

**June 3, 2012 - 11:00 a.m.**

**Pastor Jonathan Falwell**

**Romans: From Guilt to Glory**

**Scripture: Romans 1-3**

Summary: In part 1 of a series on the book of Romans, Pastor Jonathan expounds on chapters 1 through 3 of Romans, discussing the supernatural power of the Word of God and explaining that while we are guilty, we can be free because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Today we start a brand new sermon series that really is nothing more than a continuation of the series we just concluded. These last few weeks we've been in a series entitled *Holy Wars*, and we've been talking about sin out of 1 John 2—the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We've been talking about these issues that we have to understand in order to live out the life that Christ intends for us to live. We've been talking about a lot of things that will keep us from and stop us in our walk with Christ and how desperately we must follow after Him and seek His power in our lives to avoid and to walk away from and defeat sin and Satan in our lives.

Last week we talked about how we do that. We talked about the victory that comes through choosing Christ. We talked about, from Ephesians 6, putting on the whole armor of God in order to protect ourselves. I shared with you that Satan is like a lion who is walking around, seeking whom he may devour. That means he's after you and me, that his job, his passion is to destroy us. John 10:10 says, "The thief comes to steal and to kill and to destroy," but Christ has come that we might have life and we might have it more abundantly.

Last week we talked about how we can make sure that we live in the second half of that verse and not in the first. We talked about the armor of God; how, in a practical way, we can put on the whole armor of God from Ephesians chapter 6. We also talked about how we must have the sword of the Spirit in our lives as a weapon to defeat Satan.

Now certainly the Word of God is truth. It is something that we fill our hearts and minds with, that we stand on, that gives us wisdom, guidance, that is a lamp to our feet as we travel the journey we are all on, but it also is a weapon. It is an offensive weapon. It is literally a living, breathing, powerful thing that we can use to defeat Satan. And yet so many Christians today, we go through life without the sword of the Spirit in our hands. Hebrews 4 tells us that it is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. This book is supernatural; it's unlike any other book that you have.

Now we all have books at home. All of us probably have lots of books at home. In fact, I know at our house, in our family room, just a couple of weeks ago my wife organized all of our books and put them on shelves. And you know what they do when they put books on shelves—and I'm

not using “they” in sexist term, I’m just saying “they” in my home—they take the books and they put them on the shelves and they organize them so they are decoration. You know what I’m talking about? Anybody? There are some of the books that are leaning perfectly on another book as if someone read it this week and finished it and tossed it up there and it landed there. So they’re all organized perfectly. The problem is that most of those books will never be taken down off of those shelves. All of the slipcovers have been taken off so that we can see the actual cover of the book because it looks nicer and it looks more organized and more decorative. The problem is that those books are usually only touched when we go by to dust them off or to throw more books inside.

Well this book is different than all of those other books. All of those books are good to read; lots of information, lots of education, lots of edification that we can get from reading books, and certainly we encourage everybody to spend time reading. But when you read this book, it is supernatural in its power. It changes everything. It is not just words on a page. It is the words of God that are breathed to us today. They are inspired; they are infallible, and they give us the power that we need to defeat Satan at every turn. And yet we try to do it on our own and we fail.

And so a natural progression from *Holy Wars*, when we’re talking about sin and the impact of sin in our lives, today we begin a new series entitled *From Guilt to Glory*, and it’s a study of the book of Romans, and what a perfect, perfect progression when we talk about sin to move into a study of the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit that we can hide away in our hearts, that we can use to defeat Satan in the battle that is going on every day in our lives. The book of Romans is a particularly important book. It is an important book because Paul, in writing this book, has given us some incredible truths that we can use and apply in our lives, so we can understand how all of us are guilty, but yet through that we can find the glory that is found only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I asked you last week to read the first three chapters in Romans so that you would be up on where we are today because there is no way we can read the entire three chapters and still have time to study and glean some truths from that. Next week we’ll be finishing chapter 3 and all of chapter 4, so I encourage you to at least read 3 and 4, but preferably 1 through 4 for next week.

This is a book that really is a letter. A lot of the books in the New Testament are just that—letters that are written by one person that God uses to breathe that message by writing to another church or writing to other believers, others who need to be encouraged or edified in their walk with Christ. The book of Romans is just that. The Apostle Paul wrote this book in 57 or 58 A.D. from a city that was very important in those days, Corinth, and he wrote it to the church at Rome, a place that he had not yet visited but desired to visit. In fact, there are lots of places in Romans 1 where he talked about how he wanted to visit them. But he wrote this from Corinth, which was probably the most important city at that time, to strengthen the church in the seat of government, to give them what they needed.

He sent this book via Phoebe, who left from Cenchrea, a port city near Corinth, and took it to Rome, with the hope that one day he would be able to visit Rome, which of course he did—maybe not in the way that he wanted because he went as a prisoner, but he did it to encourage them. It’s interesting when we talk about this passage and the book of Romans we talk about

how he did this and why he did this. He wrote to a group of people he had never met or seen before in order to strengthen them in their walk with Christ.

Now we know that Paul wrote this; it says it right in the first verse, “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” In those days they would actually sign their letters before the letter. We do the opposite today. Paul used a scribe or secretary, Tertius (you can read about that in Romans 16) to dictate this.

I remember when I was a kid that my dad had on his desk, back in the 70s, a big box that had a hand set on it and he would pick it up and actually dictate letters and sermons into that machine and then once a day or so his secretary, Jeanette Hogan, would come in and get the tape off that machine and sit down at the IBM Selectric typewriter and write out all of the things that Dad recorded.

Now we don’t have those dictation machines anymore. Now we have computers. We can sit down and type them ourselves. Some people have those things called Siri—have you seen those commercials for Siri on the phones? You can walk around and talk to the phone and ask, “Where is the nearest pizza place?” or “How do I get home?” All those kinds of questions. That’s what we do today.

But in those days Paul did kind of the same thing. He used Tertius to write down the words. Now it’s important that we talk about that because some people would say that Tertius wrote this from the teachings of Paul, that it wasn’t really Paul writing the book, that Tertius simply wrote down things that he heard or experienced, but that is not at all what happened. This book was literally breathed by God to the heart of Paul and Paul shared what God laid on his heart. Tertius simply sat down and wrote those words out.

It’s important to know that because people will use statements in the book of Romans and other passages of Scripture to say it’s really not actually what God said. This is God’s Word. It is infallible. It is inspired. It is inerrant. Every word, every letter, everything within this book is absolutely the Word of God, and you’ve got to believe that, you’ve got to understand that in order for it to be supernatural in your life.

Paul wrote this letter to people he’d never met before. It says in Romans 1:6, “Among whom you are also the called of Jesus Christ. To all who are in Rome, beloved by God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now a couple of verses later, verse 10, he says, “By some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be established—that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”

Now I share that passage with you today because that passage, that statement in this letter that Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he wrote it to you and me as well. He says to you that “I want to come to you so that I can share with you and encourage you in this word in which you may be established.” In other words, in which you can stand, which you can hold to, cling to, that will lead you, that will guide you.

Paul's purpose is so that the church at Rome and the church at Lynchburg would be absolutely encouraged in their walk with Christ. We've got to understand why it is that Paul did this, and just as he wrote it to people he'd never met in Rome, he wrote it to you and me, and we've got to be encouraged by that.

Now over this next few weeks as we study through the book of Romans, each week I'm going to share with you some key words, and some of those we will revisit and talk about later on; some of them we will only talk about that day, but today there are three key words that I want to give to you in this passage. The first word is the word "called." You see it three or four times there in the first verses of Romans. Called to be saints. Paul, in verse 1, "Called," he said, "to be an apostle," and the word called is the Greek word *kletos*, which literally means to be invited.

We're going to revisit this word when we get to Romans 8 and we're going to talk about what it means to be called and we're going to talk about some issues from the book of Romans that a lot of people have some issues with and may be confused about, may have different views about. We'll talk about election and predestination and all those types of things, and we will come back to that in chapter 8. But the word "called" is an important word.

Another word that is very important is in the first verse, and that is the word "bondservant." Paul wrote, "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ." The word "bondservant" is literally the Greek word *doulos*, which really a better translation is the word "slave." Now we all know what the word "slave" means. It means somebody who is made to do something against their will that they cannot quit. Paul is writing the statement that because of what Christ has done, because Christ chose me, because Christ called me, because Christ changed me now I am a slave of Jesus Christ. In other words, "I serve Him and I cannot quit."

That's an important word for you and me today, because that is exactly what Christ intends for you and me to be, to be a slave for Jesus Christ, to do what Christ called us to do, to live the way that He wants us to live, to walk in the way that He wants us to walk so that we cannot and will not quit. That we would have that mindset. Paul, in writing this letter to the church of Rome and to us, he wanted them to understand: "I can't do anything but serve my Lord Jesus Christ." Wouldn't that be great if that is what the church today is like, that we were literally slaves to the Gospel of Christ? Slaves to serve Him? Slaves to walk in His way, to do what it is that He has called us to do?

That word *doulos*, slave, is an important word. Another word that is important in this first part in the book of Romans is the word "sin." We've talked about this over the last few weeks, the Greek word *hamartia*. It means anything that defies God's standard for personal holiness. Anything that goes against the nature of God. Anything that goes against what it is that God's desire is for you and me.

Now the word "sin" is used 45 times in the book of Romans. It's an important word in this passage, and we're going to talk about that, again, not a lot because we've just spent six weeks doing that, but we are going to talk about in relation to from guilt to glory, how we can experience God's perfect plan for us. Sin is an important word.

There is also a key verse that I want to share with you today, and that's the verse found in Romans 1:16, and I know you're familiar with this verse; we use it a lot around here. It says, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Isn't that a great statement? "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." This verse is so important; it's key in relation to what the book of Romans is all about, because it points us to the truth that only the Gospel of Jesus saves, that we are not saved by what we do; we're not saved by works. It is only through Christ, it is only through God's gift of His Son Jesus Christ upon the cross, His death, burial and resurrection, that that is where we find salvation.

But it is also important to understand that phrase where it says, "for everyone who believes." Let me tell you what "everyone who believes" means. It means the people you are sitting next to; it means the people who live next door to you, and it means the people who live down the street from you and it means the person that you happen to work with, and the person at work that bugs you that you don't want to be around. It happens to be the person down the street that criticizes you. It might be the person who makes fun of you because you preach the Gospel.

I would submit to you today that there are a lot of people in the church who couldn't honestly say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." Now in this room I would probably say that none of us are ashamed of the Gospel. We can say, "I'm not ashamed of the Gospel as long as I'm sitting in a room full of people who agree with it." But what about when you go out in the streets? Or what about when you're at work? Or what about when you're in your neighborhoods or maybe in a ball park or hanging out with friends in a restaurant on a Friday night? What about then?

What about when you're around the people who criticize you because you go to church, who make fun of you because you read the Word of God, who make fun of you because of your faith? What about then? Can you honestly say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ"?

Paul wrote this book, and this is a key verse, because Paul wanted to let them know that the church in Rome and the church in Lynchburg always stand up for the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ because it is the only thing that changes lives. It is the only thing that can change people. Paul wrote these words, gave us these truths so that we could stand, so that we could be established, so that we could cling to the truth that is found in the Gospel of Christ.

But how do we apply that in our lives today? How do we live this out in today's world? John 8:31 and 32 says that Jesus said to the Jews who believed Him, those who were gathered around Him, "If you abide in My word [if you stand on My word], you are my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth," and you know the rest of that verse, "and the truth shall make you free." The problem is so many of us don't live in freedom because we don't abide in the truth of God's Word because it's a book on the shelf. It's not a book that changes us day after day after day.

If this is a supernatural book, guess what? It can change your life tomorrow in a bigger way than maybe it changed it yesterday. This is not like another book that you read and you're engrossed in it and you love it and you read it and then you're done with it and set it on a shelf and never

read it again. No. Every time you open its pages, it is supernatural and it gets right into your heart and it changes you every time you read it.

So how do we live this out today? To be able to live this out, in order to make this real in our lives, we have to understand Romans chapters 1, 2 and 3 of what it truly means, what this passage tells us, and the first of two things I want to share with you that we have to understand is that we are all guilty. Every one of us. We are all guilty before Christ. When Paul wrote this letter, he started with greetings to the church of Rome, and then immediately in verses 18, 19, 20, right on through he immediately started talking about all the things that are wrong in the world.

Now listen to what he wrote in Romans 1:28 and following. He says, "Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done. Their lives became full of every kind of wickedness, sin, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malicious behavior, and gossip." Boy, that sounds a lot like today, doesn't it? This was written thousands of years ago, but it could be written today.

Verse 30 says there are backstabbers. Oh yeah, I know a few of them; "haters of God, insolent, proud, and boastful. They invent new ways of sinning." Wow! They were doing this in the first century and we're doing it still today, inventing new ways of sinning against God. It goes on to say, "and they disobey their parents." Amen, parents. Do you agree with me? I tell my kids, "You know what the Bible says. If you want to live a long life, you've got to honor your parents. Do you want to die?" I tell my kids that all the time. I'm not recommending it, but that's what I do.

It goes on, "They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too." Important words, huh? Words that could be written in 2012 just as much as they were written in 57 or 58 A.D. But in our lives today, the world that we live in today, that is a picture of what every single one of us goes through.

So Paul writes, right up front, that we are all guilty. He goes on in chapter 2 to say that those of you who look down on people, condemn them, you're just as bad as they are. He tells them we're all guilty, we're all unworthy. Romans 2:11 says there is no partiality with God. It doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Greek, Roman or Lynchburger; there is no partiality with God. We are all guilty.

The second thing we have to understand is that we are all without excuse. We are guilty, and we have no excuse for the way that we live. Romans 2:1, "Therefore you are inexcusable," you have no excuse whatsoever. He goes back to Romans 1:20 where he talks about from the creation that God's goodness, that the glory of God was manifest, was seen, was exhibited in everything that God had done, so you have no excuse. We are all guilty and we are without excuse.

Romans 3:9 he writes, "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one.'"

That is a powerful statement. You know what that means? That there is not a preacher that is righteous; no, not one. There is not a worship leader who is righteous; no, not one. There is not a businessperson who is righteous; no, not one. Not a student, not a person who works in a drive-thru, not a person who is a lawyer or a doctor, no, there are none righteous, no, not one. I don't know about you, but if I had received this letter from somebody I had never met before, I wouldn't be very encouraged right now, would you? I wouldn't be real excited about reading this letter. If all they are doing is criticizing, tearing me down and ripping me up, I don't know what I would think. But you see in order for us to understand the glory of God, we have to understand the guilt that we all live in, and that is why Paul wrote it the way that he did.

Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, all unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." You have no excuse, yet every day people are walking around thinking they've got all the answers, thinking they've figured it out, that because they are living a good life, because of the way that they are going through life, that everything is fine.

This week I had the opportunity to talk with someone at a funeral service. After the service they came up to me at the graveside, tears in their eyes, and said, "You know what? I just feel empty inside. I feel like I don't have a purpose and I don't know where I'm going and I don't know what I'm doing. I just feel empty." In the course of that conversation I asked, "Have you ever accepted Christ as your personal Savior?" I'd read a few moments before during the service from 1 Corinthians 15, talking about that Jesus died on the cross according to the Scriptures and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. I talked about the victory that comes through Christ, that even death, we have victory in death because of what Christ has done.

I said, "Have you ever accepted Christ as your personal Savior?" and immediately the answer, "I've been in church all my life. I've been going to church since I was a kid. I was involved in Awana, I was involved in choir." They went through this long list of all the things they had done. I said, "No, wait. Have you accepted and believed in Christ as your personal Savior?" We talked about that and I had the privilege of leading them to the Lord right there.

I got an email at 6 o'clock this morning from that person and they said, "I'm just so excited about what God has done. He has relieved me and released me. I haven't had a drink since that day I accepted Christ as my personal Savior. He has released me." Listen: We have to understand our guilt so that we can experience the glory that is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that we can understand the freedom and the victory that comes through His gift.

Paul ends this first couple of chapters with a statement that I know you are familiar with, verse 23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." One more time hammering it home. "You're all guilty. You are without excuse. And there is not one of you, not one of you who has not sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Then we begin to understand the ungodliness and the guilt and we begin to understand the glory of what the Gospel does.

Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of me, who suppress,” the idea of holding back. They know the truth, but they are holding it back. They know the truth, but they don’t want it to come into their lives because it might cramp their style or it might be offensive or it might not be politically correct. They know the Word of God and they know the truth and they know what to do; they know what right living is all about, but no, we suppress it, we hold it down because it might affect the way that we live.

I read this week in a commentary that Bob Bonheim sent me on the book of Romans, written by Cornelius Stam, and he defines ungodliness, and I just want to leave this with you today. He says ungodliness is simply a disregard for God and His claims. An ungodly person is one in whose life God has no welcome part. Many who fit into this category would be insulted if called ungodly, yet they would be embarrassed to be called godly.

If I walked up to any of you today and pointed my finger in your face and said, “You are ungodly,” you’d be offended—and rightly so. You’d be offended because we think we’re godly. We’re in church. We think we’re godly. We have a Bible in our hands. We think we’re godly because we’re here every time the door is open. We think we’re godly, but yet ungodliness is a situation where God is not welcome in our daily living. In other words, when this book sits on a shelf and is never opened because we’ve got other things to do, because we never get on our knees before God and pray at the altar or pray in our homes. You know why? Because we’re so busy. We don’t share our faith because we might be embarrassed. They might make fun of us. We don’t turn that computer off when it comes up showing us something we shouldn’t look at because who’s it going to hurt?

An ungodly person is one in whose life God has no welcome part. We live godly lives in an ungodly way. We say the right things, but we live differently. Paul knew that in the book of Romans, and Paul knew it today. God knew it in the book of Romans, and God knows it right now. We’re all guilty; we’re all without excuse, and in Romans 5: 8 we’re given one of the greatest passages in all of Scripture, that even still, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners [while we live like that], Christ died for us.”

Today we are all guilty, but because of Christ we can go from guilt to glory. Would you pray with me?

Father, we thank you for what you do in our lives. We thank you for your love and your power. We thank you for your gift. We thank you for your Son. We thank you for the cross and we thank you for the tomb, and we thank you that today you are risen. We thank you that even though we are all guilty, that we can live in victory because of the glory of the Gospel.

(Singing: “Come Just as You Are”)

Lord, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for its supernatural power in our lives. Strengthen us and encourage us and lead us to cling to your Word, to cling to your promises, to walk in your way so that we might be a lighthouse and we can honestly say that we are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it and it alone is where we find salvation. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.



Keywords: Word of God, Bible, call, slave, bondservant, sin, guilt, salvation, change, godliness, book of Romans, Apostle Paul