

Romans: The Good News of God

No Condemnation!

Romans 8:1-4

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Scripture

Before we moved to Tampa our family lived in Pennsylvania for 16 years. The first 5 of those years we lived in western Pennsylvania. And then we spent 11 years in central Pennsylvania. We lived in State College, PA, which is the home of Penn State University. State College is located in a county known as Centre County, and if one looks at a map of Pennsylvania, it is easy to see why the county is called “Centre County.” Pennsylvania is roughly rectangular in shape, and Centre County is right in the center of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties.

Over the years that we lived in Centre County people would ask us when we traveled where it was that we lived. Most people had never heard of State College, but to help them get an idea of where it was, I would tell them to point to the very center of Pennsylvania, and they would be pointing to our county and our town.

If I were to ask you to point to a passage in the Apostle Paul’s letters that is at the very center of his thinking, which passage in his 13 letters would you point to? Frankly, that would not be easy to do because of the richness of Paul’s writing. But our passage today has as good a claim as any to represent the very center of the Apostle Paul’s thinking.

In our text for today the Apostle Paul draws a conclusion to all that he has been saying throughout his letter to the Romans. Our text has a big, thoroughly Pauline view of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and how each Person of the Trinity brings about our salvation. Our text has one of the clearest statements about how God brings us into a right relationship with himself, and then keeps us in a right relationship with himself.

Our text teaches us how there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Let us read Romans 8:1-4:

¹ 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. (Romans 8:1-4)

Introduction

Let me ask you a question: “How can you be sure that on the day you die and stand before God, you will not be condemned?”

That’s a good question for every person to answer. How can you be sure that on the day you die and stand before God, you will not be condemned?

Paul has been spending much of his time in Romans making sure that we know the right answer to that question. He wants to make sure that our trust is in the right place, that our confidence is not misplaced. And that question continues to be on his mind in Romans 8.

People have given various answers to this question. The Atheist says, “There is no God and so it really doesn’t matter. I don’t think there’s going to be a judgment and, therefore, I’m okay. I don’t need to fear being condemned by God, because the judgment doesn’t exist because God doesn’t exist.” They take comfort in that answer.

Agnostics have pretty much the same answer as the Atheists. They are not sure that God exists. And so they don’t fear God’s judgment because they are not sure that there will be one.

There are others who are Universalists, and they say, “The reason I don’t need to fear being condemned by God is that God is going to bring everybody into his Kingdom.” It may be because God is kind and grandfatherly like a giant Santa Claus in the sky, and he’s just going to bless everybody. Or perhaps God will accept everybody because there is some spark of goodness in everyone.

Others are simply defiant and think they are the Masters of their own destiny. Do you remember Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, who was put to death in 2001? His last words were a written statement that included the last few lines of W. E. Henley's (1849-1903) poem, "Invictus." Do you remember it? McVeigh wrote, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." Such defiance is brash but it surely melted the moment McVeigh stepped into the presence of God.

Paul is not asking us to contemplate what the unbeliever takes comfort in as he stands before God on the day of his death.

Rather, he is asking the question of us as Christians, "How can you be sure that on the day you die and stand before God, you will not be condemned? What will you who still wrestle with the habits of sin in your own experience trust in when you have to stand before God? What is it that you trust in that enables you to say that there is now no condemnation for me?" How can you have that kind of confidence?

How can a person who has seen his own sin, who has cried out with Paul in Romans 7:24, "What a wretched man I am!", now have the certain confidence of Romans 8:1 where Paul says, "**There is therefore now no condemnation. . .**"? How can a person have that kind of confidence?

That's exactly what Paul is speaking about in Romans 8:1-4!

Lesson

Today, I want you to see three truths that will help you as you wait for the day when you stand before God. You have seen your sin, and you know how black it is. You are a Christian, and you are trusting in Jesus Christ. But that's not the issue.

If you are wrestling with how you can possibly be assured of the grace of God toward you in light of the fact that you continue to struggle with sin, then Paul is waiting for you in Romans 8:1-4 to help you with three wonderful truths.

I. God Has Justified You (8:1-2)

First, there is now no condemnation for you because God has justified you.

Listen to what Paul says in Romans 8:1, **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

Paul is saying that even the struggling believer can be assured of salvation, even the struggling believer can be assured that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, even the struggling believer can be assured of his justification. Why? Because his justification was accomplished by God and not by himself.

Picture the judgment of God in heaven. God is the Judge. You are on trial. The charge against you is rebellion against God by breaking his law. One by one the witnesses come in. They all testify that you have broken God’s law. Satan comes in; he testifies that you have broken God’s law. The Law itself testifies against you. Your own conscience betrays you.

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ comes in. He agrees that you have broken all of God’s laws. “But,” he says, “you came to a point in your life where you acknowledged that you broke God’s law in every way every day. And you cried out to me in repentance and faith. You trusted in me and my righteousness alone to pay the penalty for your sin.”

God the Father acknowledges that your sins have been credited to Christ, and that his righteousness has been credited to you. He therefore declares you, “Not guilty!”

That is justification. It is, as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says, “an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”¹

You see this truth in verses 1-2. Condemnation is the opposite of justification. Paul’s great theme is the complete and irre-

¹*The Westminster Shorter Catechism : With Scripture Proofs.* 1996 (3rd edition.) (Question 33). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

versible nature of God's justification. When God justifies you, that does it. He has already given you the end-time verdict. He's already pronounced the verdict of "Not guilty!" over you that you will one day hear when you stand before God. And that is irreversible. And so Paul glories in that fact that there is no condemnation. But, he doesn't stop there.

He says that **there therefore is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. Do you see what Paul is saying? The only people who can take comfort in the reality that they will not be condemned are those who are "**in Christ Jesus.**"

Paul is saying that salvation is in relationship with and through the person and work of Jesus Christ *alone*.

Sadly, we live in a day in which there is tremendous confusion about how we are justified before God. Many people think that all religions are equally valid and true ways to God. But that is simply not what Paul teaches. He says very simply and very clearly that **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. There is no justification apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul now goes on to wrestle with the practical side of the question: "What gets me out of the mess when my renewed desires as a justified Christian conflict with the principle of sin in me? I'm a Christian. I long to be like Christ. I long to walk in the ways of God. I long to walk in the ways of righteousness. But I find myself struggling with sin at every turn. What do I do in that kind of a mess? How can I have comfort? How can I be confident that there is no condemnation for me?"

And here is Paul's answer in verse 2: "**For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.**" Commentator John Stott says that "**the law of the Spirit of life**" is best understood as referring to the gospel.² It is through Christ Jesus that the gospel sets you free from sin and death.

In other words, Paul says, when you are struggling with sin,

² John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 218.

contemplate your justification. Paul wants you to be confident, not because of how you feel, not because of what you are doing, not because of your circumstances, but because of what God has done. And what is that God has done? God has justified you. There is therefore now no condemnation for you because you are in Christ Jesus.

Martin Luther was the man primarily responsible for the Reformation. He struggled with sin. He would go into the confessional for hours on end confessing his many sins. But when God justified him through Jesus Christ by faith, he knew that he was no longer under any condemnation. And whenever he struggled with sin in his life, he contemplated his justification, as he wrote in the hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is our God,” especially in stanza 2: “Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing; were not the right man on our side, the man of God’s own choosing.”

So, remember, there is now no condemnation for you because God has justified you.

II. God Has Liberated You (8:3)

Second, there is now no condemnation for you because God has liberated you.

Listen to what Paul says in Romans 8:3, **“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. . .”**

How is it that you can view yourself as free from the law’s curse? How can you be free from sin’s guilt and power?

In some ways it’s easier for you to believe that you are free from sin’s guilt, than it is for you to believe that you are free from the dominion of sin’s power because you know sin in your lives day by day, isn’t it? And you wonder sometimes whether you will ever be able to get victory over it.

Paul says in verse 3 that God accomplishes what you could

never accomplish, and he accomplishes what the law could never accomplish because of sin, through Jesus Christ. Paul gives you five facts about how God liberated you.

First, Paul tells you that the basis of your liberation, your freedom, is in what God has done. It is not in what you have done, not in what you are doing, not even in what you are not doing. The basis of your confidence of freedom from condemnation is in what God has done. Look at Paul's words: **"For God has done what the law . . . could not do."**

Paul is saying that you should not look at what you did and what you're doing. Look at what God did. God accomplished this. He's the source. He's the author. How is it that you can have freedom from condemnation, even though you're continuing to struggle with sin? Because your confidence is not based on you, it's based on him. So, **God has done.** That's the first thing Paul wants you to see.

Second, God set you free at the cost of his Son. Look at the phrase: **"By sending his own Son."**

Now can you imagine God sending his Son to do what he did, to endure what he underwent without intending to accomplish something? Can you imagine that God would have done that for nothing? Do you think that God would have sent his Son to endure humiliation for nothing?

Paul is saying, "Now, remember, it's not just that God did it, but that he did this at the cost of his own Son!" That's what the whole hymn "And Can It Be" is about: "Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

How could you possibly think that God would have done that for nothing. Paul says that's why you take confidence, that God did what you couldn't do, what the law couldn't do, and he did it at the cost of his own Son.

Third, God did this by bringing his Son into the closest possible relationship to you. Notice the language he is using. It's shocking. God sent his own Son **"in the likeness of sinful flesh."**

In other words, Jesus experienced all the infirmities of living

as a human in a fallen world, yet without sin. He was made in the likeness of human flesh, in the likeness of sinful man. Now Paul is using that phrase very carefully to emphasize that Jesus experienced all the infirmities common to human beings living in a fallen world.

Now you may be saying, “But wait a minute. How can Jesus really understand me if he’s never had to deal with the inner-stirrings of sin? I mean isn’t that a discontinuity between him and me that keeps him from being able to sympathize?”

And here’s my answer. No. In reality, the fact that Jesus was perfect, and that he was living in the infirmities of a fallen world, made it harder for Jesus to live in this world, and, in fact, makes it easier for him to sympathize with you.

Imagine a person with perfect pitch singing in a tone-deaf choir for his entire life. He would be extraordinarily frustrated because no one can hold a tune.

Now here’s Jesus. He is the man with perfect pitch singing in a tone-deaf world. He’s bombarded on every side by wickedness and the effects of sin to the point that it vexes his soul every second of his earthly existence. And yet he’s sympathetic toward you. He does understand your weakness.

Fourth, God sent his own Son into the world for the purpose of dealing with sin. Notice the phrase: “. . . **and for sin.**”

Paul is telling you that God sent Jesus into the world for the purpose of dealing with sin. Here you are a Christian, and you are wondering, “I wonder if I can be accepted because of my sin?”

Paul says, “Excuse me, God sent Jesus into the world because of sin. He sent him into the world to deal with sin. Do you think that somehow he left yours out? He thought of everybody else’s, but he just didn’t factor in your sin. Think about it. He came into the world because of your sin, and he came to deal with it. Don’t think that you were left out of the equation.” So Paul says, take confidence.

But he’s not finished yet. Finally, Paul says at the end of this verse 3 that God has “**condemned sin in the flesh.**” He has van-

quished sin's power, and he has freed you from enslaving dominion. He has condemned sin in the flesh.

Paul has given you five facts concerning how God has liberated you, how he has freed you from the curse of the law, and why you ought to believe that. But, you say to me, "I don't feel like I'm free from the dominion of sin."

It does not matter. Paul says you are. You need to be on your knees saying, "Lord, help me to believe what is true even though I don't feel like it. And in your mercy, help me to be able to feel like it one day."

There is now no condemnation for you because God has liberated you. Paul says that this truth does not depend on how you feel or how you are doing. It is gospel truth. Believe it.

III. God Is Sanctifying You (8:4)

And third, there is now no condemnation for you because God is sanctifying you.

Paul says in verse 4 that Christ came into the world to condemn sin **"in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled"**—and here you expect Paul to say "for us." But he does not say that. Instead he says that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled **"in us."** Therefore, we **"walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."**

Verse 4 is of great importance for your understanding of sanctification, or holiness.

First, sanctification, is the ultimate purpose of Christ's incarnation and atonement. The end God had in view when sending his Son was not only your justification, nor your liberation from the condemnation of the law, but also your sanctification. That's why he came!

Second, sanctification consists in fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law. This is the final answer to antinomians and the "grace only" crowd. The moral law of God has not been abolished for us; it is to be fully met in us. Although obedience to the

law is not the ground of your justification, it is the fruit of it and the very meaning of sanctification.

The great Bishop J. C. Ryle of Liverpool used to say, “Don’t show me your justification without your sanctification.” By that he meant that a profession of faith is useless unless it is accompanied by a transformed life.

Sanctification is Christlikeness, and Christlikeness is meeting the righteous requirements of the law.

And third, sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. God has given his Spirit to empower and enable obedience to his law. So, there is no reason for lack of obedience.

But you say, “Doesn’t that lead me right back to where we were at the beginning? I struggle so much with the imperfection of this work of sanctification.”

And Paul’s words to you are, “Patience, God is at work. It’s God the Spirit who is at work in you. He never promises this work to be completed in this life, but he himself is carrying it out. Now it’s time for you to join in.”

Conclusion

So, “How can you be sure that on the day you die and stand before God, you will not be condemned?”

May God help you to see that you will not be condemned on the day you stand before God because:

1. God has justified you (8:1-2),
2. God has liberated you (8:3), and
3. God is sanctifying you (8:4).

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

O Lord our God, how we thank you for the Apostle Paul. Thank you for this wonderful passage that articulates the very center of his thinking.

Help each one here today to know that he or she is justified. Help us to know that we can stand before you on the day we die and not be condemned because you have declared us “Not Guilty!” because of what Jesus has done on our behalf.

Thank you for liberating us from sin and also for sanctifying us. How grateful we are to you for all that you have done for us.

And all of this we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.