

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

ROMANS CHAPTERS 3-4: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH * SUNDAY, 13, 2023

GUEST SPEAKER: PASTOR KEITH CATRON (FRESNO DEAF FELLOWSHIP @ BRIDGECHURCH FRESNO)



BridgeChurch

JUSTIFICATION AND THE “LAW BOX”

The Ark of the Covenant is a “Law Box.” with the Ten Commandments, manna, and Aaron’s sprouted rod inside. The Law Box represents both God’s righteousness and mercy. Before Jesus, the Jewish people couldn’t approach God without the Law Box as a communication tool because they weren’t righteous under the law. This concept of justification is that God himself is righteous but we are not, but if we accept Jesus as savior we undergo transformation and in effect become like Jesus—justified and righteous as if we never sinned in the first place. This is the wonderful news of God.

1. How do we still experience the Ten Commandments as a “Law Box” in our faith?

VEERING TOWARD THE LAW CAUSES US TO BE JUDGMENTAL

(Romans 3:20) Paul was struggling with both Jewish and Roman Christians who had a cultural divide within the church. Paul indicates that no one can be made right with God by following the Law because the law only shows us our sin. The Jewish Christians were pushing the Roman Christians toward Law and encumbering them with rules. One of the biggest issues was circumcision being forced on the Roman Christians. The Jews were weighing heavily on one half of following Christ (rules). When we follow only law, we create an environment of judgment and become arbiters checking one another. God wants us to be centered on Christ, not veering toward the Law.

2. What are some dangers of focusing on Christian “rules” of living instead of focusing on Christ?

THE LAW IS A MEASURING STICK THAT CONDEMNS US

Law is a way to measure ourselves. Figuratively, Paul says I am a 1” ruler – the worst of all sinners using the perfect 12” measure of the law to compare. Only Jesus is the perfect 12” ruler and had no sin within him. He died to transform us as close as possible to the perfect 12” ruler. As we undergo judgment under the lens of the law, we will always fail, but if we stay centered on Christ we will become like the perfect 12” ruler. The greatest gift of God is to become righteousness. The Old Testament Law Box required blood sacrifice to create a representation of being justified so conversation with God could take place. Now, Jesus blood has done that to time indefinite. This is why it is important to remain centered in Christ and not diverge into the law.

3. Does the law still serve a purpose in showing us that we’re sinners?

THE LAW WILL CONFUSE YOU, CONDEMN YOU, STRIP YOU OF JOY, AND ENSLAVE YOU

Galatians 3:10 tells us that people that rely exclusively on law instead of Christ are cursed. Clearly, the law is not our friend but will always serve to condemn you instead of Christ’s acceptance and salvation. The law serves to confuse you, condemn you, and strip you of your joy. This is why it’s critical to be centered on Jesus and be justified by your faith. Paul reminds the Roman church that both the Jews and the Romans who are Christians are all guilty of sin—the law favors no races. As you move toward the law, you become enslaved. There is no spiritual freedom. We must be careful then to venture too far into law.

4. How can a focus on “law” instead of being centered on faith serve to confuse us or shake our confidence in our faith?

IN OUR CULTURE WE HAVE A “SOCIAL MEDIA BOX”

In our culture we also have a “Social Media Box.” Never in the history of man have we had to filter messages the way we do through the Social Media Box to distinguish what is real and what is fake. We never needed to develop this skill prior to Social Media, but social media is riddled with lies. We have to be careful to distinguish truth from lies. The negative effects of social media are alarming. If you stray from being centered on Christ and veer toward the Social Media Box, and as you become reliant on social media, you will become confused and be at odds with yourself. It is crucial that you stay centered on the truth in the Bible.

5. How has social media impacted your ability to distinguish what is truth?

SOCIAL MEDIA HAS LINKS TO DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, LONELINESS, SELF-HARM AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Multiple studies show a strong link between heavy social media use and increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts. Social media promotes negative experiences such as inadequacy about your life or appearance. Regardless of the fact that you may perceive social media as fake (e.g., doctored images), it still impacts how you feel. People love to share just the highlights of their lives and hide their negatives experiences, causing you to feel that you’re missing out. Despite knowing about the falsities on social media, we feel less confident and are brought down and compare ourselves on social media. But this is not truth. Christ loves us and in Christ we are lacking nothing. It is so important to centralize everything we do in Christ.

6. Compare your identity on social media to your identity in Christ.

THE ANSWER IS STAYING CENTERED ON CHRIST, NOT VEERING TOWARD EITHER THE LAW OR SOCIAL MEDIA

They might not have had social media in Roman times, but they had untruths, gossip, and backstabbing representative of social media. Romans 3:7-8 even tells us some people said, “When I lie, it really gives God glory, because my life makes the truth easier to see.” Paul reminds them it would be the same to say that we should do evil so good things would come. Imagining promoting evil to promote God!! Paul says that as we stay centered in our faith, through that, we are made righteous through Christ. There is peace and less of the confusion resulting from the law or social media. There is only one answer and it staying centered on Christ every day in our lives.

7. How do Christians today misuse social media while saying they are centered on Christ?

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SABBATICAL TAKEAWAYS: "EMERGENCE" (Rev. Ch. 2) * SUNDAY, AUGUST 27, 2023 * PASTOR ANDREW SMITH



BridgeChurch

OUR MISSION HAS A BEAUTIFUL SIMPLICITY TO IT

Our Mission: To help people discover and follow Jesus. There's a beautiful simplicity to that. He is the beginning and end and everything in the middle, our hope and the one who transforms us, the one who beckons us and does the work in us. There is nothing more you can do to gain the favor of God that Jesus has not already done on your behalf.

1. How were your beginnings with Jesus a beautiful simplicity?

EMERGENCE: MOVING FROM SIMPLICITY TO COMPLEXITY

There is a scientific term "emergence" that affects everything in our lives. Emergence is the term by which all things in life move from simplicity to complexity. Thinking even of the origin of human life, a baby starts with a single celled zygote that, within 24-hours transforms to a multi-cell embryo. Going back to the Latin it means the sureness of happening in a quick way (where we get our word emergency). Pastor Andrew shared how he had been thinking of his and Megan's 25th wedding anniversary and how everything in their relationship started from something very simple: Their love for each other, their love for Jesus, and that with just that everything will be okay—a simple innocence. But soon things compounded with moves, graduate school, bills, and the ever-increasing complexities of life, including careers, church planting, and multiple children.

2. How have movements in your life toward complexities affected you?

COMPLEXITY IS INEVITABLE BUT REVISITING SIMPLICITY IS OPTIONAL AND ESSENTIAL

In the complexities of doing life—all the "things"—it can be like a fog descends on your life due to the complexities. You can lose sight of the beautiful simplicities of where things started. Complexity is not a bad thing, but it can cause you to focus on the wrong things—incidentals that make you forget the simplicities of where things started. Complexity is inevitable, but revisiting simplicity is optional and essential. While the Apostle John was exiled on the island of Patmos, he had a revelation that came from Jesus himself. (Revelation 1:17-19)

3. How can complexities cause us to lose focus on what originally motivated and inspired us in faith/ministry?

JESUS IS THE PARENTHESIS IN ALL OF LIFE

(Read Rev. 1:17-19) While the Apostle John was exiled on the island of Patmos, he had a revelation that came from Jesus himself. Jesus affirms that He is the parenthesis of all of life—the First and the Last and everything in between. We can look back at Jesus in our lives or we can be experiencing His presence right now, but sometimes we doubt that He will be with us in the future. But why pray for Him to be with us when He has already confirmed He IS there?! He's already there ahead of us in preparation for us. If you've ever experience a feeling of spiritual abandonment, that's your mind playing tricks on you.

4. How does a confidence in Jesus within your future affect how you look at life? What causes you to feel doubt about this?

JESUS IS OUR HOPE AND WALKS BEHIND, WITH, AND IN FRONT OF US.

Jesus confirms He is alive—this is what our entire faith rests on. If Jesus was resurrected and beat sin, death, and the grave, we can have confidence in everything else He said He was going to do. Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades, which is a symbol of authority. Jesus holds the keys to reverse what sin introduced. Jesus has declared that He wins and is going to set all things right—everything our hearts long for, so we have that hope.

5. How does this truth that Jesus holds the keys to death and Hades affect your perceptions?

WE CAN DO ALL THE THINGS IN MINISTRY AND LOSE OUR FIRST LOVE WITH JESUS

Rev. 2:2-4: Jesus begins to declare some affirmations and warnings to the churches and, today, we're looking at the church in Ephesus. Jesus tells them "You have abandoned the love you had at first." Jesus loved all the great stuff they were doing...like the stuff we're doing today. We do the Jesus ministry stuff like volunteering in children's ministry, setting up for events, doing oil changes for widows, giving of finances, etc. Jesus says they also endured when it got tough. Jesus commends them for not putting up with evil people, compassionately conveying right and wrongs with empathy. Jesus says the church was doing all the right things, BUT they left their first love. In the overdeveloping complexity of ministry, they forgot the simplicity of where it started—JESUS.

6. Where have the complexities in your faith made you forget the "first love" relationship you had with Jesus earlier?

DON'T LET COMPLEXITY STEAL YOUR BEAUTIFUL SIMPLICITIES

It's easy to do a lot of great stuff for the Kingdom of God and lose our original love for Jesus. For many of us in our faith, the issue is emergence because things have gotten more complex and we've forgotten where we were when we met Jesus. This issue of emergence bleeds into every area of our lives: faith, marriage, parenting, jobs, friends. The complexity of life can steal the beauty of where things first started. By way of example, in the simplicity of parenting, you just had hopes and dreams and had concerns about their heart, but complexities may have shifted your parenting focus to behaviors. Sometimes, thinking back on the simplicities of beginnings allows us to return to gratitude. Complexity can bring beauty, but it can also cause cacophony that makes it hard to see what's important. Simplicity allows us to remember our focus and what's most important. In the church, that focal point is only Jesus. The church should begin and end with Jesus.

7. Evaluating the facets of your life (and particularly your spiritual walk), where has emergence complicated things to make us forget the beauty of the simplicity where things began?

REVIEW OF ROMANS

Ch. 1-2 is about sin—missing God’s mark/standard for living. Ch. 3-5 is what to do about it—salvation from the messes we create for ourselves. Ch. 6 is about sanctification—growing as we see God’s truth, consider it, and surrender. Romans Ch 7 is about the struggle of surrender.

1. If we’re honest, we all feel it. What is the struggle to surrender to God’s truths like in your life?

INSTEAD OF THE RULES LEADING US TO RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WE CAN STRUCTURE OUR LIVES AROUND THE RULES

[Reading: Romans 7:1 & 12] We want to choose in favor of God, yet so frequently do things our way then have a spiritual moment where we realize we still have evil inside us. The Jewish people knew and struggled with the Old Testament law—rules God had set up for good and proper living and to lead people into right relationship with God. The struggle with the “rules” also applies to followers of Jesus today. Romans 7:12 tells us that the law is good and meant for good. Despite this, what has happened in every era of human history is that we **believe** the law is good and meant to lead us into right relationship with God, but what we end up **doing** instead of being in right relationship with God through the law, we end up mistakenly structuring our lives to be in right relationship with the law instead—it becomes about the rules.

2. We all have natural tendencies. Are you more of a rule follower or a rule breaker? A checklist maker or spontaneous?

THE LAW TRAPS US INTO CYCLES OF FAILED OBEDIENCE

We can be confused about living in right relationship with God versus living in relationship to rules to prove self-worth. This creates cycles of failed obedience. This leads to unhealthy fear of God. In the Old Testament, it wasn’t the law that did this, but failure to understand that the law leads to God, but the rules weren’t the end in and of themselves. We as followers of Jesus today have the same tendencies.

3. What kinds of things do you tell yourself about how successful you are or aren’t about living Christian “rules”?

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL!

[Reading: Romans 7:14-25] The word “flesh” simply means our human nature apart from God’s intervention. Our “flesh” leads toward our consistent choosing in favor of ourselves instead of living God’s way. The law—the rules—speak to a better way that we consistently find unable to follow. The struggle is real! It affects every area of our lives and is so human. We want to be on one path, compelled by the Bible and its content, and yet every day we seem to keep choosing in favor of doing things our own way in a way that makes us aware that evil is still present.

4. Do you identify with these verses? How do they make you feel about your spiritual walk?

WHEN WE SURRENDER TO THE LAW, WE’RE CONTINUALLY TEMPTED TO BREAK IT

[Reading: Romans 7:5] When we surrender to the law, we are continually tempted to break it. This is human nature. The rules God set up for us were not to suppress us, make us unhappy, or turn us into robot servants. They were always about us thriving, growth, and good. The law was designed to bring us to surrender to God. But, if we set up a bunch of boxes to check and surrender to the law instead of to the One to whom it points, we’re continually living in temptation. If we focus on doing things “right” instead of on relationship with God, sin can seize an opportunity through the law to deceive us. The law is good, but something happens when we make rules our focus instead of making God our focus.

5. In what ways are you tempted to get caught up in a checklist for living “right”?

YOU HAD JUST ONE THING...

[Reading: Romans 7:11] The word “deceived” is important as we look back to at Genesis. In Eden there was only ONE rule! The serpent is analogous to human nature—our desire apart from God’s influence. Clear back to Adam and Eve, we’ve decided in favor of what we think it best for us. In Romans 7, we find there is something deceiving about the situation because we’re human beings and our reality is that we’re continually tempted to break the rules just like the very first people. We ask God, “Do we really...?” It’s not just that we’re continually tempted, but that we’re lead to decisions in favor of our human nature. When we surrender to the law instead of the person to whom the law is intended to take us, we **continually fail** to meet the standard of the law.

6. In what ways can we be tempted to “shade” things by asking God “Did You really mean _____ [blank]”?

ONLY THROUGH RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CAN WE HAVE A DIFFERENT HEART AND MOVE FORWARD WITH GOD

[Romans 7:18-23] When the desire to do good is within us, without the ability to follow through, it causes fear, guilt, and shame. We can’t help choosing in favor of what WE think is best or benefits us. We have built-in tendency to make a system of checkboxes for our lives—our form of the law that always fails. Only God sending his spirit into us through relationship with Jesus can give us a different heart and a different skillset, desire, and ability to progressively start making decisions God’s way. We have to choose God first and the rest will come. Checking boxes is what seems easy and in our control, but it isn’t!

7. How does checking spiritual boxes seem easy and within our control and why is this deceptive?

STRUGGLING TO FOLLOW THE RULES KILLS US FROM THE INSIDE OUT

[Reading: Romans 7:24] When we surrender to the law, we surrender to death. What was always meant to lead to the One who gives us life is what can kill us from the inside out. Sin produces death in us through what is good...the law. This is because the law is about process instead of about God. The wages of sin is death. Jesus offers us a way out by living the perfect life and then dying for our failures.

8. How can guilt stemming from rules keep us from the changed heart Jesus wants us to grow into?

JESUS HANDS US FREEDOM TO GROW A HEART THAT SEEKS GOD INSTEAD OF HIDING IN GUILT

[Reading: Romans 7:4,6] Romans gives us hope that we don’t have to live crushed under a reminder that we don’t live up to God’s standard. We can be released from the law to belong to Jesus. The desire to do it all right is dead and gone when we surrender to Jesus. That is where freedom and new life comes from. We can move on to living into what God intends for us through Jesus.

9. If you ditched your spiritual checklist this week and simply listened to how God wants you to grow, what would that look like?



ROMANS CHAPTER 12 - THE KEYSTONE: OUR RESPONSE IS TO OFFER

How the early church developed still fits with where we're at now. Pastor Smith talked about how he loves Roman architecture and the distinctiveness of the Roman Arch that is prevalent throughout its designs. Each piece of the arch is essential, but the **keystone** at the top is what allowed the arch to remain upright and bear weight. As we've been moving through the Book of Romans we're at the keystone now in Ch. 12. The theological blocks are in the "therefores" starting in Ch. 1 and now Ch. 12 it starts, "Therefore, in view of the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice..." Our **response** to what God has done should be to **offer everything** we have.

1. When you hear "everything" what room in your heart do you want to keep the door closed on so God doesn't see the mess? Does thinking of the mercies that God has offered you help you let God in to do some housekeeping?

A LIVING SACRIFICE TO SERVE OTHERS

[READ Romans 12:3-8] Why do we continually offer our bodies as a living sacrifice? To serve others. Why continually? We are forgetful and have theological amnesia all the time, making things all about ourselves. Romans 1-11 talks about how God lavished Himself on us. Now, we're invited to do the same for others.

2. What kind of things make it hard to make choices considering others rather than watching out for yourself?

THE LIST IS GOOD, BUT THE SPIRIT IS BETTER

[Read Romans 9-18] These verses are about how we can serve others through selfless practices. Remembering last week, some of us may be prone to make a list and try to do the checklist, but that's how to get it wrong. Our tendency is to orient ourselves to work in the flesh instead of orienting ourselves instead of relying on the Holy Spirit. We need to continually present our bodies in order for the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. This is the only way we're empowered to accomplish this.

3. How does spiritual amnesia relate to the concept last week that we have to live in the Spirit rather than to-do lists?

LET LOVE BE GENUINE

Verse 9 tells us to "let love be genuine." If we could truly love our neighbors like God intended, our world would look so different! The word genuine means our love should not be contrived or a flattery, but genuine and without hypocrisy. Sometimes the most genuine expression of love is saying the hard thing. The most loving thing God has done for us is to reveal our sin to us so we would be led into a relationship with Him. Genuine love is the baseline of how everything in Romans 12 must be based. He gives us the **privilege** of loving other people!

4. Share an example of when someone offered profoundly genuine love to you. How did it affect you?

WE'RE DESIGNED TO GROW AS WE LIVE IN REGULAR PROXIMITY TO OTHER PEOPLE

None of our Christian journey is lived out in isolation. We can only live out these concepts in community because this is God's design for us to be in regular proximity to other people. That's often where God is going to work on us. We need other people because "iron sharpens iron." We make each other better. God can use other people to reveal our blind spots where we most need transformation.

5. Share an example of when someone close to you made you see yourself in a new way resulting in change.

WE CAN'T LOVE OTHERS WHERE THEY ARE IF WE FORGET WHERE WE WERE.

We can't love others where they are if we forget where we were. That doesn't mean that we're held hostage to our past, but we need to look back and understand the grace, love, and mercy poured out to us and the work God has done in our lives. That allows us to love others right where they are because someone else loved us when we were really hard to love. There may have been that person who embodied Jesus and loved on you when you were unlovable. We can't change anyone, but we can be there for someone. Grace can be hard to understand, but we can embody it for someone by loving them right in all their messiness and inability to get it right.

6. Share an example of someone that loved you when you were a mess. Was this part of your spiritual journey?
7. What does it mean to "just be there" for someone? What might that look like in a practical sense?

CLING TO WHAT IS GOOD BY LETTING GO

How do we give grace to other people? Verse 9 tells us to "cling to what is good." By implication, when we say cling to what is good there is something to let go of and also something to hold onto. We can't just let go, but we need to replace it with something better. Many times, we don't want to let go because we want to hold onto the hurts, words, and actions to allow us to justify our behavior in an ungodly way as ammunition. Paul tells us what we have to hold onto in verse 10 saying we need to take the **lead** in **honoring** one another. Show the example by **choosing** to focus and bring attention to the good qualities of someone. The significant of honoring is because our actions follow our focus. If we want to find either the positive or negative about someone, we're going to find it. Sometimes one of the greatest apologetics of the faith is simply being kind to other people.

8. PRACTICE: Go around the group and share something nice about two other members in your group.

LOVE IS THE KEYSTONE OF OUR FAITH

[Romans 13:8-10] They **keystone** that holds our faith together and allows us to live in the power of the Spirit is **love**. Love is the fulfillment of the law. Yes, there is theological correctness, but the most important thing is how we love because Christ loved us. We can make faith convoluted and difficult because our culture gives us all kind of permissions not to love other people, but we should love them anyway. We need to stop cutting ties with people over things like political views. We don't have to just love people that look like us, believe like us, or root for the same sports team. We're invited to love other people in the way that Christ has loved us.



ROMANS CHS. 14-16: "OH, WAIT, I'M NOT DONE YET!" * SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2023 * PASTOR ANDREW SMITH
ANNOUNCEMENT: FOR INITIATIVE INFO DINNER: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2023 AT 6:30 PM FOR DETAILS ABOUT "FOR"

Wedges are designed to separate what was designed to be joined together.

Last week we were talking about architecture and the Roman Arch. Amazing as it was, there was one feature absolutely necessary: the keystone that allowed it to bear the weight. The keystone of our faith is just to love people where they are. There are also things that unite and divide. Wedges are designed to separate what was designed to be together. Paul wants us to realize there are all sorts of wedges that we throw into our relationships all the time based on false assumptions or opinions.

1. What are some of the ways we draw immediate conclusions, assumptions, or opinions about people?

When personal opinions become primary issues they create wedges.

[Romans 14:1-3] A lot of our wedges are frankly stupid and based on personal preferences and perspectives. They keep us from living in relationship with other people. Closing out the Book of Romans, this is what Paul wants to address this between believers. He wants us to be aware of the things that keep us from genuinely loving people. He instructs us not to argue about disputed matters because when side issues become primary issues, they become divisive issues. Our best interpretation of "disputed things" is opinions—things not based on fact or knowledge. We all have opinions—and we need to—but we can't let them become wedges where Jesus wants to create unity. Sometimes we just need to agree to disagree and not break friendship over a disputable matter.

2. What kinds of opinions (especially theological opinions) have you seen create significant differences of opinion between Christians?

It all boils down to the facts that we're guilty and Jesus is innocent.

[Luke 23:40-41] Secondary opinions have zero bearing on one's salvation. So, we need to understand what the irreducible minimum is. Here's the one thing that is the one confession of the Christian faith: We're guilty and Jesus is innocent. People will say there's got to be more! Theology is important. Doctrine (our set of beliefs and ability to explain them) is good. They are important, but not essential. Look at when Jesus was crucified with a thief being crucified on each side of him. Both were hurling insults at Jesus but then one of the thieves becomes convicted and tell the other to chill out. He says they are guilty but Jesus has done nothing wrong. Jesus doesn't talk to the thief about theology. Jesus says he will see him in Paradise.

3. If you have a well-developed set of theological convictions, do you have a hard time accepting this?
4. Is there really anything else that is a "core" belief essential to salvation based on the story of the Two Thieves?

Decide not to be a stumbling block.

[Romans 14:13-14] All other beliefs and convictions hang on the conviction that we're guilty and Jesus is innocent. We should hold our convictions and persuasions, but they cannot be wedges that divide unity because a stumbling block is something that causes what otherwise should be a clear path to be unnecessarily difficult. Some people throw a handful of Legos where others need to walk. We have to ask if we're defending our positions and being right or is it about defending the supremacy of Jesus. Wanting to be right should not be the goal in theological discussions.

5. Understanding theology is good, but how can your theology become a "stumbling block" for new believers?

In our pursuit of unity, we tend to get it confused with uniformity.

We often feel like pursuing our own positions is pursuing unity. We think that if others have the same theological positions that we do, we'll have unity. But, we tend to get it confused with uniformity. Unity is being joined as a whole like a band or the human body with many diverse parts that work together and every part is important. Uniformity by definition is a lack of diversity and a lack of variation. We see this in the church sometimes over worship styles, pews vs. chairs, literal vs. figurative interpretation of Genesis, and other opinions and preferences. That's the issue Paul addresses to the church—they have more diversity than ever but one confession in Jesus. The church today is to pursue diversity, but only have one confession. Because of Jesus, we're in it to win it, and it's just that simple.

6. What preferences have you seen break up friendships within the church or caused people to leave the church?

Knowledge puffs up but love builds up.

[Romans 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 8:1] We need to grow in our faith and understanding of the Scriptures, but we need to do this with gentleness and respect. More times than not when we grow in what we believe, we can become a little belligerent. Knowledge we collect for the sake of knowledge will make us prideful and arrogant. This leads us to seeking uniformity. What we're supposed to do as mature believers is to build each other up. Our job is to love new believers even if they have a long way to go in understanding the deeper points of theology. Loving them where they are is what lets us have dialogue and refine one another. Mature believers...it's not about protecting what meant so much to us, but about giving away our faith to the next generation or new believers who begin their faith walk just knowing that they are guilty and Jesus is innocent. Jesus welcomed you just where you were and we need to welcome new believers from a place of grace.

7. What does it look like to model this type of grace when a new believer expresses an immature theological viewpoint?

Pastor Andrew's Concluding Questions

8. In what direction is your knowledge of God trending you?
9. Is what you know about God increasing your love for other people and for God?
10. If not, why?

YOU'RE JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH! WHAT IF YOU JUST TRY HARDER?

Football season, watching the game...Have you ever thought for a second, "I could do that!" then come to an awareness you don't measure up to pro athlete performance? Maybe there's mental failure realizing you'll never have what it takes and trying harder isn't going to change that. So why do we assume we need to try harder and be better in our walk with Jesus? That we just need to do it different "next time"?

1. What ways do you FEEL like you need to "try harder" and "do things different" in your Christian walk?

TRYING TO SUBDUCE THE RESIDUALS OF OUR FLESH IN OUR OWN STRENGTH

Feeling like we just need to try harder is the first step for us to end up in a state of spiritual depression, feeling like we'll never measure up and incorrect thinking that God is always disappointed with our performance. That couldn't be further from the truth. We live in a current sense of tension and frustration, like Paul expresses about what he wants to do versus what he actually does, because we're no longer who we were before but we've got residuals of our "flesh". We resort to trying to subdue the matters of the flesh in our own strength...if I just had better discipline, a better structure, a better Bible study...if I try harder!!!!

2. Be honest! On a scale from 1 to 10, how pleased do you FEEL like God is with you right now?

GET REAL ABOUT THE BATTLE BECAUSE THE BATTLE IS REAL

[READ: Romans 8:3-4] Despite tension between your flesh and God's Spirit, there's hope for us to move beyond the sense of consistent failure. The solution is not our default M.O. and how we're naturally put together. We've got to understand there's a **war** going on inside of us even if the battle is already won. For us to apply the truth, we have to **know** the truth. We've got to get real about the battle. We only experience victory if the spirit of God leads us and we relinquish control. There's nothing we can do to impress God. Everything we can't do, He did. Jesus did the disciplines, ran the fastest race, and jumped the furthest, then he gave his record of accomplishments to YOU. But what keeps many of us from living in the reality of that truth? Because the greatest way to lose a battle is to not know there is one to begin with.

3. What is your reaction to what was just read (particularly in light of you just rated yourself in God's approval)?

THE FLESH BEGINS AND ENDS WITH ITSELF

The essence of war is a violent clash between two hostile, independent and irreconcilable wills, each trying to impose itself on the other. We have two wills inside of us, and the first is the "flesh" which is everything in us as a residual of who we used to be that is opposed to what God wants in our lives. The flesh is prideful, arrogant and begins and ends with "I" – I want, I desire, I think, I need—rather than thinking of others. It sits in opposition to what God wants for us. While we're new in Christ, we have residues of how we used to go about things prior to Jesus.

4. How do we recognize the residues of our pre-Jesus life that oppose the Spirit?

THE SPIRIT OF GOD PROVIDES VICTORY THROUGH SURRENDER

The Spirit of God is a **new operating system** within ourselves that we have to **train ourselves to surrender to** instead of defaulting to how we've always done things. The flesh says to work harder and run faster, but the Spirit can transcend what your flesh is incapable of doing. To live into this, we have to realize that the flesh and spirit are **not equal** opposing forces. The Spirit is greater than the flesh. Life according to the flesh makes you feel like you're trying but makes you realize you're failing. Life in the Spirit is freedom, but our victory is only through surrender.

5. What things make surrender hard to do? What does it mean to "train" to surrender?

THE BIBLE IS FULL OF COMMANDS FOR ANTITHETICAL LIVING: DIE TO LIVE, BE LAST TO BE FIRST, SURRENDER TO WIN

[READ: Romans 8:5-8] It's not a matter of weakness to surrender, but the first step to strength. We need to say "I can't, but He can" and orient our lives around what God wants for us instead of what our flesh wants. **The battlefield is your mind.** Surrendering to the Spirit must be learned because the flesh is instinctual, but there are things we can do to prepare ourselves to live according to the Spirit. Our discipline isn't to try harder, but to **know** the truth. We have to know what's **in** us to hope to rise above what gets thrown **at** us. Two important truths: (1) We have to start out not already defeated. The truth says "greater is He who is in you than he that is in the world." (2) Make your decision **NOW** about what you're going to do with whatever you're faced with. 1 Cor. 10:13 tells us there's always a way out from temptation to act according to our flesh, so we decide ahead of time to take God's escape route. There's nothing coming at us that God hasn't already prepared for.

6. Which of these truths speaks loudest to you, and why?

THE SPIRIT OF GOD PROVIDES VICTORY THROUGH SURRENDER

[READ: Romans 8:9-11] We already have the Spirit within us! The If-Then formula in these verses tells us we don't have a little bit of the Spirit of God but access to the **resurrection power level** of Spirit that brought Jesus back into life. That's the level of power we have access to when we surrender to living in the Spirit. If we would wrap our minds around that truth, it would fundamentally change how we go about life.

7. How does the realization of the power of the Spirit **IN YOU** impact your perception of your access to victory?

THERE'S NO CONDEMNATION WHEN YOU FAIL IN YOUR SURRENDER

[READ: ROMANS 8:1-2] But what's weird about the Christian life is that none of us is perfect—we tend to go right back to the flesh, possibly even leaving this discussion about the power of the Spirit by saying "I'm going to do that now!"—going right back to the flesh! And as we try to be more in the Spirit, we may not really be surrendering but just trying harder. HUH? But, there is no condemnation for those in Jesus because we've been set free. We need to keep reminding ourselves that **our victory is in surrender** so that **WHEN** we fail (because we will), the truth tells you that your Heavenly Father is not waiting to condemn you. We are free to continue learning to lean into surrender to the Spirit.

8. What is your temptation that you need to plan ahead to **SURRENDER** to the Spirit? (Trying to live in your own strength? Feeling condemnation instead of freedom? Something area where your flesh is winning in your behavior or attitudes?)