

The Trinitarian Work of Salvation
 Romans 8:1-17
 Trinity Sunday, June 30, 2021

8 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. **5** For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. **6** For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **7** For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. **8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **10** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **11** If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Heirs with Christ

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. **13** For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. **14** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. **15** For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" **16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Sermon:

The human race now finds itself in some great dilemmas, some great problems.
 There is the worldwide pandemic caused by the covid 19 virus.
 There is global warming which is causing the polar ice caps to melt and changing the weather.
 There is the rise of aggressive Chinese communism.

But there is an even greater problem than these and it is revealed in verse 1 of our text for today: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* (Rom. 8:1)

This verse contains both good news and bad news. The bad news is that everyone who is not found “in Christ Jesus” is under condemnation.

And this condemnation is of the most serious kind – it is condemnation before the court of heaven, before the holy God of heaven and earth. He sees every person, hears every word we utter, he sees every action we take, and he even knows our thoughts. He knows what’s in our hearts and minds. And what he sees is not pretty. What he sees in the heart and mind of every human that has ever been born on planet earth is self-centeredness, is self-glorification, is neglect of God, is lack of thanksgiving to God, is rebellion against God, is disobedience to his law and will – and the list could go on and on. What he sees is only evil continually. It is not necessarily evil that is apparent to other humans – things like pride and jealousy and hatred – but God sees them and knows about them and sees the overall trajectory of each person’s life and what he sees is humans whose hearts are totally corrupt and deserving of God’s judgment and condemnation.

Now we don’t see these evil human hearts reported on the news services, but we see murder and robbery and wars and humans abusing other humans and all these actions are the result of wicked human hearts.

The cold hard facts are that humans can be beautiful on the outside but like stinking, rotten tombs of dead bodies on the inside.

Paul describes the spiritual condition of the human race like this in Romans 3:

None is righteous, no, not one;

¹¹ no one understands;

no one seeks for God. (v. 10-11)

“Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.” (v. 13)

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (v. 18)

How is that we know all this? It’s only because it’s revealed in the Word of God. Otherwise, we would be ignorant. We would ask ourselves, “Why is there so much evil in the world, why do people lie to and hate other people? Why is there so much oppression of humans against other humans?” We couldn’t explain it – we could only observe it and wonder about it.

But thank God he has given us his holy and eternal Word – his Word brings light and truth – even when the truth hurts. But truth also brings us face to face with reality. When we know the real situation, we can seek a solution, and there may be hope, hope of a cure, hope of a solution.

So the bad news is that the whole world lies under the condemnation of the holy God, the creator of all things. The first man sinned; Adam disobeyed God and sinned. And since he was the representative of the entire human race, his sin brought death and condemnation not only on himself but on all his descendants – which includes every one born since then. You say, “That’s not fair.” But, wait a minute, before we say that,, let’s realize something else. There was another Adam born, the Second Adam, and his name is Jesus Christ. As our text today says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Where Adam failed God, failed to be faithful, Christ did not fail God, he obeyed God, he lives a sinless and holy and noble life seeking only to please his heavenly Father and he succeeded! So he became the source of eternal salvation to all those who trust in him.

Romans 8:1 says again, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” So how do we get “in Christ Jesus” so we can escape the condemnation of God for our sins.

If a man or woman realizes his or state of condemnation, of impending judgment by God almighty – if that person has any concern at all for their own soul, they will do anything they can to escape that condemnation and instead find salvation, and deliverance, “in Christ Jesus.” Their prayer will be, “Oh God, I understand that I am a sinner and I have neglected you and gone my own way in life. I have broken your law. I am guilty. I deserve punishment. Please show me the way to Christ, so I can be in him and be saved from my sins.”

So the question here is, how can a person, how can you and I, be “in Christ Jesus”?

Let’s look at the Bible to see the answer. Verse 2 says, ² “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

So let’s consider, first of all, what is the “law of sin and death” that we can be set free from? All of those people who are outside of Christ, are under the “law of sin and death.” If you are a Christian now, at one time you were yourself, in fact, your whole life until you became a Christian, also were “under the law of sin and death.” What does this mean? It means basically that humanity, universal humanity, humanity on every continent and in every age of human history, are living their lives breaking God’s law innumerable times every day and they are earning themselves the death judgment of God for their sinful hearts and minds.

If you break God’s law, you deserve, you earn for yourself death. Sin earns death. Breaking God’s law brings death. This is a universal law that applies to all people. It doesn’t matter if you are rich or poor, black or white or Hispanic or Asian, whether you’re educated or uneducated, whether you employed or unemployed, whether you’re suffering from covid-19 or not – when you sin you earn death. It is a law of God that is always in effect. The colonial preacher Jonathan Edwards described the situation as if every human being were like a spider held up by one thin thread over a great roaring

fire. At any moment the thread can break and the spider will fall into the flames and perish instantly. That is our precarious is the person' life is who is outside of Christ.

Let's look at verse 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..."

The problem here is our "flesh." What "flesh" means here is not actually our physical bodies but the sinful human nature that is permanently and deeply rooted in each one of us. Certainly, this sinful nature causes us to sin with our bodies – sins like gluttony or drunkenness, or engaging in sex outside of marriage, or hurting other people using our fists or our feet.

Paul says here that the law could not bring us righteousness and justification before God because it was "weakened by flesh, it was weakened by the sinful nature." God gave his law to the Israeli nation and his law was holy and perfect and good, but they couldn't keep the law because of their inner sinful nature. They sinned over and over again. They didn't have the power, the motivation, the will to resist sin and obey God. When they say the pagan people worshipping their idols and engaging in detestable practices such as cult prostitution and burning their children – they were attracted to that and wanted to do those things. They forgot all about the law of God. That law included the 10 commandments given to the nation through Moses on Mt. Sinai.

The end of the first sentence in verse three says, "weakened by the flesh, could not do." They "could not obey the law" of God. They didn't have the ability to do that. Their flesh, that is, their sinful nature ruled them and led them docilly land willingly like sheep to the slaughter. But look at the first part of verse 3, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do." Did you hear that? God has done something! God has done what humans could not do for themselves. What did he do? Look at the second sentence in verse 2, "*By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh...*"

What did God do? First of all, he sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." What does this verse tell us? It tells us that God had a unique Son, his very own Son, the one most precious to him, the one who had been at his side from all eternity, the One who was equal with him in deity, the who was as much God as he is God, the One who had always been the Son. There never was a time in all eternity that that the Father was not the Father and the Son was not the Son. Listen to John 1:1, "**In** the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.² He was in the beginning with God." The Word, of course, here refers to Jesus. The Bible reveals what we call the "eternal Sonship" of the Son of God. This doesn't mean that the Son is inferior to the Father in glory, power and deity, but it is describing their eternal relationship. Within the one God, and truly there is only one God – this is the basic confession of the OT religion, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." (Deut. 6:4) -within the one and only God, the Creator of all things, there is and always has been the person of the

Father and the person of the Son, and one more person – the person of the Holy Spirit. There are not three gods, but one God who eternally exists in three persons.

This is what the Bible reveals. How can one Being exist in three persons, and each of the three persons be absolutely equal to the other 3 persons in all that makes God to be God? This is a reality and truth that is hard for our human, limited minds to grasp, to understand, but this is what God reveals about his own nature and being and we must accept it and embrace it and there is also a reason we should glory in this truth. And that is because all three of these persons are vitally and intrinsically and intimately involved in our salvation. You and I are saved by the triune God! Let me say it again, “You and I are saved by the no less than the triune God himself!”

We are not saved by the Son alone, and we are not saved by the Father alone, and we are not saved by the Spirit alone. But we are saved by the one God, the Father working in our behalf, the Son working in our behalf and the Holy Spirit working in our behalf.

We do not walk through this world depending on and in fellowship with only God the Father, or only with God the Son, or only with God the Holy Spirit. But we walk every day in active fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

If you are a Christian today, you are secure not only in the love of the Father, but also in the love of the Son, and also in the love of the Holy Spirit. The great truth that I want us to get a hold of on this Trinity Sunday is that all three persons of the Triune God are actively involved in our salvation. The triune God secured our salvation in the past by the electing love of the Father from before the foundation of the world, then in history by the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the present time by the Spirit’s application and communication of the benefits of Christ’s redemptive work to our minds and hearts. We are debtors to the love of the Father, the sacrificial suffering of the Son, and the present, hourly ministry of the Holy Spirit who indwells his people.

So back to verse 3 we read that God sent his own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” This is talking about the incarnation of the Son of God. He took upon our flesh in all of its humanity, but he did not take human nature corrupted by Adam’s sin. His body, his birth of the Virgin Mary, was a fully human birth. But she was impregnated not by a human father, but by the Holy Spirit so that the infant Jesus did not inherit the sinful flesh passed down through the human race to all other humans born of an earthly father. In other words, he took upon himself our full humanity minus our sinful nature.

Verse 3 also says that God sent his own Son not only in the likeness of sinful flesh but “for sin.” What does this mean, “for sin?” It means, to begin with, that Jesus came to deal with our sin problem; he came for the purpose of dealing with what was killing us – our sinful nature that issued forth in sin all the time. We were continually exuding sin – we were a volcano of sin – continually spewing out acts of sin because of the white hot lava of a sinful nature that was inherent to our being. Who can deal with such a deep and fundamental problem? Only God could do that! And he did it in sending his own Son!

In a more specific way, the way the sent Son dealt with our sin was by becoming the atoning sacrifice for our sin, as on offering for sin. Jesus dealt with our sin by becoming the substitutionary sacrifice – the one who hung in our place on the cross and took the punishment that we deserve. 2 Cor. 5:21 captures this idea, “²¹ For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Look at the final phrase in verse 3, “he, that is, God, condemned sin in the flesh.” The meaning here seems to be that God’s condemnation fell upon his Son. The Son bore our sin and received the punishment for sin that we deserve.

Verse 4 goes on today that God condemned his Son, instead of us, “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.” Again, the law of God is good and perfect and holy and it has righteous requirements from us, but we could never fulfill them in our own strength or ability because of our sinful nature. But when God intervenes in our lives he sends his Spirit into our hearts so that we now have the inner power and motivation to obey the Law of God.

This was the promise of the new covenant we see in Jer. 31: 31, 33: ³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

What is the big difference here between the failure of the Jews to keep the Law and the ability of the NT Christian keep it? It is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

In verses 5-11 we see the difference that the gift of the indwelling Spirit makes in a human’s life. First of all, in verses 5-8, we see those who are “in the flesh,’ that is, those who are living under the control of the sinful nature:

-Have their minds set on the things of the flesh. In other words, what they think about, what they delight in, what they long for, are not the things of God but the things of this world – what belongs to the sinful nature, to the devil and to the mindset of the world which has rejected God.

-the end result is death – spiritual death – they live and operate in the world, but they have no spiritual life in them, only spiritual death.

-they are hostile to God. They are opposed to God; they are his enemies. Can you imagine anything worse, to be an enemy of the true and living God, the holy one in whom there is no sin, but only love and goodness and righteousness? To be his enemy reveals the heart and mind of the sinner. Such a one so opposed to God and his holy will merits judgment on himself or herself.

- They do not submit to the Law of God. Their minds, their beings, are unable to do this. They do not have the inner desire, the motivation to submit to God’s law. They shrink from God’s law; they hate it. It is as impossible for them to submit to God’s law as

it would be for a raging, deranged maniac to enter a church service and sit there quietly and respectfully during a worship service. His nature would not allow it. He would be jumping up and screaming and fighting and have to be carried out, tied to a stretcher with a handkerchief stuck in his mouth.

Verse 8 sums it up: "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Those whose lives are in captivity to their own sinful nature cannot do anything to please God. Every move they make is tainted with sin. Even what seems like a good work is tainted with sin. They loan a couple of eggs to their neighbor who is baking a cake. But they have an ulterior motive – they want to borrow their neighbor's lawn mower the next day so they figure by giving him the eggs, he won't be able to say no.

When the inner nature of a person is sinful and selfish, it will engender thoughts and words and actions that are sinful. A pear tree can only produce pears, it cannot produce strawberries.

But then, on the other hand, in verse 9-11 we see the lives those who are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit, in fact, lives within them, so that indwelling Spirit is going to affect all their motivations and thoughts and actions.

The indwelling Spirit, in fact, is necessary and proof that a person belongs to God, that they are a child of God, not a child of Satan. And Paul goes on to say that although our bodies may be decaying and dying because of the cumulative effect of sin, that which is in the whole race and that which may be the result of a person's individual sin, it brings death. Yet though the body is passing away, verse 10 says "the Spirit is life, because of righteousness."

What is this righteousness that gives us life through the Spirit? Likely Paul has reference to the righteousness that is granted to us when we come in faith to believe in Jesus. Our sins are wiped away and we the very righteousness of Christ is granted to us. This is justifying righteousness, a gift of God to his people who have no righteousness within themselves. All we have is condemnation for our sins. But the work of Christ, applied to our lives by the Spirit, completely changes our standing before God. God no longer sees our sin, he only sees us clothed in Christ's righteousness.

The great benefits to God's people by the work of the Holy Spirit is Paul's subject here. In verse 11 we see the by means of the Holy Spirit God raised his Son from the dead. And if that same Spirit dwells in us, God will also raise us from the dead and give never ending, eternal life to these mortal bodies of ours that are dying. It is the Holy Spirit who will change these weak and decaying bodies into glorious resurrection bodies like unto Christ's resurrection body.

What are we seeing here in this passage? We are seeing how God saves sinners – how he takes people who are completely hostile to him and by the mighty work of his Holy Spirit changes them from the inside out so that the God the once neglected and despised they now love and serve in grateful obedience. What was once ugly and

vicious in their minds has been changed to thought of love and sacrifice and service. God is in the business of radically changing human desires and motivations. All the psychologists and psychiatrists and behavioral counselors in the world do not have the power or ability to change human behavior for the better the way God's Spirit can.

Romans chapter 8 focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. But his work is not independent from the gracious calling of the Father in his sending the Son into the world. In fact, the one triune God perfectly coordinates all of his saving work among people. There is great harmony of purpose in God's work in saving a people for his own sake.

Where one member of the Trinity is at work, the other two members are at work also. For example, look at verses 15-17: *¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

What we see here is our adoption as children of God. WE receive the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of adoption. This enables us to call our to God as our Father. And this Spirit also assures us that we have an inheritance, an eternal home from God, bu also we share in Christ's inheritance.

To we see this over and over again in this chapter and in fact throughout the NT. There is this constant weaving together of the work of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in behalf of God's people.

What is the eternal nature of the Creator God? He is one only, but he exists as three persons – all equal in power and glory and authority. This is the only true God; the only God who can save sinners.

And God, as we say, “pulls out all the stops” to save his people. He holds nothing back. He throws the weight of his triune deity, his triune being, into saving a people out of the world.

Every day we can pray to the Father in the name of Jesus our Savior, and the Spirit guides our prayers. We walk every day in the resurrection power of the risen Son of God; we walk in the power and presence of the Spirit. We rest in the Father's love and abide in his peace, knowing we have a great high priest in the heavenlies at his right hand, Jesus who sacrificed his life for our redemption and salvation.

Let us ever be grateful and aware that our lives are intertwined with and under the sovereignty of the grace and love and oversight of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the one God who is and who was and who is to come.

-by Jeff Gregory, Pastor

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