

NO CONDEMNATION! Pt. 1
ROMANS 8:1-4

In my closet I have a bag of letters. Most people would not be interested in those letters. They are cards and notes that have been kept in that bag for over thirty years. But they are a treasure to me. They are the correspondence Raye Jeanne and I shared over the 13 months after we met until we married. We lived in different states and in a time when phone calls were still paid for by the minute and email didn't exist and Facetime and communication on watches was a Dick Tracy fantasy (kids you might need to ask your parents or grandparents who Dick Tracy was). So the way we communicated was by physical card and letter. And those letters chronicle the early progress of our relationship, and are immeasurably valuable.

Like my letters from Raye Jeanne, you undoubtedly have some favorite or treasured letters as well.

And if you have been a believer for very long, you likewise have some similarly favorite books of the Bible. For many of you the book is Romans. And if Romans is your favorite book, it's likely that chapter 8 is your favorite chapter. John Piper has said that this is the greatest chapter in the greatest letter in the greatest book ever written.

Others have also noted the significance of this chapter:

- "Here in Romans 8 there is refreshment enough for dry and thirsty believers!" [Ray Ortlund, Jr.]
- If the Bible was a ring and the book of Romans its precious stone, chapter 8 would be "the sparkling point of the jewel." [Lutheran Pietist leader Philipp Jakob Spener]
- "Here the apostle is swept along in a wave of spiritual exaltation that begins with God's provision of the Spirit for victory over the old nature, breaks through the sufferings that mark our present existence, and crests with a doxology of praise to the unfathomable love of God revealed in Christ Jesus. Nowhere in the annals of sacred literature do we find anything to match the power and beauty of this remarkable paean of praise." [Robert Mounce]
- "The eighth of Romans has become peculiarly precious to me, beginning with 'no condemnation,' ending with 'no separation' ...and in between, 'no defeat.'" [Charles G. Trumbull]
- "This wondrous chapter sets forth the gospel and plan of salvation; the life of freedom and victory; the hopelessness of the natural man and the righteousness of the born again; the indwelling of Christ and the Holy Spirit; the resurrection of the body and blessed hope of Christ's return; the working together of all things for our good; every tense of the Christian life, past, present, and future; and the glorious, climactic song of triumph, no separation in time or eternity 'from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.'" [Boice]

Paul has just finished a section (7:14-25) that reads like a funeral dirge — its tone is foreboding and wearying. But as ominous as that section set in a minor key is, the words that follow in chapter eight are an exultant praise written in a major key and ringing with hopefulness and joy.

The joy begins in the opening verses with a reminder of the work of Christ for sinners.

Here is Paul's theme for these four verses —

CHRIST REMOVES EVERY ASPECT OF CONDEMNATION FOR THE BELIEVER IN HIM.

These four verses tell us four truths about our position in Christ that make us hopeful for living sanctified, God-honoring lives.

[Note: there are no imperatives in Romans 8. That means Paul is not so much telling us what to do to be sanctified, but what to believe and think to be sanctified. We don't need something to do, we need something to reckon or consider. We need a promise to believe and a truth to meditate on; and that is just what Paul provides in this chapter.]

1. There is NO Condemnation (v. 1)
2. There is NO Condemnation Because of CHRIST (v. 2)
3. There is NO Condemnation Because Christ Condemned SIN (v. 3)
4. Because There is NO Condemnation, There is SANCTIFICATION (v. 4)

1. There is **No** Condemnation (v. 1)

- The *reality* of no condemnation:
 - ✓ When Paul says **therefore**, he is looking back to a previous section and drawing a conclusion. Normally it would be the previous verse or verses, but “no condemnation” doesn’t seem to fit as a conclusion for 7:24-25. Rather, he is looking back at least to 7:4-6 and the statement that the believer is dead to the Law. Because Christ has fulfilled the Law and we are in Christ, there is no need to attempt to fulfill the Law by our own works. Christ has done it for us. There is no longer any guilt from the Law, no judgment, no wrath, no Hell, no sin, and no bondage.
 - ✓ And if Paul is looking back to 7:4-6 (which I think he is), then he also likely has in mind our position in Christ (6:3-7) — we are enslaved to Him and not to sin. And thus he is also looking back to 5:12-21, esp. 5:18ff — we are no longer in Adam and identified with his sin.
 - ✓ Because of Christ’s death, **therefore**, something has dramatically changed in our lives. This seems to be a parallel thought to 5:1 — there Paul notes the positive blessing of being in Christ and here he notes the negative consequence that has been removed because we are in Christ.
 - ✓ And Paul says what has changed is that **now** there is no condemnation. That is, previously there had been condemnation, but now our circumstance is radically altered. It’s as if he is painting a before and after picture — “then you *were* condemned, but now you are *not*.”
 - ✓ And the negative, **no** condemnation is particularly emphatic — “not a single one of any kind.” Condemnation has ceased to exist. It is completely removed. But what exactly is removed?
- The *meaning* of **no condemnation**:
 - ✓ What is the condemnation that the believer no longer faces? The word **condemnation** is a rare word (only also in 5:16, 18). It refers to the pronouncement of guilt and the carrying out of the judgment against that guilt. So our sin renders us guilty and God carries out His wrath against that sin and guilt. So, as we have suggested already, Paul means that there is no judgment of God against us because of our sin — the wages of sin is death (6:23), but those wages were paid by Christ for us so there is no more death for us. We are not “penalized” for our sin.
 - ✓ But the word also can refer to “penal servitude” — the results that come against us because of our sin. Paul is not just explaining that we are justified (declared righteous), but he is also explaining that *because* we are justified we have been freed from enslavement to sin; sin is no longer our master and we are no longer in bondage to it. In other words, we are not only free from the penalty of sin, but we are also free from its power (6:11-12, 18, 21). Now we can bear fruit for Christ (7:4; Eph. 2:10); now we are controlled by Him and live for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-16).
 - ✓ **No condemnation** means *both* the penalty *and* the power of sin are removed from us.

- The *recipients* of no condemnation:
 - ✓ The only ones who receive the gift of no condemnation are those who are ***in Christ Jesus***. This is not a universal promise. It is an exclusive promise. There is only one means of escaping the wrath of God — and it is to be in Christ Jesus. Those in Him are free from condemnation; but all those who are not in Him are still under His condemnation and wrath.
 - ✓ When Paul says ***in Christ Jesus*** he is again thinking of our identification with Christ. We have been united to Him, baptized in Him, buried with His death and raised with His resurrection, connected to Him as a body to the Head, and made alive in Him. This is our present reality. It will one day be fulfilled (that's what the last part of this chapter is about), but it is already the way God thinks of us and treats us. We who believe in Christ are already in Him and already free of condemnation and wrath.
 - ✓ And because we are in Christ and it is our position in Christ that has removed condemnation from us, that also means that —

"God has done this, we did not....It means that we are not holding on to Christ as much as he is holding on to us. It means that God has done something for us larger than our own change of allegiance to him. He has included us in all that the death and resurrection of Jesus are worth. So when we prove again that we are sinners, as we too often do, we may also announce to ourselves that we are also in Christ Jesus, as liable to condemnation as he is." [Ortlund, *Supernatural Living for Natural People*.]

- ✓ If you are a believer in Christ, you must consider the implication of this reality: there is no place for a "gloomy Gus" Christian. While we still are concerned about our wrestling against sin in this life, we are even more consumed with and overwhelmed by His acceptance of us. Ortlund says:

"Verse one does not say, 'There are no sins, there are no accusations, there are no valid complaints, there are no disciplines.' A Christian is not above correction. A Christian is not always right. But a Christian is never condemned under the judgment of God. The gospel does not deny the enslaving grip of sin ('the law of sin and death,' verse 2), but the gospel does deny the damning authority of sin. When you affirm your new identity in Christ, you are not playing a pretend game. You are not covering over your problems. But you are seeing yourself and your problems in a new connection – in relation to all that Jesus is worth to you, with his blood cleansing you and his promises securing your future." [Ortlund]

- ✓ But if you are not a believer in Christ, you must also consider this reality — you are still under God's condemnation. His wrath against you has not ended. He has no saving love for you. But there is a solution for you — it is to be united to Christ — to have faith in His saving work to free you from the penalty of sin and from the power of sin, as we have just talked about. Faith says, "I cannot save myself and I cannot change myself, but I believe that Christ not only satisfied God's anger against my sin but that He can also redeem my sin and transform my sin. He can change my desires. And I believe and have faith that following Christ is better than anything else in the world."

- ✓ When you believe in Christ, the work of Christ is applied to you and God saves you so that you are joined to Christ and so that you produce fruitful work for Christ (7:4). I can do nothing better this morning than compel, urge, and command you to trust in Christ alone for freedom from your sin and the penalty of your sin.
- So the believer's great hope (confidence) is that the condemnation from God against him is removed. But how is that possible? Does God just forget about His anger or overlook the sinner's sin? No —

2. There is No Condemnation Because of CHRIST (v. 2)

- What the removal of condemnation did
 - ✓ It **has set you free**. The freedom Paul has in mind is a freedom from enslavement. It's the same word he used in 6:18, 22 and Gal. 5:1. And it's the same word Jesus used in Jn. 8:32, 36.
 - And notice that Paul says it is something that *has* happened. It's a completed act of God for us. We have been granted emancipation from slavery to sin. The irrevocable document liberating us has been sealed with the name and blood of Christ.
 - The reason that there is no condemnation that can overtake us is that we have been set free. And being set free, we can never again be placed into bondage and condemnation.
 - This doesn't mean the believer won't sin (ch. 7 and Gal. 5 make it clear we will!), but it does mean that sin is not the master but Christ *is* the new master.
 - ✓ It set us free **in Christ**.
 - There is some question about what this phrase "in Christ" modifies. It might modify "the law of the Spirit of life" (NASB), or it might equally modify "has set you free" (NASB footnote). That is, the freedom is by Christ or in the realm of Christ. Both are legitimate and possible.
 - I was pondering this on Thursday while in the dentist's chair (Romans is a good distraction from what's going on with your teeth!) and I realized there is a parallel in v. 1 — "there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus" — and v. 2, "there is freedom in Christ Jesus." It seems that Paul is saying the lack of condemnation that those who are in Christ have is because of the freedom that was accomplished by Christ. We are not only unified with Christ, but our union with Christ has broken our former bonds with sin and set us free. As Jesus said, we are free indeed!
 - ✓ It set us free **from sin and death**.
 - The word "law" is not a reference to the Mosaic Law, obviously. It probably has the sense of "principle" or "authority" as it did in v. 21. It's the same thing as "the law of sin" in 7:23, 25. This is a law that is different from the Law of God and opposed to the Law of God. When Paul calls sin and death a "law" he means there is a part of sin that is compelling to the human being. Sin "dictates" action. The flesh doesn't just entice us to sin; the flesh pushes us to sin and manipulates us to sin. It *is* a controlling principle.

- And the believer in Christ has been set free from that controlling power. As one commentator says, “The last word is not with sin or with death. While believers are not sinless, they have real liberation in Christ Jesus.” [Morris]
- Now the question is, how can one be “free from the law of sin and death” (8:2) and also “under sin” (7:14) and not doing the good he desires (7:18-19)? Is this a contradiction?
 - ... No, this is a real picture of how we really live. It’s no photoshopped image. It’s a real portrait of all the beauty and harshness of our lives.
 - ... These verses address the reality that the believer still wrestles with the illegal squatter called flesh living in his life. He still will at times blatantly sin. He will still find most, if not all, of his most godly actions tainted in some way by impure motives and longings. There is a persistent reality of sin. Cf. 1 Jn. 1:8, 10; 1 Tim. 1:15; Gal. 5:1, 13, 17. There is no day of my life when I can say, “I didn’t need the blood of Christ to pay for any sin today,” or “I didn’t need the indwelling power of the Spirit of Christ to fill me and direct me away from sin today.” Every single day I am dependent on Christ. And my sin reminds me of that. (And so in a sense, sin works to my advantage when it makes me consciously dependent on Christ for my transformation.)
 - ... But there is also the reality that I am being transformed and I am being changed and I am able to please God with my actions and motives. Cf. 1 Tim. 1:16; Acts 13:22. Galatians 5:22-24 is not a tantalizing mirage that will never be attained. This is what the Spirit produces in us and it is what we see in each other increasingly.
 - ... And whatever our struggle is, it is completely different from the unbeliever trying not to sin. The only thing the unbeliever has to fight against sin is the power of the flesh. And that flesh will sometimes enable him to be presentable and moral. But the Lord sees past the outward appearances and examines the heart. And even though the unbeliever may think himself acceptable to God, God will always judge his efforts as infinitely deficient. He will be found completely lacking. And even if he does good — teaches his children civility and disciplines them graciously and contributes to worthy causes and serves on the PTA and never curses and is faithful to his wife and helps every elderly lady across the street with patience and never honks his horn in anger, he is still not righteous. Why? Because he has attempted to do those things on his own and rejected God. In essence, he has worshipped himself and said that God is irrelevant and unnecessary. And that makes him a God-hater and worthy of God’s wrath and full of nothing but rottenness. Matthew 23:23-33 describes not only the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, but all those who attempt morality without depending on Christ.
 - ... So Romans 8:2 is *not* a contradiction of Romans 7:14. Instead it is the complete picture of the Christian. It excludes the possibility of someone being righteous without Christ, but it also makes possible one who has not yet been made righteous to be declared right with God.

... Do you remember your art history class and the painting, “The Scream” by Edvard Munch?
The curators of his works said this about that painting:

“Munch’s **The Scream** is an icon of modern art, the Mona Lisa for our time. As DaVinci evoked a Renaissance ideal of serenity and self-control, Munch defined how we see our own age — wracked with anxiety and uncertainty....Essentially **The Scream** is autobiographical, an expressionistic construction based on Munch’s actual experience of a scream piercing through nature while on a walk, after his two companions, seen in the background, had left him....Here...in depicting his own morbid experience, he has let go, and allowed the foreground figure to become distorted by the subjectivized flow of nature; the scream could be interpreted as expressing the agony of the obliteration of human personality by this unifying force.”
[<https://www.edvardmunch.org/the-scream.jsp>]

... If Munch was in one of our counseling rooms, one thing we would say is, “you aren’t thinking on the truth; life is not that bleak. Yes, without Christ there is no hope, but with Christ there can be much hopefulness...”

... Now imagine Munch’s painting next to a winter scene painted by Thomas Kinkaid — you know the paintings that are in all the Christian bookstores — the idyllic scenes with brilliant spots of light. In his paintings, there is always food on the table, no mud in the snow, and beautifully manicured yards and homes. Life is perfect. And if he were in one of our counseling rooms, we’d say, “Thomas, even for a Christian, life isn’t that perfect and ideal. It gets messy. There is freedom in Christ, but there is still a battle with sin...”

... Paul has struck the appropriate balance in his perspective of the Christian life. Perhaps his painting might be like Washington Crossing the Delaware — there is winter and harshness and cold and opposition, but there is still the certainty of victory and a powerful leader. The believer will still battle the flesh every day, but in the battle there is always the provision of victory — there is no condemnation, because we have been set free!

... Ray Ortlund, Jr. is helpful as he thinks about this:

“If you are in Christ, then all that he can do for a defeated failure is now yours. You are not going to hell any more! This brief life is all the hell you will ever know. You will never again hear God’s holy law thundering its curses against you. The atoning work of Christ on your behalf is complete, and you cannot add anything to enhance his triumph (John 19:30)....Our holy Lord exchanged places with us sinners. He put us in his place of approval, he put himself in our place of condemnation, and God accepts that exchange. Your only part is to open your heart and receive the finished cross-work of Christ. When you do, you are justified before God. You are not just brought up from minus to zero, to a position of neutrality. You are declared positively righteous in God’s assessment of you, as righteous as Jesus himself. And that is why you are released from condemnation and enter into peace with God (Rom. 5:1).” [*Supernatural Living...*]

- How we were removed from condemnation
 - ✓ The Spirit's law was introduced — it was ***the law of the Spirit of life*** that set us free.
 - Just as “the law of sin and death” is not a reference to the Mosaic Law, this law of the Spirit is not the Mosaic Law either. It is best to understand it also as a principle, or a force, or authority. It is the compulsion and authoritative working of the Spirit that produces freedom in us. Likely Paul has something very similar in mind as he did in 7:6 — as believers in Christ, we don't live under the authority of the Law of Moses, but we live under the authority of the Spirit. The Spirit constrains and compels us.
 - It could be that Paul means that the Holy Spirit is the new regulatory principle in the life of the believer — as in **Ezk. 36:26**, the Law has now been written on fleshly hearts.
 - Think about how the Spirit of God comes to live within us and produces His work & fruit in us —
 - ... He saves us through the renewal of regeneration (**Tt. 3:5**)
 - ... He is the agent of our sanctification (**1 Pt. 1:2**)
 - ... He changes our hearts (**Ezk. 36:26**) giving us hearts of flesh, with God's Law written on them internally, so that now we have an inward power and compulsion to obey.
 - ... He produces His fruit in us, empowering us to fight against the flesh (**Gal. 5:22-24; Rom. 8:13**)
 - ... He gives us gifts that enable us to serve God in particular ways (**Rom. 12:3:ff**)
 - ... Don't think you don't need the Spirit to be justified or sanctified. But do recognize that when you have the Spirit of God, you have everything you need to be sanctified.
 - What is particularly interesting here is that Paul now introduces us to the Spirit of God and the Spirit is a major theme in this chapter. Prior to this chapter, Paul uses the word “Spirit” only 5x and after this chapter he only uses “Spirit” 9x. But in this chapter he uses it 21x (19x of HS). This chapter is not about what the believer must do to sanctify himself; it is about what the Spirit of God does to sanctify us.
 - ✓ The Spirit gave us life — he is ***the Spirit of life***. He is the Spirit who contains life (life is in Him and life originates in Him). And He is the Spirit who gives life.
 - The Spirit was part of the divine creative act (**Gen. 1:1-2**).
 - And He is the power behind the spiritual creation of the new man (**Jn. 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6**).
 - All that He is and all that He does is in contrast to the death that comes from being in Adam and under the law and under sin. The Law only condemns; sin always and only brings death. Sin is never life-giving; it is always life-taking.
 - But the Spirit counteracts everything that sin is. The Spirit always comes with life; the one who is in the Spirit is never condemned and never dead and always alive and living.
 - ✓ Someone has offered a concise summary of Paul's teaching on the three different laws: “Moses' law has right but not might; sin's law has might, but no right; the law of the Spirit has both right and might.” The one who is in Christ has the Spirit and has the work of His might and right!

3. There is NO Condemnation Because Christ Condemned SIN (v. 3)

4. Because There is NO Condemnation, There is SANCTIFICATION (v. 4)

CONCLUSION: Remember one thing I said at the beginning of this message: this chapter has no imperatives. Rather it is a declaration of God's work on our behalf. And if God has done these things, we don't attempt to also do them ourselves. Rather, we meditate on them and contemplate them and reckon and consider them — we start acting as if they are true. What should you do with this message? You and I should act as if there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The great twentieth-century Welsh preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that: "Most of our troubles are due to our failure to realize the truth of this verse." What happens if we forget that there is "now no condemnation"?

On the one hand, we feel far more guilt, unworthiness and pain than we should. From this may come drivenness from a need to "prove ourselves"; great sensitivity to criticism, defensiveness; a lack of confidence in relationships; a lack of confidence and joy in prayer and worship; and even addictive behavior, which can be a reaction to a deep sense of guilt and unworthiness.

On the other hand, we will have far less motivation to live a holy life. We have fewer resources for self-control. Christians who don't understand "no condemnation" only obey out of fear and duty. That is not nearly as powerful a motivation as love and gratitude. If we don't grasp the full wonder of "now no condemnation," we will understand each word of the rest of 8:1-13, but completely miss the sense of it! [Keller, *Romans 8-16 For You*, 2-3.]

Remember, therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. Amen.

BENEDICTION: Romans 8:37-39

First Service — Be sure to take advantage of the hospitality area. Find some physical refreshment and even more look for an opportunity to give spiritual refreshment: get to know someone you don't know; give a word of encouragement to someone who needs help and hope; pray with anyone who has a need.