

Title: **WRETCHED, BUT NOT CONDEMNED**
Text: Romans 7:24-8:1
Subject: *The Believer's Complete Absolution in Christ*
Date: Sunday Morning — June 6, 2004
Tape # Y-24b
Reading: *Romans 7:14-8:10*
Introduction:

My text is Romans 7:24-8:1. The title of my message is — **WRETCHED, BUT NOT CONDEMNED.**

As you know the chapter and verse divisions in our English Bible were added by the translators. They are very useful in giving us reference points and aid greatly in the memorization of Holy Scripture. However, they are sometimes very great hindrances in interpreting the Word of God, because we tend to think a chapter division indicates a change of subjects.

Clearly, the chapter division between Romans 7 and Romans 8 is unfortunate. The first verse of the 8th chapter shows the clear connection of these two chapters. — “There is *therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*” The word “*therefore*” refers to what Paul has been talking about in chapter 7. So let’s read our text as it should be read.

(Romans 7:24-8:1) “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.(8:1) *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*”

OUR EXPERIENCE

I have often heard preachers say, “We need to get out of Romans 7 and into Romans 8.” Nonsense! There is no getting out of one into the other. These two chapters are one. They are talking about our present experience of God’s free, saving grace in Christ.

I thank God with all my heart that since my conversion I have never known what it is to be out of Romans 7 or Roman 8. That which I read in these two chapters is what I know to be the truest possible expression of my soul’s experience for 37 years. I constantly struggle with sin, inward corruption

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and wretchedness. And I rejoice, oh, how I rejoice in complete, free, absolute justification in Christ, even as I confess my sin.

After saying, “*So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin,*” Paul goes on to say, without any break, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*” The fact is, believers are in a state of conflict, but not in a state of condemnation. At the very time when the conflict is hottest the justification and complete absolution in Christ is sweetest. Is it not?

Our Savior declares, “*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted,*” and “*Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*” Those who know nothing about bitter mourning over their sin know nothing about the sweet comfort of grace. Those who do not know what it is to have pangs of hunger and thirst after righteousness do not know what it is to have the sweet satisfaction of Christ’s fulness. None but those who struggle with their own corruption and sin, none but those who know their utter wretchedness before God, can enter into the blessed assurance proclaimed in Romans 8:1. — “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*”

PRESENT TENSE

Do not fail to observe the fact that our text is written in the present tense. You will lose much of its force, beauty, and sweetness if you leave out that word “*now.*” This “*now*” shows how distinctly the statement of non-condemnation is consistent with that mingled experience of bitter wretchedness. Paul does not say, “*O wretched man that I was.*” He says, “*O wretched man that I am!*” Then, immediately, he says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*”

The passage describes a conflict which the unregenerate cannot feel; for they neither delight in the law of God after the inner man, nor do they agonize to be set free from “*the body of this death.*” Every believer readily identifies with Paul’s words. We make no attempt to hide what we know we are — Sin, nothing but sin. We frankly confess our sin before God; and do so with the sweet assurance of complete justification and absolution through the precious blood of Christ (1 John 1:6-10).

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(1 John 1:6-10) “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: (7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

Reading these verses with an emphasis upon the their present tense, my heart sings with joy. With all my watching, and warring —with all my fear and trembling — I rejoice in the Lord even now, assured that “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.*”

Now let’s dive headlong into the depths of this vast ocean of grace. May God the Holy Spirit who gave it bless it to our hearts!

(Romans 7:24-8:1) “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.(8:1) *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*”

MY LAMENTATION

- I. My text begins with a word of lamentation. **This is my lamentation.** — “*O wretched man that I am!*”

This is the phrase of one who is weary and worn out with conflict. It might be translated, “O miserable I!” This lamentation is the result of this continual, painful, and bitter conflict, a conflict in my soul between good and evil, righteousness and sin, a struggle that makes me long to be clothed upon with immortality and life (2 Cor. 5:1-5).

(2 Corinthians 5:1-5) “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (3) If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (4) For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed,

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but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (5) Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.”

“I know that in me, (that is in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing!” I wish that were not the case, but I know that it is. Honesty compels me to acknowledge it. Do you know what I am talking about? This I know, every soul wed to the Son of God acknowledges, *“I am black,”* black with sin. — *“I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me”* (Song 1:5-6; Jer. 8:21).

True faith acknowledges and confesses sin. *“I am black.”* The people of God are charged by both the world and by self-righteous religionists with many evils. But none of our enemies have such a loathsome view of us as we have of ourselves. Do any charge us with evil? It is true. *“I am black...My own vineyard have I not kept.”* I am black in myself, by nature. I am black in the eyes of others, because of my actions. I am much more black in my own eyes because of what I know I am. True faith does not defend itself. It does not seek any excuse for sin. True faith acknowledges and confesses sin (Job 40:3-5; 42:5-6; Psa. 51:4-5; Dan. 10:8).

(Job 40:3-5) “Then Job answered the LORD, and said, (4) Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. (5) Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.”

(Job 42:5-6) “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. (6) Wherefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes.”

(Psalms 51:4-5) “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest. (5) Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

(Daniel 10:8) “Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.”

Any sinner who sees Christ in the glory of his grace, having accomplished redemption by the sacrifice of himself, whose lips have been purged with

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the live coals of his burnt offering cries with Isaiah, — “*Woe is me! For I am undone!*” He cries with Paul, “*O wretched man that I am!*”

The believer is a person with two distinct natures, the flesh and the spirit. These two natures are constantly at war with one another so long as we live in this world (Rom. 7:14-24; Gal. 5:17).

We are sinners by nature. We are sinners by choice. We are sinners by practice. We are sinners at heart. Sin is not to be measured by our actions, but by our attitude. Sin is not to be measured by our deeds, but by our principles. Sin is not so much what we do, but what we are. Sin is mixed with all we do. Old man Adam is still present with me.

“’Tis a point I long to know;
Oft it causes anxious thought; —
Do I love the Lord, or no?
Am I His, or am I not.?”

If I love, why am I thus:
Why this dull, this lifeless frame?
Hardly, sure, can they be worse
Who have never heard His name!

When I turn my eyes within,
All is dark, and vain, and wild;
Filled with unbelief and sin,
Can I deem myself a child?

If I pray, or read, or hear,
Sin is mixed with all I do.
You that love the Lord indeed,
Tell me, is it thus with you?

Yet, I mourn my stubborn will,
Find my sin a grief and thrall!
Would I grieve for what I feel,
If I did not love at all?

Could I joy His saints to meet,
Choose the ways I once abhorred,

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Find at times His promise sweet,
If I did not love the Lord?

Lord, decide the doubtful case,
Thou Who art Thy people's sun: —
Shine upon Thy work of grace,
If it be indeed begun.

Let me love Thee more and more,
If I love at all, I pray;
If I have not loved before,
Help me to begin today.”

Yes, we do love Christ. He has created in us true love for himself. **But before you were converted**, did you ever think that you could love God so little as you do? – We do pray. Grace has taught every believing heart to pray. But before God saved you, did you ever think that prayer could be so difficult as it actually is? – We bow to and trust God's wise, unerring providence. But before God gave you faith in Christ, did you ever think that a believer could grumble so much against the providence of God as you do? Did you ever think that a believer could be so unbelieving? – Thank God, he has set our hearts on things above. But before God revealed himself to you and in you in Christ, did you ever think that a person who knows the Lord could be so thoroughly attached to the toys of this world as you are? – We are his witnesses. We confess Christ before men. But before you knew the Lord, did you ever think that a believer could be so reluctant and timid about holding up the banner of Christ among his enemies as you are?

Sin is so much a part of us that it is mixed with all we do and all we are. We despise that fact; but we cannot, in honesty, deny it (1 John 1:10). Truly, we confess, *“I am black.”*

No wonder our Lord said, *“Take heed to yourselves!”* **We who know ourselves to be such sinners have great reason constantly to give thanks to God that salvation is by grace alone.** — *“By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain”* (1 Cor. 15:10).

Let us ever give thanks for him who is our unceasing, all-prevailing Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1-2).

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(1 John 2:1-2) “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world.*”

MY DESIRE

II. Now, look at the next line of our text. **This is my desire.** — “*Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*”

“*The body of this death,*” or as it might better be translated, “this body of death,” is not a reference to my physical body. Rather, it refers to “*our old man*” “*the body of sin*” (Rom. 6:6) that is in us, our old, corrupt nature, the inner evil with which we constantly struggle.

I do not doubt that Paul had in his mind a picture that would have been very familiar to the Romans. It was the custom of the Romans to punish a murderer by attaching the dead body of his murdered victim to him. He was compelled to drag it along wherever he went. When he arose in the morning, it was with him. When he sat to eat, it was with him. As he walked about in the day, it was with him. When he lay down to sleep, it was with him. The dead body was always present with him. What a weight! What a burden! How obnoxious! How haunting! It poisoned the air he breathed. It gave a foul, sickening odor to everything.

Such is the case with us! Every sinner is a murderer, a soul murderer, the murderer of his own soul. It is written, “*Thou hast destroyed thyself*” (Hos. 13:9). When God the Holy Spirit convinces us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, we are made thoroughly acquainted with the plague of our own hearts and made conscious that we are carrying within us “*the body of this death,*” haunted constantly with that obnoxious thing we have made in destroying ourselves.

Oh, how I long to be free of this weight of corruption, this dead weight, this miserable thing called self!

(Romans 8:19-23) “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (20) For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the*

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same in hope, (21) Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. (23) And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.”

(2 Corinthians 5:2-4) “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (3) If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (4) For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”

How I long to be free!

- Free from sin!
- Free from unbelief!
- Free from myself!

Yes, I know, as Paul did, and rejoice as he did in the fact that deliverance is both complete and sure. But this inbred evil that is in me is something with which, blessed be God, I can never be content!

BLESSED DISCOVERIES

These are blessed discoveries of grace, things that cannot be known, but by the experience of grace. Blessed is that eternity bound sinner who is made to know, by bitter experience, that there is no inherent goodness, righteousness, or holiness within him, and that none can be produced by him! The experience of these things endear our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ to our hearts. Knowing these things we are compelled to come to Christ unto the last hour we live in this body of flesh just as we first came to him. Our daily, constant experience in and with “*the body of this death*,” constantly teaches us that our salvation is altogether God’s work of grace. They bow us low in the dust before the throne of grace and compel us to give him alone the glory for all his great goodness to our unworthy souls.

MY CONFIDENCE

Now, look at verses 24 and 25 together. — “*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” When Paul asked that

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question, he was not expressing doubt or uncertainty, but a great desire to be free of sin and death altogether. The question was raised rhetorically. Now, he gives us his confident answer. — “*I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*”

III. **This is my confidence.** — Christ has delivered, is delivering me, and shall yet deliver me from “*the body of this death!*”

Turn, O my eyes, away from me to Christ! Gaze, O my soul, gaze upon him who is my Deliverer! Because he has delivered me from death and condemnation by his great sacrifice at Calvary and experimentally by his great grace in the new birth, “*With the mind (with my heart, in my inmost being, in the depths of my soul) I myself serve the law of God*” (1 Pet. 4:1-2; 1 John 3:5, 9)

(1 Peter 4:1-2) “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; (2) That he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

(1 John 3:5) “And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.”

(1 John 3:9) “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

Yet, though I am God’s child and God’s servant, redeemed, justified, and sanctified in Christ, with the flesh, in this body of death, I serve the law of sin, not now and then, but all the time, unceasingly! — “*O wretched man that I am!*” Wretched, yes! But not condemned!

MY JOY

IV. Now, look at Romans 8:1. **This is my joy in Christ, my heart’s great delight.** — “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*”

I know that my blessed Savior shall soon deliver me, absolutely and forever, from “*the body of this death*” because he has delivered me from all

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possibility of condemnation. — *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

Paul does not say, there is **no corruption** in them that are in Christ Jesus, but there is no condemnation to them. Let absolute, perfect holiness be our constant aim in this life; but it shall be our attainment only in the next.

Paul does not say, there is **no correction** to them, but no condemnation. Corrected we shall be. Condemned we can never be. Indeed, we corrected, that we may not be condemned.

The apostle does not say, there is **nothing that deserves condemnation**, nothing damnable in them, but no condemnation. Everything about me is damnable and deserving of condemnation; but I cannot be condemned because I have already suffered condemnation to the full satisfaction of divine justice in the suffering and death of Christ, my Surety, Substitute, and Representative.

Be sure you do not miss this. — **Paul does not simply say, there is no condemnation to me, or to this or that particular believer.** Had he said that, we might imagine that this declaration of grace could be applied only to certain believers, to those who have attained some higher measure and degree of grace and spirituality than others. **This is an assured declaration and privilege of grace that extends to all believers without exception or qualification.** There is no condemnation to them; that is, to any of them that are in Christ Jesus.

Again the apostle does not say, **there shall be no condemnation** to them that are in Christ Jesus, but *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”* Every sinner who trusts Christ *“hath everlasting life,”* and is already passed from death to life, life beyond the reach of condemnation, *“everlasting life!”*

Now, let’s look at this blessed, glorious declaration of grace in its entirety. — *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

NO CONDEMNATION — What does that mean? — *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus!”*

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What a broad, sweeping assertion that is! — *“There is no condemnation.”* — No condemnation on account of original sin, though we were by nature children of wrath even as others. — No condemnation for actual sin, though we are all transgressors and come far short of the glory of God, there is no condemnation of any sort possible to us. — No condemnation, though we humble ourselves, and weep, and groan before God because in thought and word and deed we offend still. — No condemnation, though we know ourselves utterly wretched.

- Satan, our accuser, says there is condemnation, and therefore he accuses us day and night. Still, there is no condemnation. He was a liar from the beginning, and the father of lies!
- Our consciences censure us and say, “condemned” when we look for hope within, hope built upon our own works and graces. Our consciences need to be constantly purged from dead works. Yet, even then, it is written, *“If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things”* (1 John 3:20). When we look outside ourselves for hope, when we look away to Christ, our consciences speak peace, and declare, “no condemnation!”

If you read the rest of the chapter you will see how unreserved Paul was in his statement. As we get to the end of the chapter, he mounts the white stallion of the victor and rides through Zion crying triumphantly, *“Who shall say anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us!”* He makes all heaven and earth and hell to ring with his daring challenge, *“Who is he that condemneth?”* In the broadest imaginable terms he declares that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Where there is no condemnation there is no wrath, no guilt, no punishment. On the contrary, there is acceptance, favor, and bliss.

Blessed be God, the verdict is in. — Not Guilty! — No Condemnation! Where there is no guilt, there is no possibility of condemnation. And the precious blood of Christ has so thoroughly out away our sins that we are not guilty. His righteousness is so completely ours that we are made the righteousness of God in him! — *“There is therefore now no condemnation!”*

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- No condemnation for all my past crimes!
- No condemnation for all my present offences!
- No condemnation for all my future transgressions!

What a blessed, heart-cheering, encouraging declaration of free grace this is! — *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus!”* It makes me laugh with joy. If you know what it is to be burdened with a sense of sin you will laugh with me. You good, respectable people who are sailing to heaven in the ship of your own righteousness will find nothing here. There is nothing in this word of grace for you. Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

But you that have been whipped by the devil and dragged at the heels of your sins, you that have been broken and crushed under the hand of conviction, you are the people that will leap for joy as you hear the silver jubilee trumpet ring out the note of *“no condemnation.”* Come, let us be glad. Let us rejoice together because there is now no condemnation to us.

When Giant Despair’s head was cut off, Mr. Bunyan says that the pilgrims danced; and well they might. Mr. Despondency and Miss Much-afraid took a turn, and even Ready-to-Halt with his crutches joined in the party. When he saw the monster’s head on the pole he could not help rejoicing. Blessed be God, here is Giant Despair’s monster head held up on the pole of free grace — *“There is therefore now no condemnation.”* Let the redeemed of the Lord sing and dance. — *“There is therefore now no condemnation.”*

IN CHRIST — The text declares complete absolution of guilt and total freedom from all possibility of condemnation *“to them that are in Christ Jesus.”* *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,”* no condemnation *“therefore,”* **because they are in Christ Jesus!** We who trust the Son of God are in him, and therefore (because we are in him) there is no condemnation to us.

- In Christ as our Federal Head and Substitute (ch. 5).
- In Christ by a Vital Union of Faith (ch. 6).
- In Christ by a Marriage Union (ch. 7)

All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are in Christ. Believing on the Son of God, we realize our position as being in Christ. By nature I am in myself, and in sin, and I am, therefore, condemned in my conscience by God’s holy

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law. But when God the Holy Spirit called and quickened me, when by his omnipotent grace, he gave me life and faith in Christ, I flew away to Christ as my Refuge. Trusting his blood and righteousness alone, I hide myself in the cleft of this Mighty Rock of Salvation, behind this blood sprinkled Door, and am now freed from all possibility of condemnation forever.

- I am the guilty manslayer. Christ is my City of Refuge. I am safe and secure in him. As the walls of the city surrounded the manslayer, so the Lord Jesus Christ utterly engulfs me in himself!
- I am the man who has found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Christ is my Ark; and Christ is my God who shut me up in the Ark. The flood waters of God's holy wrath shall never touch me.

Who are these who are in Christ Jesus, who believe on the Son of God?

Read the rest of the verse. Here Paul tells us. Those who are in Christ, those for whom there is no condemnation are those people "**who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.**"

- **To walk after the flesh** is to seek righteousness, acceptance with God, salvation and eternal life by the dictates of the flesh, by works of righteousness.
- **To walk after the Spirit** is to seek eternal life by faith in Christ alone, trusting him to do for us what we could never do.

I am absolutely certain that this is Paul's intent in these words because this is what he tells us in verses 2-4.

(Romans 8:1-4) "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath 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 sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: (4) That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*"

(John 5:24) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

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Would you be freed from condemnation, freed now, and freed forever from all possibility of condemnation? — Flee away to Christ! May God give you grace to believe on his Son. — “*He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life.*” — “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.*”

Amen.