



NO CONDEMNATION NOW & FOREVER!

Grace Reigns: God's Gospel for All Peoples Series #40

Romans 8:1-4

David Sunday

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Today we're in the great chapter of Romans 8. Some of us come here having had a wonderful week. Maybe you're rejoicing in the experience of different victories over sin. Others come feeling very defeated and discouraged after a horrible week. You don't feel like you are able to rejoice. Whether we feel good or bad today, I am confident that every one of us has proven ourselves afresh this week to be a sinner who needs a Savior. That's true for all of us.

Last week we saw from Romans 7 that we can expect victory over sin in the Christian life—but not through the law. We can expect victory over sin in the Christian life—but not without an ongoing struggle. We can expect victory in the Christian life over sin—but not completely until Jesus comes again in glory.

So what does God's Word have to say to us who are fighting against sin but all too often failing in the fight? How does God speak to us in the midst of this battle? We find a thunderous proclamation here in Romans 8:1-4. Let us rejoice in the gracious words of our great God.

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.

Thanks be to God for this wonderful word: “*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” This is like a banner of triumphant truth that God—our Commander in Chief—puts up in the midst of the battlefield of our conflict with sin. Even when we're struck down and feeling defeated, God wants us to look up and see this banner flying high and to know that victory is assured. Even now God says, “There's no condemnation over you, My

people.” That’s His design to help us persevere, to keep us fighting the good fight of faith, and to comfort us. Amen.

Why do we sometimes not take this seriously? I can think of two reasons that we might not take Romans 8:1 seriously. First, you might think, “I’m not really deserving of condemnation.” You know, a lot of people think that way. They listen to these words and think, “Well, that’s nice. But I’m not really that bad. I’ve never even felt like condemnation was a possibility for me. After all, I’m a pretty good person. And God’s not a condemning God, is He?” That’s the way a lot of people approach these words.

Mark Dever asked the question, “How bad do your sins need to be to condemn you?” He said the answer most people give is, “Just a little bit worse than mine have been.” Most of us think we’re good enough. But listen to what the Bible says in James 2:10: *“Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”*

Be honest. When we think of that verse according to our fleshly human nature, sometimes we want to argue with God. We want to say, “Really? God, You’re telling me with just one failure total guilt comes crashing down on my head? I make one mistake—I disobey Your law in one point—and You’re going to condemn me? Isn’t that kind of an overreaction? Is that what You’re really like, God?” That’s the way human nature thinks. But is it right?

I read an article by Ray Ortlund in which he tried to get underneath the skin of this thinking a little bit. He compared it to the story of Benedict Arnold, that revolutionary war hero whose name is synonymous in American history with traitor. When we think of Benedict Arnold, we think of the man who committed that great act of treason during the Revolutionary War. We don’t remember that he was the general in the Continental Army who bravely fought and won at Fort Ticonderoga.

We remember that he was passed over for promotion and that he accumulated some personal debts. He found himself in the midst of political competition and was becoming the subject of criticism. In the process of all that, he got himself assigned to the command of West Point in New York, in order that he could covertly hand that strategic place over to the British. That’s what we remember about Benedict Arnold.

What was he thinking during that process? Did he think, “All the good I’ve done for America weighed against all the bad I’m receiving from Americans makes me justified in this act of treason; maybe it’s best that we be under the control of the British”? He probably had all kinds of ways of telling himself that this one little act of treason wasn’t all that bad.

But it doesn't work that way, does it? One act of treason overshadowed all the good that Benedict Arnold did. We don't thank him for the good he did for America. We denounce him for his treason. Listen to what Ortlund said:

Benedict Arnold's treachery revealed the true state of his heart. He had not been serving America sincerely, but for ulterior motives. And when he was not served to his own satisfaction, he turned. If he had been served to his satisfaction, he doubtless would have stayed true, but even then his loyalty would have been deeply false—undiscovered, but false.

Here's Ray Ortlund's point:

Our obedience to God doesn't necessarily mean a thing. It might not be obedience at all. It might just be a coincidence. It might be that what the Bible says and what we wanted to do anyway just happened to line up. We claim to be pro-God, but what reveals our hearts is our disobedience. This is why one violation of the law condemns us. Our sin exposes the fraudulence of our righteousness, not the other way around.

Think about it from God's perspective. Do you understand how God would say in His Word that we are worthy of condemnation? That just one violation of the law makes us guilty of breaking all of it? Do you realize this is true of yourself: that you deserve not God's favor, but rather God's wrath for your sin? And if you own that about yourself, then you're ready to rejoice in what God is saying here in Romans 8:1. Will you own that truth about yourself?

Another reason why we might not take Romans 8:1 very seriously is because we're convinced, maybe, that the only way to live a godly, holy life is to feed on a steady diet of guilt and condemnation. There are Christians like that, you know—people who think far more about their shame and sinfulness than they do about their Savior and His sacrifice. There are Christians who lean into the abyss of their sin, but rarely bow beneath the shadow of the cross, who are always saying, "Oh, wretched man that I am," but who are never saying, "Thanks be to God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

There are Christians who are always breathing in this toxic atmosphere of guilt and shame and condemnation, and they think, "This is what I have to do in order to grow in holiness. If I take grace too seriously, I won't pursue holiness. So I have to keep lashing myself in order to stay true to the Lord." They're filled with hatred of self and heavy doses of condemnation. They think, "Because I feel this way about myself, surely God must feel this way about me as well."

Is that you? Do you ever find yourself in that boat? Because if that's where you live, you can find lots of reasons to go over Romans 8:1 very quickly and not let it sink in. Romans 8:1 is encouraging you to dare to believe deeply that God loves you and that nothing in all creation can separate you from His love. Romans 8:1 is there for you to dare to believe that God looks upon you in favor and that His primary disposition toward you is not disappointment, but delight. God rejoices over His children with singing.

If you really believe this, then you can laugh at yourself. You can take yourself a little less seriously. You can rest. And you can enjoy the Christian life. You can actually smile in worship, and maybe even clap a little and have a little bit of exuberance, because there is therefore now no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus. You have joy, and you know right now you are free in Christ. Amen! Thank the Lord for that.

So let's ask five questions about this. We've already asked one, but now I'm going to ask five more. **The first one was: can you take this seriously?**

The second question is this: what does this mean, "There is therefore now no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus"? It means there's no possibility that God will send you to hell for your sins, and there's no reason for you to believe that God will treat you as your sins deserve in this life. That's because He views you not as a failure, but as a forgiven and ever-loved child. Nothing will ever separate you from that love. It means to believe that Jesus already experienced all the hell that your sins could ever deserve. He bore that wrath for you.

And it means that these ongoing skirmishes with sin that you're going to face will never cause you to be cursed or abandoned by God—never! It means that God's Word will stand forever. No matter how badly we fail, these promises will remain. He will never take these words back from us. When He says to us, "I—even I—am He Who blocks out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins," He means it.

So we can confidently say to Him, "God, You have cast all my sins behind Your back. As far as the east is from the west, so far have You removed my transgressions from me. You have tread all my iniquities underfoot and cast my sins into the depths of the sea, never to be dredged up again. Because You have given Your spotless Son to be my Savior, I can believe, Lord, that You will never hold my sins or lawless deeds against me."

That's what it means. Sam Storms says if you are in Christ Jesus, there is no valid reason why you should ever again experience fear or apprehension about your relationship with God or your eternal destiny. Never. No fear. No apprehension about your relationship with God or your eternal destiny. That's what it means.

Third question: when is this true? There are two words that I love in this verse: now and no. Now! Not later. *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* You don't have to wait until you're more mature. You don't have to wait until you have your spiritual act together, or you've conquered this nagging sin, or overcome some bad habit. God says, “Now—with this struggle that you're in. Now—even though you've fallen flat on your face. Now—even though you love Jesus just a little, but you long to love Him more. Now—when you still sometimes fail.”

Right now there is no condemnation for you in Christ Jesus. You don't have to learn more. You don't have to read another book. You don't need to get better. You don't need to prove yourself. You don't need to wait until you die. You're not on probation, if you're in Christ. The verdict has already been settled. God's not waiting for a better you before He'll decide whether or not to accept you into His favor. The decision has been made, it's final and He's never going to take it back. *“There is therefore now no condemnation...”*

And oh, how I love that word “no.” That's reassuring. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said is so well: “No means never.” It's not like when you confess and ask for forgiveness, you're forgiven and then not under condemnation for the moment. But then when you sin again, you're back under condemnation. Back and forth. Condemned—not condemned. Condemned—not condemned. No. Lloyd-Jones says this:

The Christian is a man who can never be condemned; he can never come into a state of condemnation again. “No condemnation!” The Apostle is not talking about his experience, but about his position, his standing, his status; he is in a position in which, being justified, he can never again come under condemnation. That is the meaning of this word “no.” It means “Never.”

Never will He give up on you. Never will He turn away from doing you good. Never will He use your sins against you to condemn you. When you feel like you've exhausted God's grace, when you feel like you've worn it out through your many sins and your many failures and doubts—look up! There still is an ocean of grace, and it's not ever barely a drop drier than it was before you sinned. His grace never fails.

And when you feel like you've gotten to the bottom of God's grace, you'll find there's no bottom. There is no pit so deep, but Christ is deeper still. Never will He forsake you. Never will He stop loving you. Never will He condemn you. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Fourth question: why should you believe this? It's a fair question. Paul is not basing his statement here on wishful thinking. He's not saying, "Oh, these poor people. I've been so negative in Romans 7. They need a little pick-me-up, so I'm just going to say something nice to make them feel better here." No. Paul has been building an air-tight argument here—all the way back to chapter one, showing us how we need a Savior and then how God has done what we could not do for ourselves in sending His Son to be the propitiation for our sins, the sacrifice that turns away His wrath, so that we could be accepted and fully forgiven.

Paul has shown us that this status of righteousness before God is received through faith in Jesus alone. Then he has shown us that God not only frees us from the penalty of sin, but He is also in the process of freeing us from the power of sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us. We are new creatures in Christ. But we're still living in the flesh in this intermediate period while we're waiting for the completion of our salvation, and we're still battling with sin.

So in light of all that Paul has said, he says, "*There is therefore...*" That word "therefore" connects this premise, this absolute confident assurance in this rock-solid reality of what God has done for us in Christ. He doesn't say, "Because you have done something, there is no condemnation for you." He says, "Because of all that God has done in Christ, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

And then he goes on in verses two through four to describe further what God has done in Christ. Verse two: "*For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*" There was a time when we thought we were in control of our lives. We were doing it our way. But we weren't in control of our lives at all. We were dominated by the law of sin and death. We were ruled by sin, and it leads to death and shame.

But now in Christ Jesus we've been set free. We are under new management. We are under the law of the Spirit of life. We're going to discover as we work our way through this chapter over the next several weeks that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in Romans 8 more than in any other chapter of the New Testament. Twenty-one times the word "Spirit" is used in this chapter.

What God is saying to us is that where the law of God failed to transform us, the gospel of God's grace will succeed. That's because the gospel is empowered by God's Spirit. God Himself comes to live in us. He rules our lives now. He brings us into true freedom, which isn't doing whatever your sinful nature desires to do. True freedom is living like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: walking in fellowship with God and doing what pleases Him. We're liberated from shame and guilt.

Verse three reaffirms what God has done for us in Christ to free us from condemnation. This is what we're going to celebrate as we come to this holy Communion Table in a few minutes. "For God has done..." Do you see that? "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do." There's nothing wrong with God's law. The law is powerful. But the law can only expose our sin. It cannot change us, because the flesh cannot obey God's law.

Here's what God has done: "By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin..." Jesus became one of us. He became like us in all respects except for sin. He was sinless. God didn't decide to do something like a laparoscopic procedure from heaven down to earth to change us. He came down and became one of us. He fully embraced our humanity. He did it to put an end to sin.

So He, the sinless One, went to the cross. And on that cross, God condemned sin in the flesh of Jesus. He nailed our sins to the cross of Christ. He poured out on Jesus the full brunt of the wrath our sins deserve.

Because the sinless Savior died
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God the just is satisfied
To look on Him and pardon me.

(From "Before the Throne of God Above," by Charitie Lees Bancroft)

That's what God has done, and that why we should believe, "There is therefore now no condemnation."

That brings us to the fifth question: who is this for? The answer is that it's for anyone who's desperate enough to desire it. It's for anyone who realizes, "I need it." It's for anyone who says, "There are not good people and bad people in the world. There are bad people—and there is Jesus. I'm fleeing from my badness to Him."

In God's wonderful way of grace, He says, "Okay, everything that's bad about you, Jesus took and embraced on the cross. He paid the penalty for it." So everything that's good about Him—that infinite righteousness that's in Him—can become yours. You become a joint owner of His bank account, His infinite treasury of merit.

So if you're united to Christ, if you're in Christ Jesus, there is no more condemnation waiting for you than there is for Christ. Is God ever going to condemn sin in His Son again? That's what Easter is all about. He's risen from the dead! He paid in full the penalty for our sin. Just as no condemnation awaits Christ, no condemnation awaits those who are in Christ Jesus. How do you get into that? You ask Him to be your Savior. I'm going to give you the opportunity to do that at the end of this message.

The last question is how will it affect you if you believe this is true? This is what Romans 8 is all about. It's about living in the good of the gospel. It's about the gospel's transforming power in our lives for the here and now, while we're still in this flesh. While we're still suffering in this world that is groaning, we can have hope. We can let the truth of what God has done in Christ permeate our hearts as the Holy Spirit takes that wonderful reality of what Christ has done and makes it real to us. That's what Romans 8 is about. It's about the gospel being applied in our lives.

So look at some of the words that are used in the first four verses and you'll see the effect this should have on you. I see the word "free" in verse two. This should bring you freedom, to know the pressure is off. You're not being judged on the basis of your performance. I see the word "life," this law is of the Spirit of life. This means new life. I see the word "fulfillment." Do you see that in verse four? *"God sent 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."*

What one word summarizes everything in the law of God? All that God commanded can be summarized in this word: love. Love. You'll never love people very well if you believe you're under condemnation. Have you ever noticed that people who are feeling guilty lash out at others? If there's someone in your life who is always on edge, always critical, I would venture to say that if you could probe into the depths of their heart you would find they're carrying a lot of shame and guilt.

If you're walking around carrying that shame and guilt, you're not going to do a very good job of loving other people. You're always going to treat them the way you think God's treating you. Sometimes we think, "You know what? I'll never grow in holiness if I really believe there's no condemnation for me. That's too dangerous to believe."

There are a lot of people who think, "If you really want to help Christians grow in holiness, you've got to keep them on edge. You've got to keep them feeling a little bit guilty. You've just got to be a little hard on them. You can't give them too much grace. Beware of too much gospel. If you want to get people working for Jesus, you've got to keep them wondering."

But God says it's absolutely the opposite of that. The only way you're going to make any progress in holiness is if you believe there is now no condemnation for you in Christ. You are freely and fully accepted by the God of all grace. Now you're free to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law. It's the opposite of legalism. Legalism says, "Keep the law and you will be saved." The gospel says, "You have been saved, so now you can keep the law. You can fulfill the righteous requirement of the law."

Here's one of the greatest tests of whether or not you believe this: What do you do when you fail, when you've really blown it? Do you say, "You know what? I need to stay a little bit distant from God for a while, because I'm really a mess. I'm not worthy." If you're a Christian, do you come into church thinking, "Oh, no. Communion. I've blown it this week. I can't take communion." If we think that when we fail, we've got to somehow make up for it—somehow feel guilty enough before we can draw near to God—we're not really believing Romans 8:1, are we?

Here's what someone does when they believe Romans 8:1: They're going through life. They're walking along the battlefield. They jump on the landmine called "sin," or they taste the delicacies of sin. And even while the taste of sin is still fresh in their mouths, they get down on their knees, come to God and say, "Thank You, Jesus, that You died for this. Thank You Jesus that You died for me. Yes, I just sinned ten seconds ago. Yes, I just denied the freedom that I have in You. You've set me free. I didn't act like it. But thank You, Jesus, that I don't need to do a thing to make up for what I just did, because You've done it all. I receive and embrace the work You've done for me."

That's what you do if you believe this. The real test of whether you believe Romans 8:1 is what you do when you fail. You can believe that God no longer remembers your sins and your lawless deeds. He doesn't want you to live with the constant memory of them either—always beating yourself up. It's counterintuitive to us to live like this, because in our lives there are things we do that we have a hard time forgetting. We think it would almost be wrong to forget.

I was reminded of a true story I read a few years ago in a post by Clint Archer that confirms this. It's the story of Kevin Tunell. He was 17 years old on New Year's Day, 1982 when he made the worst mistake of his life. He had gotten very drunk at a New Year's Eve party near Washington, D.C. He was so drunk that his friends said to him, "Don't drive." His words to them were, "Nothing will ever happen to me." He got into the car, drove, lost control of the wheel, smashed into another car and instantly killed an 18-year-old girl named Susan Herzog. She was just a mile from her home in Fairfax County, Virginia.

After pleading guilty to involuntary manslaughter and drunk driving, Tunell was sentenced to three years of probation and one year of community service. Susan's parents understandably thought that sentence was way too lenient. So they sued him in civil court for emotional distress and won a ruling for \$1.5 million.

But then, unexpectedly, Susan's parents offered to settle for a mere \$936—on one condition. Kevin had to pay the amount by sending them a check for \$1, made out to their deceased daughter Susan Herzog, every Friday—which was the day she died—for the next 18

years. A dollar every Friday. Eighteen years. They insisted that it wasn't vindictive retribution. They just didn't want him to forget their daughter.

I don't fault them. I can't imagine what I would do if I were in their shoes. But think about Kevin. Does that sound like an easy sentence to you? Just \$936. Just a dollar a week—for 18 years. That's all. But soon the burden of guilt proved to be too much for Kevin to bear. At one point he tried to present the Herzogs with two boxes of pre-written checks. He had them dated each week through 2001, a year longer than was required. The parents refused to accept the checks.

For seven years he went through this. Finally he couldn't take it any longer. He stopped writing the checks. The parents dragged him back into court, and standing before Judge Jack Stephens with tears rolling down his cheeks, he described the agonizing guilt he felt each time he wrote Susan Herzog on a check. He said it became unbearable. He said he got to a point where he just snapped. He would think, "It hurts too much. I used to lie in bed and if I heard noises I would think Susan was coming to visit me." He was sentenced to 30 days in jail, and he continued to pay the fine.

Don't you shudder when you think of what Kevin went through? What would it be like to live with the torment of regret over and over and over again? What would it be like to have your sins held over your head every week for 18 years—for a lifetime—for eternity? What would it be like to have to focus on your sin without being able to bask in God's mercy?

Where would we be if we did not know that the sins which could haunt us day and night are no longer remembered by God in heaven, and that one day the "No condemnation" that He declares over our lives right now will be the only declaration we hear? Sometimes it's hard for us to forget—but one day, that's all we'll be able to remember: no condemnation.

Here's what I'm trying to tell you. I think when some Christians come to church, come to the Lord's Table, we think we're doing what Kevin was called to do. We think we're writing our little one dollar check to God. We come to church and say, "God, I'm so sorry for what a miserable failure I am. Here's Your little check. Will You forgive me, God?"

We come to the Lord's Table and think what God wants from us is that one dollar check. Why? We killed His Son. Our sins nailed Jesus to the tree. That was our sin that held Him there. And we think God wants us to rehearse week after week after week our guilt, our failure, our sin, our shame. "Never forget what you did to My Son." We think that's what coming to church is all about. "Here's Your check, God. I hope You're happy with me."

God says, "It's exactly the opposite." Should we confess our sins? Yes. Confess them, forsake them, then forget them by grace. Forgetting what is behind, we strain toward what is

ahead. Here's what God wants you to rehearse week after week after week after week: *"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."* He bore our sins, so we can say:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

(From "It Is Well With My Soul," by Horatio Spafford)

That's why we're coming to this Communion Table. Not because God wants us to rehearse our sins and failures. In fact, if we think God wants us to give Him His little one dollar check here at this Table, are we giving Jesus any credit for what He did on that cross? Is that how we honor what He did? No! We come here and we rejoice—with fear, with trembling, with awe, but with holy, sublime joy for what He has done for us.

Because this is what God wants us to rehearse again and again and again: Jesus saying, "This is My body which is for you. This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Take. Eat. Remember Me. Remember Me." One day we won't remember our sins anymore. But we will forever remember the Lamb Who was slain to take away the sins of the world. That's why we're coming here. So let's bow before the Lord in humble gratitude.

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