

Sermons through

Romans

He Condemned Sin

Romans 8:1-4

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
11/24/2013*

He Condemned Sin

Romans 8:1-4

***There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).**

Introduction

It is a common practice for organizations to develop a mission statement. A mission statement is a brief phrase designed to tell others, and remind those within the organization, what the purpose of the organization is—its reason for existence. Sometimes it helps to have short, accessible propositions that we can hide in our hearts operating as sort of anchor when we find ourselves confused or distracted from what's truly important.

In marriage, for example, there may be a variety of ways we might express our love to our spouses, but the bedrock of the marriage extends back to, and is expressed in the vows. At the risk of sounding morbid, it may not be an unhealthy exercise to consider writing your own obituary. What would be an accurate paragraph expressing your purpose for existing, how you expressed that purpose and what you ever leaned on for strength in obtaining that purpose.

Throughout the history of the church, short statements, like the Apostles' Creed have been of immense help in reminding Christians what they believe. John 3:16 has, little doubt, been one of the most quoted verses in the Bible; a short verse which says so much. I once heard a prominent theologian asked what verse or phrase from a hymn or song granted him the most comfort. He answered "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

As we turn to the 8th chapter of Romans, we might find quite a few verses that would fall into the 'I must memorize that verse' category. But for me, there are very few simple and succinct phrases that have granted my heart more solace than the very first verse under our consideration.

***There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*¹ (Romans 8:1).**

No Condemnation

It is generally understood that Paul is completing a thought he began in chapter five (Romans 5:12) where, through one man (Adam), sin entered the world and how through the last Adam (Christ) that sin is vanquished. Though having no disagreement with that, I prefer to think of this verse as Paul's deep sigh of relief tightly attached to the end of chapter seven.

Paul's conjunction "**therefore**" *ara* is a marker of result as an inference, the way we might say "consequently." So one of the most comforting verses in the Bible is preceded by Paul's very intense journal of conflict with own sin (Romans 7:13-23), his confession of own wretchedness, followed by his cry to God for deliverance (Romans 7:24), and his thankfulness to God—through Jesus Christ (Romans 7:25). Paul now elaborates on why he is so relieved, so thankful.

To those who are in Christ Jesus—to those who have called upon His name—to those who believe—there is no condemnation. How important is it that we not be mistaken about condemnation! Condemnation may, or may not, be accompanied by the feeling of oppression, guilt, sorrow or shame. We all know people who can make us feel very guilty about things for which there should be no guilt at all. There are also those who can make us feel vindicated about things for which we should be ashamed.

But condemnation *katakrima* is not the feeling; it is the sentence. It is a decision against someone with a condemnatory judgment and a suggestion of punishment to follow. It might be quite easy to go through life and push aside any feeling of condemnation; and there may not be a more dangerous disposition for a human being to have. My ability to dismiss any feeling of condemnation apart from actually dealing with the condemnation would be like a patient ignoring the doctor's certain diagnosis of his terminal disease. So the patient just tries to avoid doing things that hurt until the disease kills him.

¹ The second portion of the verse is a disputed. But since it is repeated in verse 4 (where it is not disputed), we will take it up there.

If I may follow through a bit with my own metaphor, the sinful human avoids acknowledging that there is a God, that there is judgment and that we will be held accountable. And if we can bring this closer to the text, the Apostle Paul seemed to have much greater joy and peace in the knowledge of this condemnation being lifted than do most Christians. Why? Because he was a Christian who sought to obey with all his heart. He was a man keenly aware of **“kindness and severity of God” (Romans 11:22)**.

Paul’s Christianity was no mere afterthought. Paul’s moment by moment awareness of God, of God’s law, of his effort to obey it by loving God and loving his neighbor attended the pen of Romans 8:1. The law of God was to Paul like the Ark of the Covenant which housed it. It was there, and it was glorious, you want to be close, you want to obey, but you best not touch it—let alone stand on it to reach for salvation—for apart from Christ it will consume you. Paul could now interact with the law and the God of that law as a man risen from the dead.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

The Law of the Spirit

There are various suggestions as to what is meant by the use of the word **“law”** in this verse. It might be referring to the law of God in different contexts. The Spirit of God puts the law of God in its proper place—how to live, how to grasp better the character of God, the awareness of sin and need for the help found in Christ. Or, the law of God as it pertains to sin and death heaped upon those who would seek to keep it in an effort to approve themselves before God. For them the law of sin and death can be summed up in “you have sinned and therefore will die.”

As theologically true as that might be, I tend to agree with those who would understand the word **“law”** here referring to **“an inward principle of action, operating with the fixedness and regularity of a law,”** it thus appears that **“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”** here means, **“that new principle of action which the Spirit of Christ has opened up within us—the**

law of our new being.’”² So, it might be said, that man is operating under one of two possible principles or laws: the law of sin and death, wherewith we are consigned to the inevitable condemnation of **“The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20)**, or the **“Spirit of life”** where, by the grace of God, the gospel is preached and life is given. It is quite possible that Paul, as one conversant with the Old Testament, had Ezekiel 37 in mind.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” ⁴ Then he said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:1-6).

The law of God will teach righteousness, but it cannot grant righteousness. It is the gospel—the Good News that God has kept His covenant promise to send His Son to die for sinners—that is power of God to salvation **“for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16)**. **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17)**. When the gospel is given, it is the prophecy over the bones. It is the means by which God gives life.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks

² Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 8:2). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:21-25).

No less than 13 times in the first 27 verses of this chapter we see a reference to the Spirit. The redemption of souls, the giving of life from the dead is a spiritual enterprise, driven by the Spirit of God. Little wonder that the world has sought to hijack spirituality and wrench it from its life-giving context.

Spirituality, it must be said, is not necessarily a good thing. There are certain types of spirits from which people need healing: **“In that hour he (Jesus) healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits” (Luke 7:21).** But the law of the Spirit of life is in Christ Jesus, and it is a Spirit which sets men free from sin, death and condemnation. It is a Spirit which opens our eyes to see and inclines our hearts to believe what the law could not do and what God did do. Paul continues:

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:3, 4).

Something is Condemned

There is a temptation to think of the forgiveness of God the way we tend to forgive. One of my children offends the other and we tell them to say they are sorry. Then we tell the other to forgive. Then they say something like “That’s okay,” and we move on. But in God’s economy, in God’s world, forgiveness is not the simple brushing aside of the offense as if it didn’t happen. God is just. It would be more like an unthinkable court scene where the guilty defendant says “I’m sorry for the carnage and havoc I wreaked” to which the judge would not dare say “That’s okay.”

There must be justice. And in a world where sin has invaded every nook and cranny of the human soul, the just payment is deep. A condemnation must take place in order for the ledger of human

iniquity to be settled. Those who trust in Christ have escaped condemnation, but that doesn't mean there is no condemnation. Verses three and four might be thought of as an amplification of John 3:16.

God sent **“His own Son** (He didn't create His Son, but sent Him) **in the likeness of sinful flesh.”** Jesus was not Himself sinful (Hebrews 4:15), but you wouldn't know by merely looking at Him. Everything that makes a human a human (except sin, which is not necessary to being human, as with Adam) was to be found in Christ. Much can, and has been said and written about this³ but for now, we must recognize that a condemnation, a full condemnation was necessary to meet the justice of a Holy God; and this condemnation meant death and judgment. God cannot die, but Jesus, the man, could.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (Hebrews 2:14, 15).

It was mankind who sinned and it would be man who would pay for it. When we think of God condemning sin we rejoice; like Isaiah 25:8 where we read that God will **“swallow up death forever.”** And we should rejoice. But there is a popular habit of de-personalizing sin with phrases like “God hates the sin but loves the sinner.” A phrase like that has its price when we consider a passage like the one before us. It may well detract from our understanding of the price paid for our redemption to think of sin as devoid of personality; especially when it is used as a description of Christ Himself?

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And God's condemnation of sin in the flesh involved His own Son, becoming, not only sin, but its attending curse.

³ One can begin with question #39 from the Westminster Larger Catechism.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

We mentioned briefly why it was necessary for our Mediator to be fully man. But why is it requisite that He be fully God as well? If I may briefly quote Question 38 of the Larger Westminster Catechism, it just begins to touch on it:

Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God?

It was requisite that the Mediator should be God, that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death, (Acts 2:24-25, Rom. 1:4, Rom. 4:25, Heb. 9:14) give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession; (Acts 20:28, Heb. 9:14, Heb. 7:25-28) and to satisfy God’ s justice, (Rom. 3:24-26) procure his favour, (Eph. 1:6, Matt. 3:17) purchase a peculiar people, (Tit. 2:13-14) give his Spirit to them, (Gal. 4:6) conquer all their enemies, (Luke 1:68-69,71,74) and bring them to everlasting salvation. (Heb. 5:8-9, Heb. 9:11-15)⁴

The story of redemption does not end with Jesus dead and under the curse. It ends with Christ, the conquering King, that all who trust in Him might be **“more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37)**. This is why any form of Christianity which seeks to undermine the deity (Godhood) of Christ, has an incomplete salvation which must somehow be filled up by human works—a fool’s errand.

When it comes to being delivered from condemnation, those who trust in Christ have nothing to fulfill, because the Father sent the Son to condemn sin that **“the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”** And though Paul will soon write of those to whom these blessings belong, in terms of their walk of life, he is not here informing us of what Christians will do, but rather what has been done for them. In other words, he is not telling us that now that

⁴ *The Westminster larger catechism: with scripture proofs.* (1996). . Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

we have the Spirit, we can fulfill the law, but that because of Christ, the law is fulfilled in us. Calvin weighs in:

They who understand that the renewed, by the Spirit of Christ, fulfill the law, introduce a gloss wholly alien to the meaning of Paul; for the faithful, while they sojourn in this world, never make such a proficiency, as that the justification of the law becomes in them full or complete. ⁵

We should not from this draw the conclusion that faithful Christians are mere statues cleansed from pigeon droppings of sin—standing clean and still. As Paul has labored in his instruction, those who have been brought to life have a heart that beats, lungs that breathe and they walk around. In other words, they demonstrate that they are in fact alive. To put it in Paul’s words, they **“do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”**

To **“walk”** *peripatousin* means the way we conduct our lives. As Paul taught elsewhere:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:1, 2).

At the risk of sounding judgmental, it can be a source of great concern when Christians observe the other Christians behaving in a way indiscernible from the world. Paul specifies the marks of the person under God’s grace—it is the person who walks according to the Spirit. But let’s be clear, the blessings are not theirs because they walk in the Spirit—they walk in Spirit as a result of the blessing; as Schreiner puts it: **“The logic seems to be that a transformed life is evidence that believers are not guilty in God’s law court.”** ⁶

In short, we are not condemned because sin is condemned in Christ, that the law might be fulfilled in those who have demonstrated that this has happened in their lives by walking in obedience. But the

⁵ Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed., Ro 8:4). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

⁶ Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Romans* (Vol. 6, p. 404). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

walking in obedience is not the means by which we are approved before God. I don't know if it can be said any better than Calvin:

How are we righteous in the sight of God? It is assuredly in the same respect in which Christ was a sinner. For he assumed in a manner our place, that he might be a criminal in our room, and might be dealt with as a sinner, not for his own offenses, but for those of others, inasmuch as he was pure and exempt from every fault, and might endure the punishment that was due to us — not to himself. It is in the same manner, assuredly, that we are now *righteous in him* — not in respect of our rendering satisfaction to the justice of God by our own works, but because we are judged in connection with Christ's righteousness, which we have put on by faith, that it might become ours.

Questions for Study

1. If you were to write a mission statement for yourself, what would it be? Can you think of a Bible verse, a line in a hymn or a short statement from which you have derived great peace? What is it and why (pages 2-4)?
2. What is condemnation and how do we know we are not under it? Why do you suppose Paul rejoiced so in this (pages 3, 4)?
3. What is the law of the Spirit? Compare this to the law of sin and death? Is spirituality always good? Explain. What is the means by which the Spirit gives life (pages 4-6)?

4. How is God's forgiveness different than the way we tend to forgive (pages 6, 7)?
5. Why was it requisite that the Mediator (Christ) be fully God and fully man (pages 6-8)?
6. What does it mean that the "righteous requirement of the law was fulfilled in us" (pages 8, 9)?
7. Define what it means to walk according to the Spirit (pages 8, 9).
8. Discuss the quote given by Calvin. How is a person righteous in the sight of God (page 9)?