

No Condemnation If... Romans 8:1-2

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Steve DeWitt

Welcome to Paris and the Louvre Art Museum. What you are looking for is right over there. You and everyone else want to see the Mona Lisa.... Step right up everyone. Don't crowd. What you want to see is just at the top of these ancient stairs. You've come a long way to see Machu Picchu.... That's right folks, it's thousands of miles long; built to stop invasions. It's a wonder of the world most people call The Great Wall of China.

Today and for the next few months, I will be your tour guide of one of the wonders of this world and the next. Romans is the greatest gospel explanation in the Bible and its epicenter of truth and beauty is Romans 8. It is exactly the middle chapter and is the heart and soul of Romans.

For some reason, to this day I remember the pastor of my childhood teaching on Romans 8 and sharing that a survey was done of church leaders and theologians asking them, *if you were on deserted island and could only have one chapter of the Bible, which would you choose?* Any guess which one?

Why is it so wonderful? Romans 1-7 broadly tells how to be saved from God's wrath. Truly wonderful. Romans 8 is the Fort Knox of our security forever in this salvation. Chapters 1-7 are all about how to have right standing with God. Romans 8 says, once you have God's sovereign saving love, you'll never NOT have it forever.

As a dad, I can't help but think of how often I tell my daughters, *Daddy will always love you. I love you to the moon and back. I love you forever and always.* What do I want them to know and feel? Confident assurance of my unending love.

Romans 8 is God's statement to his people, *Forever and always, to the moon and back, to the cross and back, to heaven, I will love you.*

That is not to say there are not difficult things in chapter 8. Many of us will have to shift our paradigms in order to see following Jesus as living life in and by the Holy Spirit. He is going to ground our assurance in the eternal purposes of God's sovereign call and predestination. But all of this is intended by God to be for every genuine follower of Jesus. His shout to us is, *I will always save you, keep you, and love you.*

The Structure of Romans 8

It is helpful to see Romans 8 by its bookends. Our text today is verses 1-2 which say, *no condemnation!* The end of Romans 8 is, *no separation* and the elevated language that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of Christ.

No condemnation. No separation. And as someone has said, everything in between is "no defeat."

The Context of Romans 8

Our last message in Romans was back in December. Let's do a quick flyover of Romans chapters 1-7. Romans 1 introduces our problem. It's God versus our sin. In our sin, we deny God his place and worship. God is usurped as we replace him by worshiping stuff and self. This misplaced worship corrupts everything about us right down to our sexuality. Therefore, we are all under God's judgment and wrath.

Chapter 2 includes God's people, the Jews, who are highly privileged to have God's law. Rather than God's law saving them, it does for them what it does for us—highlights how sinful we all are.

Chapter 3 tells us we are so messed up that we think we can save ourselves. Religion is man's attempt at self-salvation. Yet, we all fall short of the glory of God and God's purpose for all our lives to live to his glory. For us to be saved from God's wrath, only God could do it. By his grace and for his glory and our good, he did just that. God has provided a way for us to have right standing before God (righteousness) for all who personally believe in Jesus as Savior. By virtue of his death in our place, God promises to treat us forever as if we are as righteous as Jesus was in his life. His righteousness is granted (imputed) to us by faith (justification).

In Romans 4, even the greatest man in history, Abraham, was not saved by his own merit but was justified by faith in the promise of God.

Like Abraham, all who believe God's promise through Jesus have peace with God—that's chapter 5.

Romans 6 moves from right standing before God to right living as a response to God's grace. Grace is not permission *to* sin, it is permission and power *not* to sin. God's will is to make us holy in every aspect of our lives, not as a condition of salvation, but as a fruit of it.

Yet, as Romans 7 explains, in this life none of us will completely get there. Not even Paul himself. As long as we are in this body, we continue to struggle against indwelling sin. Sin is an alive and active reality in our souls, the enemy within. It's so frustrating that Paul cries out in 7:24 (ESV), "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" He concludes chapter 7 with doxology—"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25)

The context up to Romans 8 is spiritual and moral struggle. Frustration and disappointment. Chapter 7 is a chapter of lament. Imagine Romans ended there. Great gospel that saves, but it's not enough to make any real difference in your life. Come to Jesus and your bottom line will be, *Wretched man that I am!* Perhaps you are somewhat there today. Your spiritual life is chapter 7 without chapter 8. Defeat with no hope of ever changing. Defeat with no hope of victory. You are convinced you will never get past some sin in your life. Some chronic and besetting sin. *I may be going to heaven, but God isn't strong enough to give me freedom from this.*

What say ye, Pastor Steve? What say ye, Romans? What say ye, Apostle Paul? What say we? We say Romans 8.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 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, 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. 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. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 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. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 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. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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." (Romans 8:1-11, ESV)

And it just gets better from there. Today our focus is verses 1 and 2. Let me read them again.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:1-2)

"There is therefore." Words like *therefore* are important clues in Bible interpretation as they indicate a step of logic or a conclusion based on what's been said previously. The *therefore* either goes back to 7:6 for the logical connection or the last half of chapter 7 for the pastoral connection. Or perhaps both. *"There is therefore now **no condemnation.**"*

No Condemnation Means _____.

This word "condemnation" includes more in the Greek than its common use in the English. In English *to be condemned* can simply mean spoken to harshly or someone sharply disagreeing with us. Someone might say, *you are a bad, bad person. You are scourge on society. You are a colossal disappointment.* In English, that's condemnation.

Condemnation here is the declaration of guilt. By whom? The only person that matters. God. God condemns sin and sinners. We are legally guilty. Personally guilty. Shamefully guilty. Eternally guilty.

But this is way more than a guilt trip. The Greek word is both the declaration of guilt AND the sentence for it. Pronouncement and punishment. This is guilt and hell. This is guilt AND separation from God. This is guilt AND eternal and unending separation from God and all love, truth, and beauty. This condemnation is an eternal condemnation. Eternal death.

Go with me in your minds to that terrible day in the future, to what the book of Revelation calls the *Great White Throne Judgment* where God judges all those NOT under his grace. Each one receives a just judgment and the due penalty for a lifetime of sin. While we don't know what this will be like exactly, we can know it will be terrible beyond words. One by one, each one condemned. While I believe there are degrees of punishment in hell, hell is hell. Hell is trillions of years upon trillions of years. Forever and ever, time without end. That's the condemnation in Romans 8.

But note the little word in front of condemnation. Two letters that dictate our entire destiny. *No*. No condemnation. No declaration of guilt AND no eternal punishment. Could there be a

more wonderful negative in all the world? We are forever NOT guilty. Remember, it's also the sentence. We are forever NOT punished. Essentially, this is a guarantee from God of never hell. Our status will never be retried, re-adjudicated. The case against us will never be reopened. We will never get a new judge or jury.

Can additional charges be brought in the future? Later in Romans 8, Paul will answer that and say, charges by whom? It is God who declares us righteous and Jesus who died for us. Who's left with the moral standing to bring a charge against us? "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" (Romans 8:31) So, there is no guilt ever. No punishment ever. No future accuser ever. No future charges ever. All this sounds like what Jesus promised, "*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*" (John 8:36) But wait, there's a condition.

The condition for no condemnation is _____.

"...for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

So, this clearly isn't true for everyone, only for those *who are in Christ Jesus*? What does that mean? Here again is the wonderful doctrine of *union with Christ*. We've seen this already in Romans. I illustrated it with climbing ropes and carabiners. What does it mean? *When we trust in Christ for salvation, in God's eyes, what happened to Jesus happened to us*. When he died for our sin, we died with him. When he was raised to life, we were raised with him. His death conquered our sin. His resurrection conquered death's claim upon us. We are in by faith and God's grace in union with Christ.

The shorthand in the Bible for this is *in Christ Jesus* or *in Christ* or *in Jesus*. It's found 165 times in the New Testament.¹ When you see that, think, *union with Christ*.

Let's put this together, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" No guilt. No sentence. No hell. The opposite of condemnation is true. For those in Christ, it's all righteousness before God. All freedom. All heaven and new earth forever. Tragically, we must see what this verse also infers. For those who are *not* in union with Christ by personal faith in Jesus, there is now and forever condemnation by God. It's pronouncement and punishment. They are forever guilty. It's hell forever without the same provisions. Their case will never be retried. Their situation will never be heard on appeal. There's no new judge or jury. If God is against you, who can be for you?

I must ask, dear friend, *which is it for you? Which will it be for you forever?*

We are Free in Christ by the Holy Spirit

"*For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*" (Romans 8:2)

While Romans 8 continues to talk about Jesus, the trinitarian focus of the chapter is the third person of the Trinity. Quickly, the doctrine of the Trinity is that God is one and God is three. Three in one. Confusing? Yes, but this is what the Bible teaches. God the Father. God the Son (human name Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit. They are all co-equal sharing fully all the divine qualities. Romans 8 is a tremendous chapter on the role and working of the Holy Spirit. Here Paul calls him, *the Spirit of life*. That's a good name as the Holy Spirit gave life

¹ Rankin Wilbourne and John Ortberg, *Found in Him*, Kindle Location: 83

to Jesus in Mary's womb, gives spiritual life to every Christian through regeneration, and is the ongoing source of spiritual vitality.

"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." (v. 2) What the Holy Spirit does is the opposite of what the law does. The law condemns. The law enslaves. The law requires punishment. But the Holy Spirit in salvation is the agency by which the saving works of Jesus are appropriated to us. All this is summarized by *"has set you free."* Free in Christ Jesus (there's union with Christ again). Free from what? Free from condemnation. Free from eternal guilt. Free from eternal punishment. The Holy Spirit applies salvation to us. He is the agent.

"He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5) Our salvation is accomplished by Jesus, but all the saving benefits are applied to us by the Holy Spirit who gives life and who grants freedom from sin and punishment. *"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."* (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Romans 7 is the depressing reality of indwelling sin. Romans 8 is the glorious reality of indwelling Spirit. Within the soul and body of every Christian spiritually dwells the Holy Spirit. *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"* (1 Corinthians 3:16)

What does the Holy Spirit do in us?

<i>Convict us of sin</i>	John 16:8
<i>Comfort us</i>	John 14:26
<i>Renew us</i>	Titus 3:5
<i>Glorify Christ</i>	John 16:14

*"The essence of the Holy Spirit's ministry is, at this or any time in the Christian era, to mediate the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ."*² (J.I. Packer)

If we are in Christ, then the Spirit is in us. The ramifications of having God the Holy Spirit in you are so massive, it's like a law (which Paul calls it here). Like the law of gravity in which everything is affected by it. The gravitational pull of the law of the Spirit of life orients not just our future life, but our today life as well. That orientation is freedom from the penalty of sin, and slowly through sanctification, freedom from the presence of sin. He is the Spirit of life who grants freedom.

Let me give you a recent example. Last week, I spoke with a couple in our church. The wife has been a Christian for some time. Her husband was not; his life has been that of a marijuana-smoking atheist. He would come here to Bethel with his wife and he told me he liked my sermons. I'm not sure what it means when marijuana-smoking atheists like your sermons.

Three weeks ago, his wife said, read this. What was it? The book of Jude. Jude! Not Romans or John, *Jude!* He read Jude and God used his Word to convert this atheist. It happened in a moment. He said, "I suddenly realized it all is true. There is a God. Jesus is his Son. He is the Savior." In that moment, he believed. You know what he told me next? He immediately felt tremendous regret for something. He told me, "I suddenly thought, who were you to

² J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 49.

take communion all those years? Get this. I've never realized I wasn't supposed to. I felt terrible for partaking in the Lord's Table."

Why? For the first time, the Holy Spirit was active in his life and conscience. Despite this area of regret, the joy on this man's face said it all. What happened? He believed in Jesus and instantly was in union with all the saving work of Christ. In that moment he started his new life IN Christ. But another thing happened. The Spirit of God indwelt him and immediately the gravitational spiritual effect of having God in his soul started to refine him, starting with the ordinance of Jesus we call the Lord's Supper. Today was his first time he was taking the Lord's Table as a Christian.

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2)

Off we go in the greatest chapter in the Bible.

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