

No Condemnation

Romans 8:1-4

The gavel comes down hard on the wooden bench, as the judge's voice thunders throughout the courtroom. "Guilty!"

The word hovers in the air. The judgment is sure and binding. The future of the defendant, only condemnation. He will spend time imprisoned in a cell, and then, he will face death. Condemned. Justice had been served, and the sentencing is just.

This is the state of all who are born into this world. Romans 3:10 tells us that "none is righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:23 also tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

If we were to stand before the Judge of the universe in the courtroom of eternity, we would all hear the same verdict: "Guilty!"

What's worse is, no matter how much good we try to do in this life, no matter how righteous we try to be, it will never be enough. We can try to follow God's law, but we will always find that there is something wrong somewhere. Something that always keeps us from attaining that standard. That "something" is that we are flawed in our very nature. We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we are by nature, sinners. It's a fatal flaw that takes something good, namely God's law, and makes it a harsh task master, always pointing out our inability to live up to God's standard. It shines its perfect light on all of our imperfection, weaknesses, and sins.

(pause)

And that's why Romans 8:1-4 is the best news imaginable.

Please open your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. (page 944 in the pew Bibles)

Leading up to chapter 8 in Romans, Paul gives us a brilliant vision of the gospel. He begins in chapters 1-3 telling us that sin is a problem that is deep and abiding, and affects both Jews and Gentiles alike. No one is exempt. He then tells us that we are justified by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, and then in chapter 4 he recounts to us the fact that this justification in Christ is a culmination, a fulfillment, of his promise to Abraham, that just as Abraham was justified by faith, so are we. In chapter 5, Paul makes the stark contrast between the first Adam from whom we received our sinful nature and were condemned, and the last Adam, Jesus Christ, in whom we are justified and forgiven. Paul then, in chapter 6, answers objections like, "since we are under grace, shall we just feel free to continue to sin?" No, he says, for we are now radically

identified with Christ through faith. We are identified with Him through His death, and so our old self has also died. And we are identified with Him in His life, for because of His resurrection, we have new life. Paul then answers still another question in chapter 7 which asks, “Did God just cast aside the law then? Is the law evil?” No, Paul answers, since the law is what gives us the ability to discover our sin problem in the first place, and yet that law is powerless to save us from that condition. This leads us to the greatest news of all.

Romans 8:1-4

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Let's pray.

This morning I'd like to take a look at three truths found in these verses. Paul said that the reason why he wrote Romans, the goal of this letter, is so that these truths would lead to “the obedience of the faith.” These truths show us from Scripture exactly what Christ did in our salvation, and I pray that they would encourage you and strengthen you in your faith, and that the Holy Spirit would use these words to transform us on the inside.

I. We are delivered from the sentence, or penalty, of sin.

8:1 - “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

We sang that great hymn today, “And Can It Be.” I love that verse that says,

“No condemnation now I dread;

Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!

Alive in Him, my living Head,

And clothed in righteousness divine,

Bold I approach th'eternal throne,

And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.”

Therefore –

6:7 – For one who has died has been set free from sin.

6:14 – For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

6:17-18 - But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Look especially at 6:22-23 - ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

7:6 - ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

And *therefore*...there is *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus.

When we place our faith in Christ, we are saved from the wrath of God. We no longer live under the condemnation of sin.

John 3:17-18 says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

John 3:36 says it this way: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

So Paul here is saying just that. Those who are in Christ are not condemned anymore. The wrath of God no longer remains on them.

Notice the contrast in these two verses. They say that everyone, without exception, was born into this world condemned, and God’s wrath remains on them. And they’re saying that the **ONLY** way to be free from that is to believe - to obey – the Son of God, Jesus Christ. When one believes, that person is “in Christ,” and the wrath of God no longer remains on him.

This is a truth that some of you need to understand. You have trusted in Christ, you’ve been born again, and yet, you continue to live as if you were still under condemnation. You continue to look at your failures, and compare them to the perfect law of God, and you live in self-condemnation, unable to ever achieve those standards. I’m here to tell you, you don’t have to! There is One who has lived up to those standards for you, and His name is Jesus!

You are no longer under God’s wrath. You are no longer condemned!

Why? We see that in verse 2 which brings us to our second point:

II. We are delivered from the slavery of sin.

8:2 - ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Now we need to define a few things here.

- First, what does “the law of sin and death” mean?

It means the same thing Paul meant in Romans 6:23: *For the wages of sin is death...* That is a spiritual law. Sin brings forth death. James 1:15: *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

That’s why things die. That why *we* die physically. But more than that, that’s what separates us from God, the source of life, and we die spiritually. And if we die without Christ, we will experience eternal death, eternal separation from God.

But notice something here. It says that this is a “law” of sin and death. And it says we have been “set free.” That means we were in bondage or slavery to sin. We were being held captive by our sin, unable to break free.

In one of the old Superman movies with Christopher Reeve, Lex Luthor tricks Superman into opening a chest, only to find a chain inside with Kryptonite attached to it. Lex Luthor puts the chain around Superman’s neck and pushes him into a swimming pool. In the pool, Superman struggles to free himself from the chain, but it is no use. The Kryptonite has made him helpless and defenseless. No matter how hard he tried to free himself from that chain, he simply could not break free from it.

As you all know, even we as Christians sometimes still struggle with our sinful flesh. We have been set free spiritually, but yet we, from time to time, tend to go back to our old ways of the flesh, not realizing that it is a chain of Kryptonite that is meant to destroy us. But it’s to you who struggle that God says, “I have set you free.” You are free to not return to your former chains. You are free to not return to your former slavery.

Romans 6:16-18 puts it like this:

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

- So then what does “the law of the Spirit of life” mean?

This is really the crux of Paul's argument here, and the mystery that he is just now revealing in its fullness after 7 chapters of building his argument. It's "the difference-maker." It's the "stop the press" moment. It's the "everything has changed" bombshell.

What has changed? It's the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! THAT is what makes someone a Christian! THAT is what sets a person free from the law of sin and death! THAT is what frees us from our chain of Kryptonite!

Paul says the exact same thing in just a different way in 7:6 – "But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, **so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.**"

You don't have to try to live your life trying to please God by attempting to follow a written set of do's and don'ts. And the reason why you don't have to is, first, it would never work anyway. By focusing on what you shouldn't do, it only awakens the desire to do the exact thing you're trying not to do. But second, God gave us a new way of serving Him through the Holy Spirit who has taken up residence within us.

Paul is saying, the reason why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is precisely *because* the Holy Spirit has taken up residence inside every believer and has begun a new way of serving God. It's like having Jesus Himself living His perfect life inside of you!

This is why Jesus said, in John 16:7, "I tell you the truth: It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you."

Because we are in Christ Jesus, we now have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life, living inside of us, and because of that, we have been released, set free, from the requirement that we have to keep the whole law.

Look at it this way...there are two ways to have eternal life. First, you can, from birth through death, keep the whole law perfectly and not offend in the least little place.

In his book, *How The Gospel Brings Us All The Way Home*, author and pastor Derek Thomas writes,

*If salvation is to happen by the law, perfect obedience is necessary. There can be no blemishes or shortcomings, for the law will never show mercy. It knows nothing of grace and forgiveness. It demands perfection, because whoever transgresses in one tiny detail transgresses the whole of God's law: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" (James 2:10). Getting to heaven through obedience to the law requires perfection. Merely doing your best will prove insufficient; good intentions are not enough."*¹

¹ Derek W. H. Thomas. *How The Gospel Brings Us All The Way Home*. (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), 4.

The only other way to have eternal life is by placing your faith in the one Man who did keep the whole law perfectly and died and rose again so that we can have new life. That Man is Jesus Christ.

Paul was a Pharisee, he was zealous for the law. He wanted to keep it perfectly. But what he came to find out was that because of the law of sin and death...that is, the fact that we all are born with a sinful nature, he couldn't do it! You see, we aren't sinners because we sin. We sin, because we're sinners.

And that's what Paul was talking about in Romans 7:15 and following. ¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me."

So we come to 8:3-4 then, which is our third point:

First we are delivered from the *sentence* of sin...

Second, we are delivered from the *slavery* of sin...And third...

III. We are delivered from the sickness of sin.

"³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Several years ago, my family and I were at church on Easter Sunday. The church where I was serving at the time had three services on Easter Sunday, and in between the second and third services, I received word that my youngest daughter had broken her leg. She had her new pretty dress on and was doing spins in her dress. For one of those spins, however, she spun, but her sandals didn't and she suffered a spiral fracture in her leg.

She was taken to the hospital where they did X-rays, which revealed clearly what the problem was and what the break looked like. The X-rays were very helpful because it showed the problem and allowed the doctor to know what needed to be done to fix my daughter's leg. But the X-rays, as helpful as they were, could not actually fix her leg. They merely showed the problem. Something else needed to be done to actually fix the break.

Romans 7:7

Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

So the law is just like those X-rays. It reveals the true problem. The X-rays showed what the problem was with my daughter's leg, and that was a good thing. But there is much that the X-rays can't do. It can't fix the break. So there is much that the law can't do. It can't save us from the sin it reveals.

That's why it says, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do." What does that mean, "weakened by the flesh?" It means the problem is not with the law. The problem is with us. If we were *able* to follow the law perfectly, we would have eternal life. And therein lies the limits to the law, though. It's because of our sinful nature, our sinful flesh.

But *God* did, what the law couldn't do. Which leads us to ask the questions, then, "WHAT did God do, and HOW did He do it?"

If the problem was our sinful flesh, then the way for God to overcome that is to bypass the sinful flesh somehow. So then the following statement in verse 3 tells us both the HOW and the WHAT:

By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...

Notice the all-important word "likeness" in this passage. Jesus came to earth as a man, in the *likeness* of sinful flesh. In other words, he came as a man just as we all are, yet he himself didn't have a sinful nature. Hebrews 4:15 states it this way: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin.**"

So God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, *and for sin...*

Look at it like this. Sin is a sickness, a disease that has terminally infected the whole world and everyone who has been born after Adam. God sent His perfect Son to go to the cross, and on that cross, God, as it were, reached across history past all the way to Adam, and then reached across history future to the judgment, and gathered the sin – the sickness, the disease of sin – from all of His children, and placed it on His Son. And when He had placed all of our sin-sickness upon Christ, His Son, God poured out all His wrath upon His own Son, upon the sin that He placed upon His Son, in order that we would be made well. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

Notice it says, "*He condemned sin in the flesh...*"

You see, one day, God will destroy all trace of sin. He will eradicate it from this world completely. And He will do so with His holy wrath. His wrath can be seen, if you will, as the final cleansing remedy for the problem of sin. But God knows if that sin is still in people, those people will be destroyed with it.

While sin was born in one garden, it was in another garden that sin's remedy was embraced. All alone before His Father, Jesus cried out, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me." This cup Jesus was referring to was the cup of God's wrath, the complete and unmitigated fury of a

holy God. He knew that the remedy would kill Him in His flesh. But He also knew that it would also kill the sin that plagued God's people. That's why He said, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." Hebrews 12 says, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame..." And He went willingly to the cross, bore our sin in His own body, and submitted Himself to the Father's wrath so that our sin-sickness could be cured!

This is the necessity of the Incarnation. It was necessary for God to become flesh in order that He could deal with sin in mankind. He did what we could not do...keep the law perfectly. This is often called Jesus' *active* obedience. And in keeping the law perfectly, He was standing in the place of all who would be *in Him*, just as Adam was representative of all who were *in Adam*. He also did what we could not do in going to the cross and receiving the Father's wrath, dying for our sins, and rising again on the third day.

1 Corinthians 15 puts it this way in verses 21 and 22:

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

And that's the difference. All of us...every human being that ever lived, is born naturally *in Adam*. But only those who are *born again* are said to be *in Christ*.

This brings us to the final verse, verse 4. Reading it in context we see that:

*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, (and here's verse 4) ⁴ **in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***

THIS is why there is no condemnation for all who are *in Christ Jesus!* The righteous requirement of the law *has been fulfilled in us!*

Who is the "us?" Those *who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*. That's another way of saying those who are no longer living in their old nature, but they have the Holy Spirit residing in them. They have been made new!

So then here it is:

Because we are in Christ Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us, doing in us what we couldn't do because of our sinful nature, applying in us what only Jesus did, which is fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law – all of it! Jesus fulfilled every single bit of the law perfectly, and the Holy Spirit takes that perfect righteousness, applies it to us through His living inside of us, we are justified by it, which means God the righteous judge says, "No condemnation! I have accomplished what you could not do!"

Martin Luther - "So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: "I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One

who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!”

Listen to me, precious child of God. If you are in Christ...that is, if you have confessed that Jesus is Lord, and you believe in your heart that He rose from the dead, then there is no longer ANY condemnation for you! You have passed from death to life. God’s wrath no longer abides on you! This is God’s promise!

I want to invite you to pray with one of our elders immediately after the service today. If you would like to receive prayer for something you’re struggling with, an elder will be down front here to pray with you. If you have never trusted Christ, if you don’t know Him...if you were to die today, and you aren’t 100% sure where you would spend eternity, I urge you to respond to God’s calling today.

Let’s pray.