

A Mind of Life and Peace

By Bobby Schuller

Today I want to talk about this message from Paul in Romans that can break every chain in your life. And I also want to talk about a researcher who spent six years doing scientific research to find out how people connect deeply, and how all of this is tied together with two things: shame or feeling worthy. And, those two things are diametrically opposed.

Today, if you hear anything I say, I want you to know this: You are worthy of love and belonging. Shame is not helping you. You are worthy of love and belonging. If the cross doesn't teach us that, what else does it? That God sent his only perfect Son to die for you and me so that we could be reconciled to heaven, that we could be a part of God's family. If the precious blood of Jesus Christ is not proof enough, I don't know what is. That you really are worth love and belonging. It's what the Lord wants for you.

Do you ever feel shame? No? You know, shame is a universal human emotion. It's something all of us feel. All of us have this lingering feeling that I don't belong. There's this lingering sense like I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough, I'm not attractive enough, I'm not holy enough to fit into the circles I want to be a part of.

Many of us feel this undergirding insecurity that I really am not worthy of being loved and so I need to pretend and show something that really doesn't exist so that people don't see this part of me that would cause them to send me away. So I need to pretend.

There's a big difference between guilt and shame. Jay and I were talking about it. And the big difference is this: Guilt says *what I did was unworthy*, but shame says *I am unworthy*, and there's a big difference. You see, guilt isn't always bad, right? Guilt can drive us to repentance, to say I'm sorry, to reconcile with people.

But shame causes us to withdraw and to hide. Shame reinforces the idea in our hearts that I don't belong. It's the despair that because of who I am, I will never have a proper place with loving people; that I'll never be enough. That I have to keep trying harder and that the day I give up I'm totally going to be severed from everyone. Shame says if people only knew this about me, they wouldn't really love me. And it's amazing the things we feel shame about. We feel shame about things that people even did to us. It's not even your fault and you feel shame. And we feel crippled, we feel unworthy, we feel that if people really saw us deeply that they would reject us.

I want to tell you something: No one sees you deeper than God does. He does not reject you. God says to you, and I say to you, you are worthy of love and belonging. And this is a community that every day reinforces the idea that every human being deserves dignity, love, and compassion, and that no one is beyond saving. If you're still alive, God is going to do great things in your life if only you have faith in Jesus Christ.

Your past does not define you! Many of us, our identities are rooted in our families, are rooted in these things we used to do, are rooted in our old careers that we regret, or whatever. We have all of these things. I am my divorce, I am my affair, I am my old drug addiction, I am the me that was in prison, I am all of these other things. I'm never going to be valued. I'm never going to be worth somebody who really cares about me. Look – all of those things are lies.

I want to tell you something. If you follow Jesus Christ, he will train you to see the truth - that you are loved, that you are valued, that you belong. And that God is forming in you a new kind of person, a heavenly person that not only feels as though they belong and connects deeply with God and others, but also becomes the kind of person that draws other people into heaven. One who says friend, no matter what happened to you, you're not what you do, and you're not what was done to you. You do not need to be ashamed. The cross is enough. You're

loved. You're welcomed. And you belong. You are worthy of love and belonging and, if you hear anything I say, hear that.

I think one of my favorite chapters of the whole Bible is Romans chapter 8. It's read a lot and you can pick any section from it and it's wonderful. But the beginning, which was so eloquently read by Jan, whose not sitting here now. I don't know what...he was there a second ago, and now he's not. He's in the choir! What on earth? Stand up, Jan. Right there, wave if you can't see him. That is hilarious. I thought you were here the whole time. Is he any good, Don? He's pretty good. All right. As Jan so eloquently read this morning, "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Paul writes, "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus will set you free from the loss and in death."

Look, many of us feel condemned all the time. The irony of many Christian denominations is in trying to preach the gospel and trying to teach the deadliness of sin, and sin is deadly. They impose into the deep DNA, spiritual DNA of people an ongoing soul-gripping feeling of shame. Like I'm never good enough. Like I will always be messed up. Like I will always have this thing in my life that I can never show because until I'm perfect, until I get all the rules right, I'll never fit. And this was something that Paul, the author of this letter, and this was something that his

people dealt with. It was something Jesus dealt with a lot and that is soul-killing legalism.

Listen, many of you grew up in a religious environment. Maybe some of you were so hurt by religion, now you're just sort of dipping your toe back in the water. I just want to tell you that the number one enemies of Jesus Christ were religious people. And I hate to admit that, being a pastor, but the persons he criticized the most, the persons he talked about hell the most with were religious leaders. Jesus was so frustrated with, particularly, the Pharisees and religious leaders that put these burdens on people, created fake boundaries, that if you do X, Y and Z perfectly, you're in, and if you don't, you're out.

Many of us carry this from childhood. You're maybe in your old age and you've learned all this stuff and you still carry these deep-seeded burdens that are not from God; they are from the enemy that say until I'm perfect, till I get it all together, I will never truly be good, and I will never belong. You deserve love and belonging. And you are loved and you do belong.

And so this is a theme for Paul. Throughout the whole book of Romans he's talking about what religiosity and legalism did to him, and what it's doing to the church. And he actually says when I started

studying the law, it made me worse! When I got into legalism and all these rules, I started thinking about. I didn't think about coveting and then all of sudden I saw "Thou shalt not covet" and I started coveting all the more.

Christians all have the same goal – to help make good people, right? Christians believe that goodness comes from the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, not from legalism. And that's what Paul says here. It is the spirit of life, the fresh wind that is blown into you, the deep abiding friendship and love with Jesus Christ, and the pleasure therein that makes us good people. In other words, we do good not because someone told us to; we do good because we want it. And that's what God is forming in you right now. Right now, he's melting away the shame.

The irony of shame is that shame actually causes us to sin more. It's been proven in a lab that shame is a trigger for people to fall back into old patterns and withdraw, especially addiction. That the more we feel shame, the more we're tempted to sin. And that is why the cross is so important. That the freedom of shame, the sort of reckless abandon; it doesn't matter what I did, I have a hundred percent clean slate and I am loved and adored by God. I belong here. Even when I keep messing up God says don't worry about it. Get back up on your feet. Keep going. I

believe in you. My daughter, my son, I believe in you. God says he loves you and you belong.

So in this passage, Paul talks about the spirit. And the spirit is such an important word. In Judaism the Hebrew word for spirit is ru-ach. Everybody try and say ru-ach. A little bit of spit there. I've always thought this word ru-ach is the word for spirit, but it's also the word for breath or wind. And I always thought that it sounds like breath or wind: ru-ach. This is the word that was used in Genesis chapter 2:7 when God forms out of the dirt or the clay or the earth a man, Adam, and he breathes ru-ach into him. He breathes life into him.

I believe this is what Paul is referring to - this breath of life, this wind that comes from God. It is when we receive not the law, but when we receive the Holy Spirit breathed into us a desire for good, a desire for belonging, a desire of worth and value, Christ in me blossoms into full life and we can't help but overflow with God's love and joy, compassion, and gentleness. And we become filled with the breath of God that gives us life and renews our bodies and our minds and our souls.

He tells the church to be rooted not in the flesh, but in the spirit, to live every day in the spirit and to find new life. And so I want to just proclaim this over you. God is breathing new life into you. Maybe you're

out of breath. Maybe you're suffocating. Maybe you're dying on a hill. I want to tell you God is breathing fresh wind, fresh life into you. All your shame, all your guilt, confess your sins, and let it go.

Look, what God has given us: salvation, life, regeneration, it is a free gift. It is what he is doing in us. It is not earned and it is not lost. Did you catch that? Look, this gift that God has given you is not lost. If you could lose it, you would have lost it already! So would I! We're so crippled by fear that unless I do everything right I'm going to be cast out and that is not at all what happens. God is not sitting by just looking forward to kicking you out of the kingdom of heaven. God is more like a coach that when you fall and when you mess up, he says get back up. Let's go. Keep going. God is encouraging you, when you sin, not to sin more, but to sin less and to keep on and carry on to be refined into the image of Jesus Christ. God believes in you and he believes in your future. There is no saint without a past, and there is no sinner without a future. That is the truth. Never forget it. And that was St. Augustine, by the way, as much as I'd like to take credit. God will not abandon you. You deserve dignity, you deserve respect, you deserve belonging, and you deserve God's love. Perhaps we don't deserve God's love, but it's there and we get it.

The thing about shame no matter how it takes its form is shame piles. Many of us, we have a deep, deep shame rooted in all of the shame that we feel, something that happened maybe when we were a kid. That we didn't bond with our parents or maybe something happened to us. Maybe you were abused. Maybe you were taken advantage of, or whatever it was when you're a child.

Or maybe some point in your life as a teenager or as an adult, something brutal happened to you and you just carry this shame. And, what it does is it downgrades the way you view your personal value. And then every time you mess up or you make a mistake, it piles on. It's all the way connected. So that every time I didn't text somebody back, I feel shame. Every time I forgot to call someone on their birthday I feel shame. Every time I'm late for an event, or every time I didn't say the thing I wanted to say, or every time my job didn't do as well, I don't go oops I made a mistake, I go I feel shame, I feel a downgraded sense of worth, I feel outside, I feel as though I don't belong, I feel as though I'll never fit in. Shame is not what God has in store for you and you don't need to feel shame. Feel love because that is what you have. God loves you.

Sometimes, when we mess up, we don't say I messed up, we say I am the worst. Instead of saying *I made a mistake*, we say *I am a mistake*, and that is a lie. You are chosen. You are blessed. You are loved. You are

called. Follow Christ into your future. It is a good future if you trust in him. You don't need to hide your soul from God or people who love you. You don't need to hide your mistakes. You don't need to hide the things that you don't like about yourself.

Stop beating yourself up saying I'm a terrible person, or I'm bad, or I'm a mistake, or I'm worthless. Those are lies from the enemy. He is called the accuser of the brethren. The Holy Spirit is called the comforter and he says to you, you are loved. Be comforted. Have faith. God is the catcher. He will catch you and he will save you.

See, when we beat ourselves up all the time and we start to say I don't have worth or value, that is when we begin to hide ourselves. And there is a big difference between saying *I messed up* or *I am a mess-up*. Don't say those things to yourself. Look, align your mind and your heart with the word of God that says you're the head and not the tail. That says you're above and not beneath. That says there's no condemnation for you because you're in Jesus Christ. Trust in that and you can let go of all of your shame, all your worry. And you say to me Bobby, you just don't understand. You don't know what's in my life, and that's true, but God does, and he loves you. He does and I do, too. You don't need to hide.

There's a great researcher and you may have seen her on a Ted Talk, and she is a Christian. Her name is Brene Brown and I've really loved reading and watching these videos. This woman, Brene Brown, was a sociologist for a lot of her life. She's out of Austin, Texas. And she decided to spend one year of her life as a social worker. She saw people. She would see kids, especially, that some would be able to bond with others and get out of the mess, and others just never would, and they'd always fall back into issues. Things like gangs, drugs, and things like that.

She wanted to see what the big difference was between those who could really bond and connect deeply with people and those who couldn't. She did it as a scientist. She wanted to do it as research. And the one thing she found was this: that between the people who could connect deeply with others and those who could not, there was one difference. You know what it was? That they actually felt worthy of love and belonging. That was the one thing. That those who could actually say to themselves I am worthy of love and belonging were actually the ones that were able to love and connect deeply with others. And you know why? Because they were able to be vulnerable about their imperfections. They were able to be vulnerable about the ways in which they messed up and that allowed them to connect deeply with others.

Brene Brown's research showed that the number one thing that is severing your ability to connect with others, and I would argue to connect with God, is this deep sense of shame. Not guilt, shame. I'm not good enough. I'll never overcome this. Or for whatever reason. And whenever people feel shame, according to her research, there are three things that usually come up that show people feel a deep sense of shame.

The first is this: absolute certainty about everything. When people are like absolutely certain about everything, it shows that they are not being vulnerable to others, and that they have a deep sense of shame, and that they're hiding stuff. So tell me, what is the state of politics in our country today? And to be frank, what is the state of religion in our country today? These used to be things where people of opposing views and different views used to be able to have civil discourse about important ideas, and now it's I'm right, you're wrong, shut up. Or I'm right, you're evil. Who can talk to each other anymore? And her research shows that the undergirding emotion of all of this stuff is shame, that people lash out with absolute certainty because it's the only way they're able to cope with a deep sense of shame.

The second symptom of societal shame is perfectionism. Everything has to be right. What's the state of parenting in America today? This idea of perfectionism – that my kids have to be perfect, and I

have to be perfect, and my house has to be perfect, and my job has to be perfect, and my relationship has to be perfect. Everything has to go perfectly and everything has to go in the order that I want it to go is also a sign of deep abiding shame; that I do not have worth or value, or I am not worthy of love and belonging.

And the third and most common is the numbing of emotions. So it's certainty, perfectionism, and finally numbing of emotions. Do you think people numb their emotions? I think that in psychology they call this withdrawal. It's the idea that there's this thing that I'll always run to when I feel depression, sadness, anger, frustration, that instead of being vulnerable and opening to others, I'm going to withdraw and deal with this myself, and I'm going to just sort of stamp it out and pull myself up by my bootstraps. And when that doesn't work over and over, that means I'm going to drink, I'm going to eat, I'm going to reconnect with that person I shouldn't be with, I'm going to go back to that thing I always said I would walk away from.

And so shame pulls us back into all of our numbing. But you want to know something? You can't selectively numb any particular emotion, and this is according to Brene Brown again. There is no emotion you can selectively numb. If you numb out sadness and anger from your life, you're going to numb out joy and gratitude and creativity and love! And

the only way we can come alive is to be vulnerable about the fact that we feel alone. That we feel sad. That we feel angry. And if you feel shame, it's so hard to be vulnerable. And the irony is that the only way to deal with your shame is to be vulnerable about it.

The thing is, so many of us, when we're vulnerable about the shame in our life, we feel so weak. We feel like we've lost, like we've given up, like we're a loser. But you know how it's perceived? It's perceived by everyone else as courage. When people see you be vulnerable about your pain and your heartache and your suffering and your hard day, others perceive it as courage that pulls down walls; that lets others know, oh, they're not as perfect as I thought they were. I don't have to be perfect either! And you know what that does to their shame? It helps bring it down.

So much of the shame that many of us feel is the fake, perfect images we see in other people. They're feeling shame, too. Because they say if people only knew what I was really like, they wouldn't think that about me anymore. Guess what? We're all messed up because we're all humans. And we're all loved. And God is doing a work in you. And you are going to be better. And you are going to get a breakthrough. And you are going to defeat whatever it is that's bringing you down. God's got a plan for your life. Just don't give up, and you haven't. If you'd given up,

you wouldn't be in church today and you would have changed the channel. But you're still here and you're still listening. The spirit is doing something in your life.

The key to releasing shame is vulnerability. Being vulnerable is the thing that allows you to connect with people, but it's so scary because vulnerability is the place of all of our fears! All of our shame! But you know what? According to this research, vulnerability is also the birthplace of compassion and joy and creativity. We're so afraid that if people saw deeply into our hearts, they would see the worst. But let me tell you – God sees deeply already, and he sees something that's wonderful. He sees you and he loves you. You are worthy of love and belonging. Believe it! Believe it!

Being vulnerable means you have to take a risk because there will be times if you're vulnerable that people will condemn you and people will curse you and people will shut you down. That absolutely will happen sometimes. But most of the time, especially if it's with people you love, it will draw shame out of your soul like drawing poison from a wound. You'll feel such a sense of freedom and courage and power.

When you're vulnerable with the Lord, it allows the Holy Spirit to just enter in and just begin a work in you, and he is. It feels like

weakness. It's not. It's courage. It brings down walls with other people. It allows others to show their shame and all of the stuff that they wrestle with and it allows you to bond deeply with them. And it becomes a place where your life turns into a creativity, joy, love, happiness project. I know! I'm telling you from experience! So much of my life was about being vulnerable with Hannah and with my friends and with my parents. And I saw that with some people, there was a little bit of this rejection or trying to fix me or being ashamed of me. But with most people, it was Bobby, we love you. Bobby, you're doing great. Bobby, thanks for sharing this with me. I feel the same way, too.

And so whatever it is you feel shame about in your life, whatever it is that brings you down - whether it's the way you look, or the way you feel, or what you hoped you would have accomplished in your life, or the way your relationships haven't gone the way you thought they'd go, or whatever it is that makes you feel outside - I want you to know something: You're worthy of love and belonging. Human existence really comes down to one thing: connecting with others and connecting with God deeply. But the only way you connect with people is when you're deeply visible, when you allow somebody to see you deeply.

So I proclaim over you that I see you and God sees you and you are loved. There is no part of your past that the blood of Christ is not

sufficient to conquer. You're prettier than you think. You're better looking than you think. You're more successful than you think. You're more loved than you think. People want you more than you think. And your future is brighter than you think, and that's a promise. You are loved. You're worthy of love and you're worthy of belonging, and you do belong, and you are loved. Amen.