Main Idea: Christians grow in righteousness through the Holy Spirit and God’s discipline, not by the implementation of law!

1. Introduction:
   a. Christian churches often approach holiness like Bob Newhart: “Stop it!”
   b. Whether out of bad motives (pride, control) or good (concern for God’s name), for thousands of years Christians have tried to motivate behavior through external means.
   c. To live according to law, however, is to reject Grace, and we end up enslaved to burdens we cannot bear.

   Remember, *law* says that “you get what you deserve.”

   *Grace* says that “you get what Christ deserves!”

   d. How does Grace prevent abuse of this promise, which is too good to be true?

2. The “secret sauce” of holiness: divine transformation. (Galatians 5:13-26)

   “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ez. 36:25-27 ESV)

   a. God’s solution to the defamation of his name is heart change.
   b. The Holy Spirit transforms our desires.

   “And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38 ESV)

   i. If we are to live godly lives, we must desire to be godly, which requires a transformed heart.
   ii. The Law cannot bring thoroughgoing righteousness.
   iii. To be led by the Spirit naturally forces out the deeds of the flesh.
   iv. The receiving of Grace entails God replacing our cold dead hearts with living hearts sensitive to the Spirit.

   c. Transformation requires the Holy Spirit.

   i. Apply: through law you can get your children into habits of external obedience, but you cannot instill righteousness in them.
   ii. Apply: our civil authorities cannot simply let criminals go without punishment believing that they will not re-offend, because the mercy of a secular court does not include the impartation of the Holy Spirit.

   d. Those who fully submit to Grace will not abuse it due to *the work of the Holy Spirit*, not due to ‘balancing’ law and grace.
i. Truly righteous people aren’t willpower savants, they just love what is good!
ii. Salvation precedes and causes righteousness, it is not the reward for it.

3. Pain as discipline, not punishment. (Hebrews 12:5-11)
   a. If your sin was paid fully on the cross, God will never punish you for your sin.
   b. God will, however, use pain as a tool for developing his children.
      i. Punishment is about Justice, discipline about maturation.
      ii. God uses pain to remind us how destructive sin is.
      iii. God calls us to holiness because sin destroys and righteousness builds up.

   “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

   c. If our parents disciplined us out of anger or for the sake of control, this is harder to grasp.
      i. God uses pain to bring about righteousness and peace.
      ii. If God does not discipline us, it proves that he has written us off.

   “[Because they rejected God], God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...God gave them up to dishonorable passions...God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28 ESV)

      iii. Painful discipline only becomes empty if we refuse to be trained by it.
   d. Not all pain is necessarily discipline.
      i. All sin causes harm: sometimes to us, often to others.
      ii. We should not blame God for the pain caused by our own foolishness or sin, or the foolishness or sin of others.
      iii. Every time God intentionally brings pain into the life of a believer, it is for their own growth in maturity. It is discipline, not punishment.

4. Why doesn’t Grace cause Christians to sin with impunity?
   a. God actively works against it.
      i. The Holy Spirit transforms our desires.
      ii. God disciplines those he loves.
   b. Next three weeks: reasons for us to pursue Holiness.

5. How do you pursue greater holiness today?
   a. Choose a particular stumbling point in your life and pray daily that God would make you want to do what is right, to love what is good and hate what is evil.
   b. Identify the place where you most think that God is causing or allowing pain in your life, and ask him what He is trying to teach you. Respond as He leads.

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This Week

Read
Romans 8:1-17

Consider

In your own words, try to explain the contrast Paul makes here between the flesh and the Spirit.

What role do these ideas play in the teachings found in Romans 8: freedom, the Spirit, death, sonship?

What practical actions help you to set your mind on the Spirit?

In what ways is the Spirit urging you to put to death the deeds of your body? (v. 13)

Do

Ask God to strengthen your desire to live according to the Spirit rather than the flesh.

Ask a friend to help you start a plan by which you can put to death a sinful habit of the flesh that you have, or by which you can more regularly set your mind on the things of the Spirit.

Pray

Thank God that He loves you enough to transform your heart, and that He has adopted you as a son or daughter and cares enough about you to discipline you. Ask him to strengthen your desire for holiness and to help you respond to discipline by being trained into greater righteousness that brings peace.