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Barton, Bruce B., David Veerman, and Neil S. Wilson. 1992. Romans. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. Barton, Bruce B. 1993. John. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

Sermon Notes:

Wk 10 In His Footsteps: Jesus Brings Freedom

Happy Sunday, everyone! Well, I am back. I thank you for your prayers while Meg and I were away on vacation.

I want to thank Elders Clayton and Bryan for preaching some wonderful sermons while I was away. Praise God for a great team! I want to welcome our new AVC family and guests, both in person and online.

Before we hop into God's Word today, let me share the AVC Connections:

- YouTube
- App
- Facebook/Website

[Let's pray]

As I have stated in the past in our series, "In His Footsteps," the Gospels of Jesus Christ are the powerhouse of the New Testament. Without the Gospels of Christ, we have nothing. If Jesus stayed dead, so would Christianity.

I titled today's sermon: Jesus Brings Freedom.

Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, humanity has been at war with sin. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were literally freed from the bondage of enslavement to King Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God freed them, but they enslaved themselves again because of the hardness of their hearts. In the Old Testament, Numbers 14 describes the Israelites' stubborn hearts, and in Hebrews 3:7-11, it gives us a paraphrase of what happened.

Let's read:

"So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, "Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways." So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest."' (Hebrews 3:7-11)

"They shall never enter my rest." I want you to hear this word this morning: Sin never lets us rest. Sin will grind you down and wear you out physically and emotionally. Sin literally caused the Israelites to die in the desert, a 30-day trip took 40 years. Sin is toxic. That's why a toxic home environment will cause chaos in your atmosphere.

In the Gospels, in John 8, we find a woman who was enslaved to sin. Here's what happened:

- The religious leaders caught a woman in sin.
- Jesus knew this woman was caught in adultery.
- The Law said to kill her, to stone her.

Let's read John 8:6b-11:

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Jesus said two life-changing statements:

1. "I do not condemn you" (v. 11).
2. "Leave your life of sin" (v. 11).

[Story of Cross.]

Let me tell you the story of Ed, a young man who came to AVC and helped us get in here. His woodworking skills were out of this world! But I didn't know it at the time—he had a drug problem. He lost his wife, his marriage, and his child. He went to prison, got out, and eventually overdosed. Friends, we gotta leave our life of sin.

Here's the most famous passage in the whole Bible. I want to read it:

**"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."
(John 3:16-17)**

Listen, Jesus didn't come to condemn you or throw you into hell. Jesus came to free you! I want to close with the words of the Apostle Paul, who tells of his struggle with sin but the freedom Jesus brings.

Let's read Romans 7:14-24:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do,

but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Friends, if you're struggling with sin, let Jesus bring you freedom.

Closing Prayer

Devotional Questions

John 8:1-11 (The Woman Caught in Adultery)

1. How does Jesus' response to the woman caught in adultery demonstrate true freedom, and what does this teach us about His grace and mercy in our own lives?

- Reflect on how the absence of condemnation opens the way for transformation.

2. In what ways are we like the Pharisees, quick to judge others without recognizing our own sins? How can we adopt a posture of humility and compassion instead?

- Consider how humility can free us from the bondage of self-righteousness.

3. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). What areas of your life is Jesus calling you to walk away from, and how can His grace empower you to do so?**

- Reflect on the freedom that comes with leaving sin behind and embracing new life in Christ.

Romans 7:14-24 (Paul's Struggle with Sin)

1. Paul describes a battle between his sinful nature and his desire to do good. How have you experienced this struggle in your own life, and how does acknowledging this conflict help you rely more on Jesus for victory?

- **Reflect** on the tension between the flesh and the spirit and the freedom found in Christ's power.

2. In recognizing that "nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature" (Romans 7:18), how can accepting our weaknesses lead us to greater dependence on God's strength?

- **Consider** how dependence on God removes the burden of self-reliance.

3. Paul asks, "Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24). How can this question lead you to celebrate the freedom and hope that come through Jesus Christ our Lord?

- **Reflect** on the assurance and liberation found in knowing Jesus as the ultimate deliverer.