

## “Do-Be-Do-Be-Do”

*Romans Wasn't Read in a Day – part #6*

*Romans 7:14-8:4*

**[title slide]** *Welcome, prayer.*

Disclaimer alert: This sermon has nothing to do with Frank Sinatra. Although I have been humming “Strangers in the Night” occasionally, this message has more to do with Scrabble than with song. “Do” and “Be” are two of the shortest verbs in the English language, and it turns out, they have a lot to do today with our scripture.

**[Rome]** As you can read in the bulletin, we’ve been on a journey this summer through the book of Romans, a masterpiece of theology written by the Apostle Paul hundreds of years ago. Romans was influential in the life of so many pastors, scholars, and saints, including Martin Luther and John Wesley. While I admit Paul writes pretty long sentences and uses quite a few multiple syllable words in this letter, I hope you are not deterred from reading it, studying it, and contemplating his message. Rome was the center of the empire in Paul’s day, and the Christians in Rome were hungry for instruction and encouragement. They wanted to know for sure what they believed. So should we.

**[Questions on Do and Be]** So let’s start with our two little words this morning, “do” and “be”. I’d like to put some responses on my white board to these questions. First, if someone asks you, “What do you do?” (say, for a living or for fun) how do you answer? [Wait for responses.] Great. Now, if someone asks you, “Who are you? Who do you want to be?” how do you answer that? [Get more responses.]

We see some pretty clear answers here. “Doing” of course, is all about action. “Being” is about identity. The two are related, but sometimes, they even conflict with each other.

**[Clutter]** In my house growing up, there was a lot of “doing” going on. We had to-do lists, things we had to do before we could go out and do the other things we really wanted, like play baseball. Most of the things on that list, in fact, came from my grandmother. “Do your chores. Make your bed. Help your

mother.” It was those Midwestern farmer values, the idea that a good day was one where you worked hard.

I admit, I’ve given my own children plenty of things to do. But in our house, we have a special person who does everything. I know, you’re thinking it’s my wife, but you’re wrong. His name is Nobody. Nobody does the dishes, Nobody vacuums the floor, Nobody picks up the dog poop. Nobody does everything in the house, but of course, Nobody gets all the credit for it.

**[Ten Commandments]** There are a lot of people who equate being a Christian with a long “to-do” list. They think being a Christian means being some sort of employee of God, as if our worth is based solely on our production. We fear that if we don’t measure up to God’s law, then God is just going to look for someone else to get the important stuff done.

**[Romans 7:15 – frustration]** That’s not a healthy or helpful way to live out your faith. Look at what Paul writes in Romans 7:15. “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.” Friends, that’s a lot of “do-do”. Paul admits that God’s law is good. We need someone to teach us morality; we need to know that we are sinful. But Paul’s hang-up is, he has learned that nobody is perfect, least of all himself. Nobody obeys God’s law all the time. The only person who truly did that was Jesus, who came not to abolish the law but fulfill it. (Matthew 5:17) Paul has a terrible struggle being perfect, and he is not afraid to admit it.

Can you even imagine that? The Apostle Paul! The world’s greatest missionary! He admits he is not very good at being a Christian. Maybe he struggles with unconditional love, or always being generous, or forgiving those who persecute him. Paul doesn’t say explicitly, but all of us can fill in those blanks for ourselves. How many times do we promise, “I’ll never look at that website again!” and it still pops up in our feed. We swear, “I’ll be kind and patient from now on,” and then something surprises us and we blow our cool. We know what we are supposed to do, and yet we do the opposite. Paul says, “Exactly. You feel me.”

**[Romans 7:21-24]** Paul writes, “Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner

of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am!” (Romans 7:21-24)

“A wretch like me.” Do you know who else used those words? John Newton, composer of the hymn, Amazing Grace. Read the book, watch the movie, look up his story, because it is truly amazing. Newton went from being a slave trader to a priest. How? Only by the grace of God. Newton understood Paul’s bitter cry and saw his only hope was Jesus.

**[Romans 7:24-25 – happy man]** Look at the next two lines Paul writes. “Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25)

Christianity is not about doing good. It’s about being forgiven in Jesus Christ. That’s how we overcome our dilemma.

We do not have a free reign to sin whenever and however we want. Paul makes that clear elsewhere in Romans. Instead, we must realize that we cannot conquer sin ourselves. The only way to be free is to completely surrender to Christ. Then God will do a miracle in us, and begin, step by step, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to remove our desire for sin.

**[Romans 8:1-2, grace]** The songs we sang this morning are basically connected by one word: Grace. The unmerited, undeserved favor of God that cleanses us of our sin. Look again at Paul’s words in Romans 8:1-2. This is possibly one of the most powerful verses in the entire Bible.

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2)

“No condemnation’? But I’ve messed up so much!” Correct. No condemnation. In fact, any guilt or shame you experience after you turn your life over to Jesus is just the enemy trying to trick you. Jesus died on the cross, once, for all of your sins, even the ones you still struggle with today. Becoming a Christian does not mean you are suddenly perfect in every way. It means being on a journey, step by step, being sanctified and made holy. It comes with each decision, each confession you make, to say no to your old life and yes to the new life you have in Jesus. Don’t despair if you haven’t arrived yet. You’re in good company. The church is not a country club for saints; it’s a hospital for sinners.

**[Choice]** Friends, you have a choice to make today. You can, if you want to, solely focus on the Do’s and Do Not’s. “Do this. Do that. Hope you measure up.” But it’s a long list. There’s not enough time in this life to get it all done. If you are trying to just squeak by, to just be “good enough” so that hopefully God won’t be disappointed in you or punish you, you will forever be doubting yourself.

Take the better option. Give up the “do-do”. Instead, just be. Be forgiven. Be rescued. Be loved. Be accepted. Be the child of God you were created to be.

**[title slide]** When I was younger, I focused a lot on trying to make others happy. They would ask me, “What do you want to do when you grow up?” I wasn’t really sure, but since my self-worth was based on the world’s idea of production, I decided I would become an engineer. Build stuff. Make money. Do cool things.

However, there was another force at work in my life. It was being a child of God. As I was growing up, I also went to church, summer camp, mission trips, and retreats. Yes, there was still a lot of “doing” for the church, but I was slowly awakening to what God would do in my life if I just stopped and listened to the Spirit. It started when I became a worship leader in college. Then I became a camp counselor. Then, the week after I got married, I received a phone call asking if I would consider working as a youth minister. It certainly wasn’t something I was seeking, and it led me down a completely different path, which you know led to my ordination and me standing before you today.

I am not perfect. I would echo Paul’s statement, “What a wretch I am!” I struggle with the idea that I can just rest in my relationship with God. But I know that truth, and I am trying to live it. I don’t need to prove my value to God, any more than my children have to prove themselves worthy of my love. I love them because they are my children, and God loves me the same way. Does it make me happy when they make their beds? Sure! Probably about as happy as God is when we sing praise songs to him. But our value in God’s eyes is not based on what we do. “There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.” No complaints. No to-do lists. Just an invitation – “Come be with me. Let me show you how to overcome your struggles with my Spirit.”

Jesus promises that anyone who is weary of measuring up to the world’s expectations can come to him and find rest for their souls. His yoke is easy and

his burden is light. (Matthew 11:29-30) His to-do list is simple. May you hear his voice calling you, and may you finally drop the expectations of “doing” and lean into the “being” a beloved child of God.

Let’s pray.

**Memory Verse:**

Romans 8:1-2 (NIV)

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you[c] free from the law of sin and death.”

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Think of some of the goals you had as a child. What did you want to do? What did you want to be? How many of those goals were burdens placed on you by others?
2. What would you say is the most important thing a Christian should do?
3. What is the most important thing a Christian should be?
4. Why do you think Paul admitted his struggles to follow God’s law perfectly? How does his confession encourage you?
5. Name one thing you want to turn over to Jesus.