

PASTOR DOUG'S FAVORITE BIBLE VERSES

Romans 8:1

In a few months, Lord willing, we will begin a lengthy study of the book of Acts. But between now and then I would like to invite you into my life. While I believe I was saved at a young age – around 4 or 5 – it wasn't until I was 17 years of age that I came to truly understand the gospel. Up until that time I had known Jesus as my Savior, but it was only in those late teen years that I came to understand the idea that Jesus was also to be my Lord. But once that started to sink in, **it changed everything** in my life.

- Instead of merely acknowledging Jesus, I came to be a spokesman – an ambassador – for Jesus.
- Instead of giving him mere lip service, I came to embrace him as "my Lord and my God."
- And instead of merely being acquainted with the Bible, I came to voraciously consume it... to, in a sense, "eat it up."

At the time I had a small, pocket size King James Version of the Bible and within six months I had that Bible marked up, underlined, highlighted and dog-eared. I wish I still had it, but somewhere along the way I lost it.

This appetite for the Bible, accompanied by a memorizing of various Bible verses, led me to understand something I had observed from the time I was very young...and that was how people would appear to have Bible verses that they deemed as their "life verse."

And so I had noticed how when some well-known Christian – be it a musician or politician or athlete – would sign his or her autograph they would often write below their name a Bible reference.

And so, for example, Billy Graham might sign his name but then write below it: John 3:16 (which in the King James Version reads, *"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."*)

Or NBC correspondent Deborah Norville, based upon what I have read, might write below her name Philippians 4:13 (which reads, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*)

So as I entered into this period of spiritual growth, I began to think, "What verse really means a lot to me? What is MY life verse?"

And it was at that time that I centered in on Romans 8:1. So let's turn to that verse at this time...

Romans 8:1

Last Sunday, during the older adult Sunday School class, we spent a bit of time talking about the closing verses of Romans chapter 7...particularly verses 14 through 20. Let's read those as well...

Romans 7:14-20

If somehow you are unfamiliar with the **debate that rages** over these verses it all has to do with the question of whether or not the author (St. Paul) here is talking about his life **BEFORE** he came to Christ or **AFTER** he came to Christ. The conclusion of most, though not all, Bible commentators is that this is Paul describing his life **AFTER** coming to Christ. And that what Paul is here describing is the inner battle or war that takes place in the life of every believer. It is the battle between what the Bible elsewhere describes as "the old man" and what we now have in Christ.

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That is to say that just because we may have come to ask Jesus to come into our life, to forgive us of our sins, and even to be the very LORD and Master over our lives, this does not mean we are instantaneously FREE from a life of temptation to sin. The fact of the matter is, we were born sinners with a great proclivity towards sin, and though, by the Spirit of Christ, that old nature in us **is being put to death** it has an **amazing ability to seemingly RISE FROM THE DEAD** again and again and again throughout our lives.

Anyway, this is what our discussion was about in our class last Sunday.

After class, the teacher, Tim Martin, showed me a quote he found in Karl Barth's commentary on Romans where he quotes Martin Luther. It is a **GREAT quote** – indeed it is such a great quote I will make certain that it is printed in next Sunday's Heartbeat church bulletin. Let me read it for you now...

Luther writes,

"Paul, good man that he was, longed to be without sin, but to it he was chained. I too, in common with many others, long to stand outside it, but this cannot be. We belch forth the vapors of sin; we fall into it, rise up again, buffet and torment ourselves night and day; but, since we have to bear about with us everywhere this stinking sack, we cannot rid ourselves completely of it, or even knock it senseless. We make vigorous attempts to do so, but the old Adam retains his power until he is deposited in the grave."

Oh, man, what a great quote. And at age 17 and then 18, with my "hormones raging" (as they often say) the idea that I could somehow just lick or beat my "stinking sack" (to quote Luther) was just about more than I could bear.

And so, like many, I not only could relate to the battle of Romans chapter 7, but I too would find my "vigorous attempts" to knock these various (mainly sexual) desires senseless almost futile.

Now – thank God – what I learned, fairly early on in my newfound pursuit of Christ and holiness, was that **I was not alone**. If I had not learned this (that I was not alone...that others faced similar battles of

the flesh) I think it may have driven me crazy. For I longed to be holy, and, very honestly, the people at church all appeared (at least outwardly) quite holy. I was not aware of the statement by Martin Luther (that I just now read) at the time but I soon came to read, hear and understand that this battle over my soul was **not mine alone**. That, indeed, **just about everyone** with whom I engaged, if they were both serious and honest about their Christian life and walk, admitted that they too struggled to be holy. They struggled to live up to what they had already been granted in Christ.

And so it was in that context that I came across Romans 8:1. And **what a RELIEF Romans 8:1 became to my heart and soul**. To hear that REGARDLESS OF HOW I FELT AS THOUGH I WAS DOING in this experience which we call "the Christian life" I was promised that there would be NO condemnation.

- Not that there would be **less** condemnation, or
- that there would be **little** condemnation.
- But that there would be **NO CONDEMNATION**...zilch...nada...nothing...none whatsoever!

As I truly believed that God was and is HOLY, and had also become convinced that for all my faith and trust in Jesus I was still a young man plagued with – how did Luther put it? – a stinking sack, the idea that there would be NO CONDEMNATION was...and still is...a glorious thought. And thus it makes my top ten list of favorite Bible verses and I cannot imagine that I will ever remove it from that list

Now, we live in a day and age where FALSE TEACHINGS and FALSE IDEAS abound. I was talking to someone this past week who was relating to me a conversation he had with some coworkers regarding Satan. Apparently there is a television show on right now called "Lucifer." I have never seen the show. But whereas the Bible would teach that Lucifer (or Satan, the Devil, the Dragon, Apollyon, the Deceiver of the Brethren, and a host of other names) is EVIL, OPPOSED to God, an enemy of the cross and a despiser of all that is good, this television show presents Lucifer as an angelic being who is a **Son of God** and **whose goal is to help people**. That is, the show presents Lucifer as **quite the opposite** of how the Bible presents Lucifer. But...now get this...when the person I was talking to told me of his conversations with his co-workers, he **said they defended the television show's presentation of Lucifer as being the TRUTH**. That is to say, **their ignorance of the Bible was SO GREAT** that regardless of what was being presented on the television show, they accepted **that as the truth** about Lucifer over against what the Bible said. Ha!

Well, in much the same way, there has come to be a growing notion – even among some who would call themselves Christians – that if there is a God, and if there is a judgment of all before that God, then that **God will certainly forgive all and condemn none**. For if there is one idea that has come to be accepted even by a lot of people who are otherwise totally ignorant of the Bible, it is that God is love. And by that, people take that to mean that God is certainly going to forgive EVERYONE regardless of anything and everything.

And, after all, wouldn't our verse for the day – Romans 8:1 – support that same idea...that there is going to be no condemnation? After all, isn't that what it says, "There is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION"?

Let's look at the verse again...

Romans 8:1

Ah...yes...the REST of the verse: "For those who are in Christ Jesus."

I met with a woman this past week and upon sitting down with her almost the first words out of her mouth were, "I'm afraid to die." As I know this woman to be one who names Jesus as her Savior and Lord I was surprised to hear her say that. So I said,

"Why are you afraid to die?"

And she said,

"Because I'm afraid God won't accept me."

I then told her, "Oh, my, you definitely should be at Burning Hearts THIS Sunday, because this Sunday I'm preaching on Romans 8:1 with its promise that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

You see, IF you are in Christ Jesus, it is THEN and THEN ONLY that you **can** take a breath of relief. For it is to those who are "in Christ Jesus" that this promise is given. And on that basis this dear woman has no basis to fear.

But to those who are NOT in Christ Jesus there is no such promise. Now, the world may not get this. And the same people who at the workplace were arguing about Lucifer and what they thought they had learned from the television show, THEY may not get this either. But the Bible's presentation is that it is ONLY those who are in Christ Jesus who have any hope come the day of their death.

Quickly...

Daniel 12:2

John 3:36

1 John 5:12

So for the unbeliever there is PLENTY of reason to fear...to be afraid.

But if you are in Christ Jesus...if Jesus has become YOUR Lord and Savior...then I would ask

Now why this fear and unbelief
Has not the Father put to grief
His spotless Son for us?
And will the righteous Judge of men
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Now canceled at the cross?

There is no need to fear. For on the cross Jesus accomplished for us that which we could not do for ourselves.

He brought us forgiveness;
He brought us a right standing before God;
He brought us a righteousness greater than our own
So that "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who
in Christ Jesus."

Amen? Amen!