



## **No Condemnation!**

Romans 8:1-4

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We've reached Romans, chapter 8, this week. We'll be looking this morning at Romans 8:1-4, looking at one of the most beloved chapters in all of the Bible. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 8, verses 1-4:

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

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we ask this morning that you would open up your Word to us, that in your Word we would see the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would see our need *of* him, our hope found *in* him, and our duty *to* him. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

Romans, chapter 8, has been called the greatest chapter in the Bible. Now I don't want you to get the impression from that that some sections of the Bible are more inspired than other sections in the Bible, but as my friend and mentor, Dr. Derek Thomas, puts it, if you knew you had 10 minutes left to live and you wanted someone to read Scripture to you, would you rather they read Romans 8 or 1 Chronicles 1?

For those of you who aren't aware, 1 Chronicles 1 is merely a series of names in a genealogy. I'm glad we have that delivered to us from the Lord. It *is* inspired. It *does* help us to understand the Scripture, but I don't think any of us would choose our last few moments on earth to be a series of names being read to us. We would want to camp out in Romans 8. That's why Romans 8 is often considered the greatest chapter in the Bible. It describes for us what our life in Christ is as we live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is a chapter of victory in Christ, of the victory Jesus has won, and how it affects us today and the promises it gives to us for all eternity. So this morning, as we begin this chapter, we begin by looking at life in the Spirit, what it is like to live as a Christian. If chapter 7 of Romans gave us pause because it reminded us that all Christians sin, chapter 8 reminds us of the great victory that is found in Jesus.

I would like us to see three things from our text this morning. First, Paul tells us *we are no longer under condemnation if we are in Christ Jesus*. Secondly, Paul tells us *we are set free in Christ Jesus*. It's not just that

we're no longer under condemnation; we're also set free. Then thirdly and finally, Paul tells us *we are purposed by God to be holy*.

As we begin this chapter, let us remember that Paul has been building up to this point. Paul opened up Romans by telling us our only hope is to believe in Jesus Christ and in his work to save us from our sins. Then secondly, Paul moved to a second section in this book to tell us about our life in Christ. He told us first that grace is not an excuse to continue in sin. That was the subject of chapter 6.

Secondly, he tells us that we have been freed from sin and we should no longer live in it in chapter 7, and then he answers the objection, "Why do I then still sin? Am I not a Christian if I sin?" Now he gives us hope in the midst of our struggle with sin with an assurance that comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

### **No Longer Under Condemnation**

Let's begin, then, by looking at Paul reminding us *we are no longer under condemnation*. He does this by giving assurance to the believer. We begin looking at verse 1 with an old familiar friend: the word *therefore*. You know by now what you do when you come across a *therefore* in the Scripture. You look at the *therefore* and look back to see what the *therefore* is there for. What is Paul grounding chapter 8 in?

Paul is going to ground this text in truth he has already given to us, truth we've already learned. It seems that there are two aspects Paul wants us to remember, just as Paul has previously talked about two works of God: the work of *justification* and the work of *sanctification*. If we think about justification, we have to go back to chapter 5, verses 16 and 18, where we're told the one sin of Adam brought condemnation on everyone. It's the same word Paul uses here in verse 1.

Then Paul reminds us that the free gift of grace that comes through Jesus Christ brought justification, righteousness, and life. As a result, sin reigns no more in those who are in Christ, but instead, grace reigns through righteousness, leading to eternal life. What Paul wants us to remember in the *therefore* is that if you believe in Jesus you have no more fear of condemnation. It has been done away with in your justification.

There is also a second thing Paul is looking back to, and that is with respect to sanctification. There is also an assurance he wants to give to those who believe on Jesus yet still struggle with sin. We saw this happening in chapter 7. Paul is pointing us back to that struggle at the end of chapter 6 and in chapter 7. He's talking not just about the *guilt* of sin we see handled in justification, but he's also talking about the *power* of sin that is handled in sanctification.

So when we read this passage, we have to make both applications to our lives. With that in mind, let's begin by looking at verse 1. Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Now what is *condemnation*? What does Paul mean when he uses that term? I think the easiest way to explain

it in the context of what we have read, remembering our *therefore* with one eye looking back, is to say that condemnation is the opposite of justification.

Condemnation is a verdict of "guilty" that hangs over us. It is not just a sense of guilt. When we think about being condemned, we think emotionally about a sense of guilt that hangs over us. We know something we've done is wrong, and it affects our conscience. We have difficulty sleeping. Our stomach churns. That is all true. That sense of guilt is there, but it's also a sentence that has been pronounced against us.

This is important, because if condemnation is the opposite of justification, then we know God's "not guilty" is an irreversible verdict. It is an end-time verdict, so there cannot be any possible future condemnation. We might think about it *this* way. At the end of a president's term in office, often the president will issue presidential pardons to people. That pardon does not say the person never committed the crime, but it *does* say that person is going to be treated as not guilty, and no one can reverse that.

The next president can't undo it. The congress can't pass a law reconvicting that man. There cannot be new charges brought up in the same vein by states or by individuals. That "not guilty" verdict, if we could put it this way, sticks. It's over. It's done with. There's no more condemnation of guilt and sentencing to be placed against such a person. This is what our Lord does in declaring us justified.

The second word I want us to look at here, beyond *condemnation*, is a small word, but it's a word that carries great meaning. It's the word *no*. If we look at this in the English translation, especially if we're reading quickly, we can go over it without much thought. Yes, there's no condemnation. We think of *no* as just being some qualifier to the idea of condemnation, and we spend all our time there, but really, because of the irreversible pronouncement of justification, Paul can be very emphatic about our lack of condemnation.

So as we look at this and we see this word *no*, we have to understand that the translation itself does not fully bring out its power and weight. First of all, in the Greek this is not the ordinary word for *no*. It is a compound word for *no*. It is *no* taken to the next level, we might say. In modern parlance, we might use something like "No way!" or "No, that could never be!" We'd have to almost come up with a phrase around it, but Paul uses this word specifically to give emphasis to the fact that there is *no* condemnation.

There's something else Paul does that we miss because it causes difficulties in translation. Paul is emphatic by putting the word *no* as the first word of this sentence. Now, translators don't do that. I'll let you try over lunch to translate this sentence or to describe this sentence by making the first word be *no* and not coming up with some form of English gibberish. It's exceedingly difficult.

So translators opt, rightly, for clarity. They want us to understand what the sentence is saying, but we need to also understand that there's not just clarity here; there's emphasis here. The very first word Paul uses is *no*, a strong *no*. Do you have any doubt about whether there is any condemnation for the believer? I want to tell

you this morning: do not hesitate to apply this verse to yourself. If you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul is very clear. There is *no* condemnation. No, no, *no* condemnation.

The third thing we see in this sentence is another short word. It's the word *now*. Paul knows there's something else that could disturb us. Does this "no condemnation" apply to me right now? Do I need to do something to get this "no condemnation"? Does it hang over me, and can I lose it if I mess up somehow? Paul understands this. That's why he includes this word *now*. "There is therefore *now* no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The change that has occurred has been because of what Jesus has already done. There's nothing left to do. There's no waiting. We were condemned in Adam. We were condemned by our sins. We had the wages of our sins being death, but now we can have assurance. Now God is on our side. Now Jesus has purchased a complete redemption, complete forgiveness for us. That is ours right now.

Well, who is it who is not condemned? Does this "no condemnation" apply to everyone? Is Paul using twentieth-century theology? "I'm okay. You're okay. We're all okay." Is that what Paul is saying here? No, that's the way the world thinks about sin, if it thinks about sin at all. If the world thinks about sin, it does this in the sense of "Nobody is perfect." That's the modern paraphrase of Romans 3:23: "Well, nobody is perfect." It also gets comfort, that my good, which I get to define and delineate, outweighs my bad, which I also get to define and delineate.

The Bible is clear. There is an absolute requirement to have no condemnation, and it's for those who are in Christ Jesus, Paul says in Romans 8:1. So what does it mean to be in Christ? What it means is that in order to have salvation, in order not to be condemned, you must be in a relationship with Christ. That is the only way of salvation. It is only by being united to Christ by faith that we experience salvation. This is what Paul said in Romans 5 when he described Jesus as our covenant head and said we were in Christ. This is what Paul described in Romans 6 when he said we were united to Christ in his death.

Now I have to tell you, this is not a very popular way of speaking. It's not polite to say Jesus is the only way of salvation, especially at this time of year. That's why you get "Happy Holidays" and not "Merry Christmas," because we don't want to somehow be exclusive. We don't want to leave others behind. It's why so many so-called churches in our day refuse to say Jesus is the only way of salvation.

But let me tell you this: we *have* to say that. To do otherwise is to lie, to deny the plain truth of the Bible. It is to lead people astray and leave them in their condemnation, thinking that there is no condemnation *outside* of Christ when the Bible is very clear that there is not, that the only way we can experience justification, the only way we can be free from condemnation is to be in Christ.

So let me tell you this today. Do you love others? Then you must tell them about Jesus, because it is only in Christ Jesus that you can have no condemnation. This is not to make a point with other people. No one will be saved whether they hear "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays," but if people think they can be right with God, that their eternal destiny can lie on anything other than the finished work of Jesus Christ, all they have to look forward to is condemnation.

I want you to also notice this work is a Trinitarian work. God the Father has done this work by sending his Son. Oftentimes, modern Christians practice poor theology in *this* way. We think of the Father as always being angry toward us and always expressing hatred toward us that can only be resolved by Jesus pleading with him to love us, but the Bible shows us actually the exact opposite. It is not that the Father waits for the work of Jesus to have love upon us. Rather, God so loved (the *so* there means "in this fashion") that he sent his Son to redeem for himself a people. It is the love of the Father that sends the Son.

Then we see, of course, that God the Son accomplished the work the Father sent him to do. Paul tells us that what the law could not do, God, by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, *did*. Jesus accomplished our redemption. He was born of a woman. He lived a perfect life, never sinning in thought, word, or deed. He died a death we deserve to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus completed everything that was asked of him to redeem for himself a people.

God the Father sends the Son, God the Son purchases our redemption, and God the Holy Spirit applies that work of redemption, applies the work of the Son, setting free those who are in Christ Jesus. That's what Paul means in verse 2. He says, "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all working together to redeem a people.

Do not underestimate the power of God's work. You cannot undo what God has done. That's why there's no condemnation. Do you know what's missing in verse 1? What's missing in verse 1 is what we often want to put there: an *unless* or an *until*. "There is no condemnation *unless* you do *this*" or "There is no condemnation *until* this happens."

Do you see that in *your* verse 1? I don't see that there. It is an absolute statement of Paul of the abiding work of God. Beloved, the minute we realize we are falling short in our lives and we think we need to do more to get back into God's love, we need this truth of Romans 8:1 to correct us. God's work does not need your help. I think sometimes we even have a skewed view of worship.

We think that a week has been difficult and we've fallen into sin and our relationship with God is strained, and we're so glad to be at worship so we can get caught up in the emotion of singing his praises, so we can pray harder than we've ever prayed before, so we can listen more closely to God's Word than we've ever listened before, and that will somehow lift us up and give us an assurance of God's love, and if we perform

properly, then there will be no condemnation. Then the next week starts again, and we fall into the same pattern. Paul tells you to stop trying and to rest in what Jesus has done.

## Set Free

The second thing Paul says is that *we are set free*. He says, "For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." What Paul is really describing here is that God has done what we could not do. As we look at verse 2, what does Paul mean here by the phrase *the law*? We've seen Paul use *the law* different ways throughout this book. We've seen him use it to refer to the Ten Commandments or perhaps to the law of nature, the law of conscience we have, the sense of right and wrong.

Here I think he's using it in a way he has used it before to describe an animating and regulating principle. That is, the principle of the Spirit of life and the principle of sin and death. We needed to be freed from the power of sin and death, which held us in bondage. Paul reminds us of the state we were in in the second half of verse 2. He says the Bible describes us in a certain way when we are under the law of sin and death.

He says in Romans 3, "There is none who does good, and all have fallen short of the glory of God." Then in Ephesians 2 he says, "You were dead in your trespasses and sins." This describes someone under the animating power of sin and death. Furthermore, we had no ability to help ourselves. Look at verse 3. "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do."

We can't get out of our state of sin and death. We're caught in a cycle of sin, sinning all the time, and even the law, God's holy law, is no help to us. Any attempt we might make to do good is fruitless, because the law was weakened by our sinful nature. The law has no power to execute judgment on sin and to destroy its power, and that is what we need.

Now what we could not do God has done. We see one of the great words in the Bible. As we read the Bible, I encourage you to read *all* of the words in the Bible, because some of the best words in the Bible are some of the smallest and most common words in the Bible. Here we see it in verse 2 and in verse 3. It's the word *for*. The reason there is no condemnation for us is because God has broken in. There is no condemnation because of what God has done.

The one who has every right to condemn us has entered in by grace. God has done what the law could not do, and he does this by sending his Son. This is the true meaning of Christmas. It is not "Be kind to others," although there's nothing wrong with being kind. It is not thinking good thoughts, though I would encourage you to think good and noble thoughts. No, the true meaning of Christmas is that God freed us from the law of sin and death and removed any trace of condemnation by sending his Son.

God initiated with *us*, the sinners. He came to *us*, and he did this by bringing his Son into the closest possible relationship with us that he could. Look at the language Paul uses in verse 3. It's very precise and specific. "By

sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh..." Notice what Paul *doesn't* say. He doesn't say "in sinful flesh," because that would imply that Jesus was sinful, and if Jesus was sinful he could not make atonement. He could not atone for the sins of others if he had his own sins for which he had to atone.

It also doesn't say "in flesh," because then there would be a sense that Jesus is unlike us, because we have sinful flesh. We have flesh that brings us down. No. Paul describes it as Jesus coming in the *likeness* of sinful flesh. We might put it this way: Jesus comes as like to us as he can except for sin. It's the same way the author of Hebrews describes that Jesus was tempted in all points like we are but without sin. This is what God does. He sends his Son to free us from sin and death. What does God do through the work of his Son? He frees us by a judicial judgment against sin and its power.

That's what Paul means when he says, "He condemned sin in the flesh." Jesus Christ made sin forfeit its dominion and power. Sin is done. It is over. Jesus Christ came as a baby, lived a perfect life, and died a death we deserve for our sin, and in this he broke sin forever. The Holy Spirit, then, applies this victory to the believer. Paul says in verse 2, "The Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus." It is in the work of Jesus Christ, in our union with Christ, that the Spirit sets us free.

That victory is yours today if you believe in Jesus. That's why you can't have *part* of Jesus. You can't just have the baby in the manger. No, that's not enough. You must have the Jesus who conquered sin, the Jesus who died so you would have life, and you *can*. If you believe today that Jesus died for your sins, then Jesus is yours and you are Jesus'. He has done what you can't. The Holy Spirit applies that to you, Paul says. He sets you free in Christ Jesus.

### **Purposed to be Holy**

The third thing we see is that there is a design God has for his children, that *we are purposed to be holy*. There is a purpose in God's work. Oftentimes, we think of the purpose of God's work as his love, but really, God's love is not his purpose; it is his motivation for doing what he has done, but he *does* have a purpose. There is a purpose in his design. He is saving his people for a reason.

Now we might think of answers to that question... *What is the purpose of God's work?* When we do that, our answers tend to be self-centered. "Well, the purpose of God's work is to save me from hell. The purpose of God's work is to defeat my enemy, the Devil." Actually, verse 4 gives us the answer. "...in order that..." When you see that in your Bible, you need to think purpose. *In order that* means "The purpose is *this*." "...in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us..."

The answer for the purpose of God's salvation is holiness. That's the purpose of God's salvation. It is sanctification. It's why you can't separate sanctification from justification. The Bible never does this. In Ephesians 2 Paul writes, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." He writes in Titus 2, "[Jesus] gave himself for us to

redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

So what does it mean to be saved? It means we are not just saved *in* our sins, which we certainly are. We are also saved *from* our sins. The goal is that the righteousness of God's law is to be seen in us. These two words Paul uses here in our translation, *righteous requirement*, are actually one very interesting word in the Greek. It is a word that describes a command that brings about an action that is right and just. It is a command that brings justice or righteousness. It's an unusual word that Paul brings here.

What he's trying to describe is that Jesus' aim for you is for the law to be fulfilled in you and in your actions. At first, this sounds pretty intimidating. It might even sound wrong. "How can this be? How can that be the end, that I would be righteous and holy and show God's law in myself?" Now let's think about the two main errors that crop up in this respect.

The first are the Pharisees. We often think of the Pharisees when we think about the law and showing the righteousness of the law, and we think, "That can't possibly be what happens to *us*, because the Pharisees are bad." What we have to understand is the Pharisees were not trying to show the righteousness of God's law. What they were trying to do was to change and modify and revise God's law so they could avoid fulfilling it.

They tried to narrow it so they wouldn't have to show the holiness of God's law and they could still make it count. Let me give you just one example of this from the Bible. Do you remember the story when the woman who was caught in adultery is brought to Jesus? The Pharisees say, "What should we do with her, Jesus?" Of course, they're thinking of the law that says you're to stone an adulterer.

Now do you think the Pharisees were trying to uphold the holiness of that law? No, of course not. Why? Who's missing in this story? How about the guy? They don't bother to bring *him*, because they're not really concerned about the law. They only want to bring *her* because they think they can catch Jesus being compassionate, willing to violate the law, and they can come after him.

Why are they even doing this? If she were to be caught in adultery, that would mean there were witnesses, and why would there be witnesses to this act of adultery? It seems obvious this was all a setup so they could produce a circumstance to bring to Jesus, and what they're really trying to do at their core is fulfill their hatred of Jesus. They're using the law to hate Jesus. They're not showing holiness at all. They want to destroy Jesus.

Well, some go to the other extreme. It's one of the great theological maxims of our day that we are to follow our hearts. "If it *feels* right, it must *be* right. Don't worry about it. Follow your heart." Now, kids, if you ever happen to be watching a movie (I don't care if it's a cartoon, I don't care if it's brought by Disney) and they tell you to follow your heart, here's your pastor's instruction. You get the remote, you turn it off, and you yell, "Liar! I'm not going to follow my heart."

Ladies, when you're watching a special on one of these cable channels, whether it's a Christmas or a Valentine's Day or any other holiday, and they tell you, "You just have to follow your heart," you know what *your* instructions are. You get the remote, you turn it off, and you yell, "Liar!" because they're lying to you. Men, when people tell you to follow your heart, they are lying to you. They are trying to get you to destroy your family, your life, and your community by following your heart.

That is not what God calls us to. God calls us, Paul says in verse 4, to the righteous requirement of the law. God has revealed what is right to us. You don't need to follow your heart; you need to follow Jesus. That's what you do. Jesus is redeeming a people to be made like him. And who is Jesus? He's the one who followed God's law in every instance at every moment of his life, and he is right now making you more and more like him so that you will follow the righteous requirement of God's law.

Now let's be very, very clear. This is a consequence of salvation. This is a purpose of salvation. Nowhere is Paul saying you must do this in order to be right with God. He says you're *already* right with God and, therefore, this is what happens. It's a natural outflowing. Well, how is this designed? How is this accomplished? It's accomplished by us living out the design God has for us in our salvation.

First, we need to accept that this is not an optional part of the Christian life. Let's go back to our theology of chapter 7, that there are not two stages of the Christian life. This is God's purpose for our salvation. Do we dare ignore it? If we say we are following Jesus, we must follow Jesus. Notice how the righteous requirement is fulfilled. It is not just *for* us that it is fulfilled; it is fulfilled *in* us. This tells us we're not out on our own. We're not expected to do this by ourselves. It is fulfilled *in* us by the work of the Holy Spirit, that is, the law of the Spirit of life. The animating principle of the new life in Christ is the Holy Spirit's work.

Now this is very practical. Paul has told us in chapter 6 that we're not to let sin reign in us. He told us that we were released from the law, and now he tells us it is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit. So we are to live... Paul uses this wondrous word: *walk*. We are to have all of our life, our thoughts, our words, our actions... We are to live all of life not in accordance with the flesh but in accordance with the Spirit. The Spirit of God is not against the law of God. He is the one who energizes obedience *to* the law.

In conclusion, there is not just hope for you this morning. There is every confidence for you. There is no condemnation for the one who has given up on doing and has placed his trust in Jesus and what he has done. Jesus has accomplished our reconciliation with God. Jesus has accomplished the condemnation of sin. Jesus has sent his Spirit to fulfill in the believer the righteousness of God's law.

You may struggle with sin, but God tells you to trust him. By grace through faith he is at work in you. He never promises that work will be completed in this life, but he *does* promise that he will finish the work. Walk with Jesus. Walk in the Holy Spirit. Draw near to God. He is all you need.