

God's Great News for Humanity's Great Problem *Paul's Letter to the Romans*

God's Engagement with Human Evil *Romans 6:1 – 11*

Introduction: The Necessity of Conversion from God's Perspective

This morning I'd like to step back and view humanity from God's perspective. What does it look and feel like for Him? And how does He deal with it? As a father, I have some understanding of the complexity of human evil. Occasionally, there are times when my son John hits his younger sister Zoe. Or there are times when Zoe ignores John when he's trying to say something. When I see that happen, I get angry because I love the one who has been hurt. In fact, anger is a legitimate feeling that flows out of love: the greater my love for the hurt one, the greater my anger towards the one who hurt her or him. I am not impartial. So because I love, I respond to bring about some form of justice: 'Go to your room.' Or, 'apologize to your sister.' Or, 'Help your brother clean up that mess like he's asking you.' But what about the one who did the wrong? Of course, I also love the one who has done the hurt, the wrong, the injustice. So I want to have mercy on the one who has done the wrong, but I also want them to be loving for their own sake. I want them to come back into alignment with my love for their brother or sister. If they don't, they will continue to experience my anger.

Now let's ask how God views evil and injustice. Imagine that you are called before God, the highest and most insightful Judge in the land, the One before whom all hearts are laid bare, the great King. The charges are very troubling: injustice, through your internal thoughts and external actions, through what you have done and what you have not done, through what you have said and what you have not said. The scary thing is that God is actually not impartial. He loves every person you've ignored, judged, cheated on, had contempt for, and actively hurt. Also, you have benefited from an unjust system that has hurt many other people He loves, and God is infinitely angry with that system and all who derive identity from it. And because God infinitely loves those people, God is infinitely angry with you. Yet He loves you infinitely, too, just as I love the child in the wrong, as well as the child who has been wronged. God loves you infinitely and wants to have mercy on you. He also wants you to be as loving as He is so that you won't inflict evil on them. So God as Judge and King finds you guilty of injustice, and assigns you the penalty appropriate to what you have done to those He loves infinitely: dying you will die. But God also looks at you with compassion and says, 'I will not revoke my punishment in the slightest. But I will do this. I will participate in my own judgment in the person of My Son. But I will rise again into new life. If you hold my hand, and join yourself – your heart, your life, your will – to me, then you too will rise again into new life. You have to agree with my justice but even more deeply with my love, because on the other side of death, I will give you life and power to be as loving as I am. So not only will you be free on the other side of this judgment, you will begin to be transformed, first fundamentally, and then progressively. You will die one way or the other, because I am not revoking my justice. The only question is will you die and rise with me?' This is what God did for us through Jesus. God entered His own judgment through Jesus, so we could die and rise with him and be free from the authority of sin, self-centeredness, and evil.

Context

In the sweep of Romans 5-8, Paul is talking about how God heals and transforms human beings who have faith in Christ. Right away, I want you to notice that Paul uses the words death or dead or crucified 15 times, and the word life or alive or resurrection or raised 9 times. Why? Because he is talking about us going through a change so major, it can only be described as going from death to life. So I break this passage down into three sections. Verses 1-4 describe our newness of life. Verses 5-7 describe our new identity. And verses 8-11 describe our new relationship with God.

Baptism Into Death and Newness of Life: v. 1 – 4

Let's get into verse 1! 'What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin [and I would add: selfishness, injustice and apathy] that grace might increase? May it never be!' In other words, if God graciously forgives everything through Jesus, then why can't I just stay the way I am?! I don't want to change. It's too hard! I'll just stay like this.

The problem with this attitude is it's a gross misunderstanding of what happens to us when we come to faith in Jesus. We misunderstand our new identity. In v. 2, Paul responds, 'May it never be!' If Paul were from L.A. like I am, he might have said, 'As if!' Or something like that. And then he responds with a question of his own, 'How shall we who died to sin still live in it?' In verse 3, Paul clarifies the change. 'Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death?' Notice that that question is an expansion of the question in v.2.

What in the world does he mean? Well, let's think about what it meant back then. The term baptism comes from two main places in the classical Greek world. The first is the garment business, and in secular Greek it meant, 'to dip,' or 'to cause to change.' In order to make clothes a certain color, you needed to dip your cloth in that dye. Then it was brought out and the cloth was said to have been baptized. The second place is a ceremony that existed in some of the other religions of that day, both Jewish and Gentile. Usually in the ceremony, a person would be dunked in water, or buried up to his or her head in earth. That would symbolize a death. Then the rebirth would happen as the person was pulled out. Theoretically, in Jewish baptisms, a man was so completely new that he could marry his own sister or his own mother. And in other places, people would be spoonfed milk because they were like new babies. So this term has a very rich meaning that Paul uses.

This is like what happens to the Christian. It's a life changing event. But it goes deeper than anything anyone had ever known. Why? Because this is not a ceremony symbolizing something we wish would happen. We died and rose with Jesus. Look at v.4, 'Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death.' One way to think of this is to imagine yourself in Jesus' burial tomb, since Paul does say 'we have been buried.' Imagine yourself next to Jesus' lifeless body in that small cave. It's dusty and cramped; the air is stale. Then the stone is rolled to shut the entrance and all is dark and silent. You sense nothing but the smell of death. Now you are united with Christ in his death. His grave is our grave. His tomb is our tomb. But that's not the end of the story, is it? Sunday morning comes, and Jesus' great heart begins to beat, and his great eyes open. And 'up from the tomb he arose,' as the hymn says, in his resurrection. And with a flick of his finger, he rolls the stone away, and raises us up with him. And as we step outside into Sunday morning, everything smells new. The sun feels new. Everything feels new. Why? Because WE are new.

And Paul says in v.4: 'In order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.' We are the ones who are new. That word 'newness' is the same word used to describe the new heavens and the new earth God will create when Eternity begins. We are the beginning of that new creation. We are the beginning of the new things, the great things, God has yet to do. The resurrection of Jesus is the beginning, and we are joined to him in that resurrection. We are NEW!

A lot of people go to college wanting newness of life. Did you? You weren't totally happy about high school, so college is that new phase of life where you can make new friends, buy a new backpack, put away the retainer. You can kind of reinvent yourself. But are you really new?

So what does this newness of life mean? I'm reminded of a couple I know of. They hadn't known the Lord when they started dating. But they both committed their lives to Christ, and afterwards felt God blessing their relationship and calling them to be married. They decided to get marriage counseling from a pastor. The woman was very honest and told the pastor that before they had turned their lives over to God, they had been involved sexually. She was concerned about whether she should wear white, because she is white American, and in her cultural tradition, she felt that white symbolized a purity that she no longer had. The pastor opened the Bible to explore what it meant to be a new creation in Christ and asked, 'Does this apply to you?' She said yes. So the pastor smiled at her and said, 'By all means, wear white!!' More generally, wear the clothing that reflects your newness and purity in Jesus.

Our New Freedom From Sin: v.5 – 7

But God doesn't just deal with the guilt. Here is the critical shift I want you to make. He deals with the evil that caused the guilt in the first place. So we are not just free from guilt. We are actually free from evil. Let's see how this happens. Look at verse 5. Here we see Paul highlighting Christ's Death and Resurrection again. 'For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection...' That's the second time he refers us to the Cross and the

Resurrection. But this time he explains why this chance to start life over is a chance to start life over DIFFERENTLY.

Look at v.6. Paul gives us a string of four statements that build on each other: 'knowing this, that our old self was crucified with him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, for he who has died is freed from sin.' The application Paul draws this time is that our sinful identity was killed at the cross. Paul actually uses the term 'the old self,' which sounds weird, doesn't it? What is the old self? Essentially, it's our old identity. Paul makes a huge deal out of that concept throughout Romans 6-8. If you get the chance, read Romans 6:1-8:13 and note how Paul distinguishes between your 'self' and your 'members.' Your 'self' is your core identity. Your 'members' are your hands, feet, eyes, mouth, mind, emotions. Our struggles are over what to do with our members, but the battle is won as far as our identity is concerned.

Tying the four phrases in v.6, God kills the old self. He did that by coming in Jesus and wearing it as his very own humanity. He took the self-centered humanity that we all have. He came to acquire this disease that we all have. And throughout his life, he resisted its self-centeredness. Every time it wanted to squirm away and lust after a woman, Jesus said, 'No.' Every time it wanted to acquire material wealth, Jesus said, 'No.' Every time it wanted to pick up a sword and plunge it into the body of a Roman soldier, Jesus said, 'No.' Every time it wanted to revel in pride over someone, Jesus said, 'No.' Every time, Jesus said 'Yes' to the love of God and realigned his humanity with the love of God. He loved God and he was a vessel of God's love for others. And finally, Jesus carried that squirming, stubborn, resistant humanity all the way to its death. Like Frodo carrying the Ring of Power into Mount Doom, Jesus plunged the old self, the self-centered humanity, to its bitter end on the cross.

When we join ourselves to Jesus by faith and by his Spirit, our old self also dies with him. Our old identity was totally broken off from us. But now, we've got a new identity. And we are free from sin, because just as Jesus died to our sin, so we died to our sin. But Jesus was raised for us, too, and he comes into us by his Spirit to share his new self with us. This is why Paul said, 'It is not I who live but Christ who lives in me.' This is why 2 Peter 1:4 says, 'We have become partakers of the divine nature.'

Illus: What comes to mind for me is the story *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss. Any of you remember that? My kids love it. In the beginning you're introduced to the Grinch with that hilarious song:

You're a mean one, Mr. Grinch.
You really are a heel.
You're as cuddly as a cactus,
You're as charming as an eel.
Mr. Grinch.

You're a bad banana
With a greasy black peel.

You're a monster, Mr. Grinch.
Your heart's an empty hole.
Your brain is full of spiders,
You've got garlic in your soul.
Mr. Grinch.

And the X-ray machine comes over his chest, and sure enough, his heart is 4 sizes too small. That's what our old self is like. But then a transformation of love comes over him, when he hears all the inhabitants of Whoville singing even though he stole all their presents. A transformation of love comes over him from the inside out, and the X-ray machine comes over him again. And sure enough, his heart gets bigger, so big that it bursts out of the X-ray machine and breaks it!!! That is what Jesus does to us when he comes into us. Then the Grinch comes down to Whoville to give all the presents back and to carve the roast beast. It's the resurrected Jesus that defines us now. He defines our NEW self. And he comes into us to pour out his life and his love through us. He is who you are now.

I've got to tell you, being clear about your core identity in Jesus is absolutely essential. Illus: When I got married, I moved out to Boston because the potential for Ming and me to bridge urban ministry and college ministry at the same time was so big. When Ming and I packed up my stuff into my little '86 Honda Civic and drove out of East Palo Alto, CA, where I had done urban ministry for 5 years, I couldn't stop crying for about an hour. Still, I felt like it was the right thing to move to Boston. We drove across the country, got to Boston, and lived in a small apartment for a few months. Meanwhile, we looked around at some lower income areas of Boston to buy a house and start a Christian community household that would do urban ministry there. In late 1999, we found our house and we signed the paperwork in January of 2000. Some people donated some furniture to us. As I was thinking about how to move the furniture from those people to our house, it hit me. In California, I had guy friends that I could call, and I knew they would say, 'Totally. Hey, it's just an excuse to hang out together anyway.' In college, we moved each other's stuff all the time. But in Boston, I didn't feel the same confidence at all. There were great people there who would help, but I wasn't sure that they would feel the same way about it. For guys, friendship and moving furniture are pretty important. So, I felt it. I felt alone. And I began to feel bitter. Bitter about moving. I wondered, 'Was I thinking clearly?' I looked at Ming and wondered, 'Did I marry the right person?' And in my sulking and self-pity, I remembered what my college pastor had taught about this very passage. I heard the Lord say, 'Mako, that's not who you are.' It was a great reminder to me that my identity had changed.

It doesn't mean that we won't struggle. We will. But when we do, we're struggling to be the person we already are, defined by Jesus. It means we're not trying to be something we're not, to fake it, to put on the appearance of godliness without the power. It means that we can be victorious! Some of you might be sitting here thinking, 'Yeah, but Mako, I feel just the same way I've always felt. I don't *feel* new. I don't *feel*...' Well I'm not telling you what you FEEL! I'm telling you WHO YOU ARE!!! YOU ARE NEW IF YOU HAVE GIVEN OURSELVES TO JESUS.

That's different from the way we usually think about it. We usually think about it as Jesus dying instead of us, and leaving us the same. Here's a table to contrast two different understandings of Jesus' death and resurrection. On the left is the definition White American fundamentalism developed in the early 1900's. 'Jesus died instead of us.' Next point: We believed. What happened to us? Nothing. We stayed the same. God changed how He sees us, but we stayed fundamentally the same. Next point: So what are we saved from? We are saved from guilty feelings, since God forgave us for what we did. We are also saved from hell. Instead, when we die, we go to heaven. But God still feels distant. But I focus on the Cross to remind myself of Jesus' death. Why do I obey? In Asian-American circles, it could be because what you feel you owe. How many of you have heard an analogy saying that Jesus entered the courtroom of God's judgment and died INSTEAD of us, and now we just have to accept it for forgiveness? Well, if that's true then Paul's reasoning process would have been totally different. He would have said, 'By no means! Don't you know how much Jesus suffered for you?' He would sound like an Asian parent: 'Don't you know how much I suffered for you? Don't you know how much I sacrificed for you? God found a way to keep you alive by killing Jesus instead. You should be grateful!' That is the way of emotional blackmail. Or, you could think about what you gain. Some kind of reward.

But the other column flows explicitly out of Romans 6, but also all of Paul's letters, John's Gospel, 1 and 2 Peter. Jesus died ahead of us. Next line: We believed. What happened then? We died and rose with Jesus, by his Spirit. So we are changed. It's not that God changed. We changed. What are we saved from? We're saved from our evil AND our guilt. We're saved from our sin AND from hell. The focus is not on dying and going to heaven; it's about bringing heaven to earth now. You see for a long time conservative Protestant Americans thought of evangelism as saving people to heaven when they die. That was only 10% of the real gospel. And the direction was totally wrong. Jesus is bringing heaven to earth in himself and in his people. It's not about reducing people down to souls as if we were not also bodies. That's Greek Gnosticism. It's not about getting that soul to heaven when you die. It's about bringing heaven to earth. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus came to transform humanity, to put himself into our bodies by his Spirit, so that we would be new, so that God would be present here on earth!! Next line: God is not distant; He dwells in us by the Spirit of Jesus. And we dwell 'in Jesus' by the Spirit. The focal point of Jesus' ministry is not just his death, but his death and resurrection. So why do we obey Jesus? Because it's who I am. Yes, there is also what I gain; thank you John Piper. But from the way Paul reasons in all his letters, there is something deeper and more profound.

Why do I obey? Because it's who I am. Secular educators have noticed that the best way to motivate a child struggling in school is not to say, 'What are these grades? What are you stupid? Do you know the sacrifice I'm making for you?' The best way to motivate a struggling child is, 'What are these grades? This isn't who you are!' Do you hear the difference? And that's an analogy in the secular world. How much more of a difference does that make to us? A HUGE DIFFERENCE!!!

Older Christians understood this. The 19th century tent revivals of the evangelist Billy Sunday had altar calls, and when he called people forward, he asked them to sign up for abolition. 'Great! You're new in Christ. Welcome to the family of God. Our purpose is to address evil in the world in the name of Jesus. Let's fight this racist slavery we have.'

So on the one hand, we cannot sit there as the world struggles with evil on its own. Apathy is a sin as much as any other. On the other hand, we cannot let the social activists think they can have justice without Jesus. If you take away Jesus, what you're left with a demand for good works that are never enough; it's psychologically damaging. It overestimates our abilities, and it underestimates our evil. For example, Herman Melville's book *Moby Dick* shows that Captain Ahab, who wanted to destroy the white whale, which symbolized evil, became evil himself as he sought to destroy evil. That's why Bush's early rhetoric of 'infinite justice' was so jarring. At what point do you become evil in the fight against evil? You have to let Jesus deal with evil, both in you and in the world.

When you do evangelism, focus on Jesus saving us from evil, not just guilt, although that's included. At UCSD, those of you there saw WorldVision's Africa tent simulating an AIDS village. At UCLA, there was a week focused on human slave trafficking. My IVCF colleagues did that. Now I'm not suggesting that you try that. At San Diego, it took \$70,000. At UCLA, it took 60 staff from all over Southern California. But I would like you to hop on board and take advantage of those opportunities when another campus ministry does that. In the case of the Africa tent, you can call for people to resist the evil of health care inequality, to resist poverty and disease, to resist mass orphaning, and to resist their own apathy. Call people to come to Jesus to be changed. At UCSD, 26 people became Christians that joined the IV fellowship. As far as we know, 60 people total came through other fellowships or churches. According to the UCSD Guardian, eighty children got sponsored through WorldVision. A few thousand dollars were raised to go to a health care center in Malawi. And if just a few of the 5,000 students who walked through the tent decide to spend a few years in Africa using their skills for the AIDS cause, say with health care or micro-enterprise development, it was financially worth it. At UCLA, my understanding is that 60 people became Christians in the context of talking about sex slavery and human trafficking. This is the impact of Jesus as he saves us from evil, as he transforms who we are. This is why Jesus did evangelism by calling people join him and to love their enemies, give to those who ask, pray for those who resist you, reconcile with those you hate, stop being materialistic and worrying. That's how he did evangelism. He said, 'Come to me. I'm going to change you and change the world through you.'

If Jesus died, and I died with him, to be raised new with him, then I am actually accepting God's justice upon me. God says I had to die. But He also says that He wanted to raise me to be the loving person He wants me to be. God's justice requires evangelism because God's way of being just is by killing and raising people with Jesus. Doing evangelism is the foundation of doing social justice because God's way of sharing His love and goodness in the world is by transforming His people by His Spirit to do it. At this point of converge in our union with Christ, justice is evangelism and evangelism is justice.

Dead To Sin, Alive to God: v. 8 – 11

But there is one other question we might have, which is: 'How does God feel about me? Even after this most deep and magnificent change in me, how does God see me?' The answer is in verses 8-11. 'Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death is no longer master over him. For the death he died, he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God.'

Once again, for the third time, Paul draws on Jesus' death and resurrection and applies it to us, only from a different angle. This time, what angle does he take? This: What was Jesus' relationship with God after his Resurrection? It's a life of unbroken love. The love was broken only once in Time: at the Cross, when in that painful moment Jesus cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Listen to the words

Paul uses to describe Jesus' experience in v.10: the death, he died, he died, to sin. Jesus utterly died. But then Jesus was raised again. And his eyes saw the shining face of His father, with His Father's beaming smile. And his ears heard the deep voice of his Father saying, 'This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

What's the application to us? It's v.11, the very first command Paul gives in the book of Romans! And guess what it is. It is **KNOW YOUR IDENTITY IN JESUS**: 'Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' 'Consider' really means 'to recognize.' We are to recognize what has happened to us. God has done this. So align your mind with reality. This is who you are! In fact, look at the word Paul uses here. It's the word: 'yourselves.' Consider your**SELVES**.

So my core identity is 'in Christ Jesus,' as Paul says in v.11. That sounds kind of strange. How can you be in another person? It's because we are joined with Jesus in his Resurrection. Who is the only person who can call God 'Father'? The only one who is actually God's Son. Only Jesus can. And only those who are in Jesus inherit Jesus' relationship with his Father. The love Jesus experiences from God his Father, he causes us to experience that. And when Jesus heard 'This is My Son, in whom I am well pleased,' we now hear, 'This is My daughter, this is My son, in whom I am well pleased.'

My son John was born last September, after a marathon 55 hours of labor, 3 shifts of doctors, 2 hours of pushing, and a last minute C section. Being our first child, we were unusually excited and expectant. But it later hit me that part of the reason I had such strong feelings for my son is that for about eight years, I have done ministry to at-risk kids. And what I've seen has broken my heart. Some of them have no parents, most have no dad's, some have no one to give them a basic sense of love and structure and encouragement and order. But I felt like I could never do that much, because they weren't my children. They were outside of me and my family. But all those years of working with at-risk kids grew in me a desire to be a good dad to my own children. When John was born, it felt like all my feelings for the at-risk kids I knew could finally be expressed. And I had this thought: To the extent that I can do things right as a dad by the Spirit of God, if only I could love each and every one of the kids I have ever known through my son John, that I could somehow bring them inside my family through John and that by loving John I could be loving them. What I cannot do is exactly what God does. He is a Father to His one and only Son, Jesus. And though there are many who are outside His family, He desires to bring inside His family by offering them Jesus. He says, 'Come to My Son, Jesus. Join your life to his, absolutely, with no holds barred.' So Jesus takes his own experience of being loved by his Father, and he shares it with us. Jesus actually helps us to experience what he experiences, right here and right now.

Let me conclude by pointing out the implications for us talking about the significance of Jesus. On the left, you can see that if you think it's 'Jesus died instead of me,' then all you've really got to share when sharing about Jesus is going from 'guilty to forgiven.' And that's not trivial. Actually it's huge! But look on the right. If it's 'I died and rose with Jesus' then you get 'guilty to forgiven,' and more. Look at this table...

'Jesus died instead of me'	'I died and rose with Jesus'
Guilty to forgiven	Guilty to innocent in Jesus Empty to filled in Jesus Old to renewed in Jesus Broken to being healed in Jesus Evil to good in Jesus Sick to healthy in Jesus Held down to set free in Jesus Stained to clean in Jesus Drained to empowered in Jesus Alone to adopted in Jesus Being performance oriented to being in Jesus Outside God to within God in Jesus