

Sermon 59: Romans 8:1: No Condemnation

OUTLINE

Introduction to Romans 8

No condemnation

INTRODUCTION

'If I still sin, and still have sin in me, and God is holy, am I still going to dwell with God for eternity, doesn't He have to judge me?' This is the natural question that arises after our investigation of Romans 7. It was a chapter that took us into the dark recesses of our hearts and revealed the shocking truth of our fallenness before we were saved; and the continuing sin that remains in us even after we are born again. We are all very sensitive to the reality that we are very sinful, we can now easily identify with some of Paul's phrases like, 'chief of sinners;' and 'least among the saints.' Looking with such intent upon our sins awakens our horror to our sins and the glaring sinfulness of them. We feel like Isaiah, 'Woe is me I am undone.' It is this very question that Paul is addressing in Romans chapter 8, he answers by saying, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' And so opens what some have called the greatest chapter in the Bible.

You will notice that this verse has the word 'therefore' in it indicating that it is looking back to what has come before and is drawing together some conclusions. This chapter is not merely looking back to chapter 7, but is drawing together the whole argument of the book so far. Let us think about the landscape of Romans for a moment. You will remember that the first three chapters from 1:18-3:20 was Paul revealing the state of humanity in sin showing the necessity of the Gospel. Then we saw God provide what we could not provide for ourselves, a righteousness from God that we receive by faith, this provision of the gospel was elaborated and illustrated in 3:21 -4:25. Chapter 5 started a new section which only ends at the end of chapter 8. We see in 5:1 that Paul begins to show us the benefits of the gospel, all with the intent of increasing our assurance. In 5:1-11 he made a wonderful of the benefits that are ours, in 5:12-21 he described the mechanics of how through Christ as our federal head we have received these benefits. But then instead of continuing with the theme of assurance, where he could have gone straight from 5:21 to 8:1, instead Paul takes a detour to deal with some objections. There are two elephants in the room. If we are saved by grace through faith and do not have to do anything to earn our salvation, this leads to two possible misunderstandings. Firstly, that this message of grace that increases when sin abounds seems to encourage sin. Paul gave us Romans 6 to prove that grace overcomes sin on account of our union with Christ. Secondly, if the law does not save us and increases sin, that makes the law look bad. So, in Chapter 7 Paul defends the purity of the law by showing both in the states of our being unsaved and saved how it increase the knowledge of our sins and exposes our sinfulness, vindicating the law's goodness and showing how it is absolutely impossible that the law can ever save or even sanctify. The fact that chapter 7 ends with a statement about sin still being in us, that raises the question of our assurance, which of course dovetails smoothly with the overall emphasis of what Paul

began in chapter 5 and so, taking occasion by the questions raised from the end of chapter 7 he returns to the topic of our security in Christ. So picking up on the themes of assurance, union with Christ and the Holy Spirit Paul takes us into the heights of God's goodness to us.

It has been pointed out that this chapter is bracketed with the doctrine of our security in Christ, it opens telling us there is no more condemnation, and it closes telling us that there is nothing that will separate us from the love of God. No condemnation and no separation are the book ends of this chapter. Sandwiched in between this we have no defeat that we are more than conquerors in Christ. Another important feature of this chapter is the fact that it refers to the Holy Spirit than any other in Paul's writings. The word 'spirit' appears 21 times in the chapter and 19 times it is referring to the Holy Spirit; that is once every two verses. The next most Spirit saturated chapter would be 1 Corinthians 12, where the Spirit is mentioned approximately once every 3 verses. This on its own is very significant. Today if you mention the Holy Spirit we are trained by the Charismatic church to think in terms of the gifts and the miraculous. However, in Paul's own theology his emphasis is more on what the Spirit does to you than through you. The way Paul weights his emphasis on the Spirit puts the emphasis on God's power towards us in saving us and building us up in our faith, more than God's power through us. God's acts not our acts dominate the horizon line with God's grace to us as sinners getting the emphasis not our actions getting jobs done with His help. If we do not know in depth what the Spirit does for us as Paul maps it out in this chapter we are not beginning to speak of the Spirit in the same way that Paul did, but rather in a self-centred, man's activity centred way. This emphasis is on the Gospel not our deeds.

Now let us read through the whole chapter and we will follow a six part dissection of the chapter suggested by Hodge, Boice and Lloyd-Jones. Each of these six sections is an argument proving that we are secure in our salvation in Christ.

8:1-4: No condemnation from the law. The opening verses explain how through Christ we are no longer under the condemnation of the law, let's read them together. Notice in particular the argument that our salvation is secure because God has fulfilled the law in Christ.

8:5-14: Holiness by the Spirit. You will have noticed that in verse 4 we are saved with a purpose in mind, to keep the law by the power of the Spirit. Paul uses this as a launch pad for the next section 5-14 to talk about being spiritual people who live according to the Spirit, let us read it. Notice in particular the argument that if the Spirit is in you, you have life (v10).

8:15-17: children of God. The last words of verse 14 are 'sons of God,' this is the thought that Paul follows as he talks about the Holy Spirit's role in our adoption, let's read v15-17. Notice the argument, that if we are children then we will inherit the kingdom.

8:18-25: Future glorification. The last idea in verse 17 is glorification, and this provides the springboard for Paul to talk about how the whole creation will participate in the glory of the children of God, let us read v18-25. Notice the argument which proves the security of our salvation in that the Spirit is the guarantee of our resurrection (v23).

8:26-27: The intercession of the Spirit. Paul moves from the groaning of creation to the inward groans of the Spirit on our behalf, let's read verse 26-27. Notice the argument that our weaknesses and ignorance is covered by the work of the Spirit on our behalf.

8:28-39: The plan and character of God. The greatest argument for the security of our salvation is saved till last. God's love and His ability to save and finish what He starts is Paul's final argument. John Stott has pointed out God's purposes and power to save are laid out with 5 unbreakable links in the chain of salvation found in v29-30, bridging from eternity past to eternity future we see God foreknow, predestine, call, justify and glorify. And this is followed with 5 unanswerable questions. 'If God is for us who can be against us?' 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?' 'Who is to condemn?' 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' Let us now read v28-39.

I could pronounce the benediction now and you could all go home, but that was merely the introduction. We turn now to look more in depth at verse 1.

No condemnation

'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.'

Paul starts chapter 8 the same way that he started chapter 5, talking about justification by faith. In 5:1 he said, 'Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Remember Paul was mapping out the benefits of justification, now that we are justified this is what we have, and he gave us a list of benefits. Paul begins chapter 8 in the same way except instead of using the positive word, justification, he uses the exact opposite word, condemnation.

The word 'condemnation' is a legal term just like justification, and in Paul we see them used as exact opposites in 5:16 and 18, 'And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.' 'Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.' Paul uses the word condemnation to describe the sin that Adam brought upon us when he sinned as our representative. And he compares this with the righteousness of Christ that He won for us when He was given for us. Condemnation is a word describing the judges sentence over a guilty person; justification is a word describing the judges declaration about those who have received Christ's righteousness by faith. Condemnation is a word spoken over criminals and those who are being judged for breaking God's law. Paul tells us here that 'now' where we stand at present as Christians, there is no condemnation.

You still have remaining sin in you, you still break God's law, you let Him down on a daily basis. Perhaps you have wondered to yourself, am I a Christian, how can I escape judgement, I am guilty. Paul tells you now, there is no condemnation for you. Have you been able to identify yourself in the man in Romans 7 a contradiction of good intentions and sinful desires, old and new, flesh and Spirit? Do you carry around those feelings of being wretched and the chief of sinners? Then here is the greatest news you can hear when you are weighed down by your sins, there is no more condemnation for your sins.

How you might ask. Well, the word condemnation is a word that speaks of righteous judgement, it is a word that speaks of God's wrath towards sin. Anyone who breaks God's law, God is a good judge who does not overlook sin, He sees it and will see it punished, He cannot deny Himself and His justice, He cannot pretend that the highest treason has not been committed. Those who have sinned are under the condemnation of God's law and judgement day will be the day when all that they deserve will be done to them on account of their sins. God's anger burns against sin and against those who have sinned. As sinners we are His enemies and He is obligated to judge sin in us. However, God is loving and so He provides His own Son to suffer our punishment. Do you remember our studies in chapter 3 when we looked at Christ who was our propitiation, the one who was given to appease God's wrath by satisfying the requirements of justice. We saw that sin was fully punished in Christ, that He became a condemned criminal hanging in our place on the cross with the sins of His church on His account. He suffered the indescribable agony of God's wrath for our sins, paying full, draining the dregs of the cup of God's wrath to the end. He suffered all the punishment that our sins deserved, offering up His infinitely pure and costly life to pay for our sins against God's infinite holiness. We said that Christ is like a lightning rod, He took the full strike of God's wrath against our sin, and now there is no more sin to be paid for it has been paid in full. When it comes to Christ lightning does not strike twice. There is no more condemnation because every sin, past, future and present is already paid for.

What's more, this condition of being justified, of no more condemnation, it is irreversible. It never changes. God makes one verdict concerning you the moment you put your faith in Christ. When you trusted in Christ as the one who fully paid for your sins, God put Christ's death and life on your account and saw your sins as fully paid for and you as dressed in the alien righteousness of Christ. That verdict can never be reversed, the devil has no court of appeals by which he can overturn the decision regarding your sins. When you sin now you are not in the out then in then out again as if you could be condemned again. Once and forever you have been justified and you will never be condemned again. Judgement day is not a day we think of with trepidation because the day our sins were judged does not lie ahead of us but behind us, at the cross of Christ.

Who is this for? Paul tells us 'for those who are in Christ Jesus.' We need to be very clear that the judgement day for our sins is only done away with for those who are in Christ. All those who are outside of Christ are outside the ark. They are lightning conductors that have never experienced a judgement, they need to flee to Christ and put their trust in Him, His death and His life as being the only sufficient payment that will settle our sin debt against

God. If we reject Christ we are rejecting the safe place against God's judgement. Outside of Christ there is condemnation. There is fear, there is judgement, there is certain doom and punishment, but in Christ there is peace, there is joy, there is friendship with God.

Here is the good news. Although you have broken God's law, and even if you try you do not have enough to pay for what you have done, God has made provision at cost to Himself. In His love He sent Jesus to pay for our debts, to pay in full all that was required against our sins, not only for past sins, but present and future as well, so that we can never again be under the condemnation of the law, but only ever righteous in God's eyes. Do you wonder why Paul ends this glorious chapter with a statement that we can never be separated from God's love, it is because God has taken over your debts, and He is perfect at settling them, and so He has done for us in Christ.

Let me end with an illustration:

Boice tells the story '...of a young man who was the son of a friend of Czar Nicholas the First of Russia. He had been given the job of exchequer of a border fortress of the Russian army, a responsible position in which he was to manage the czar's money and dispense wages to the troops. But the young man fell into gambling and began to cover his losses by borrowing little by little from the army treasury. One day he received notice that a government auditor was arriving to examine the books, so he sat down and added up what had been taken. It was a huge amount. He emptied out his own meagre resources, subtracted that from what should have been in the government account and noted the great discrepancy. He then wrote under the amount due: 'A great debt; who can pay?'

The young man knew it was impossible for him to make up the amount, and he did not know anyone who could be counted on to help him. So, rather than await arrest, trial, and disgrace, he drew his revolver and determined that he would kill himself upon the stroke of midnight. As he waited for the clock to strike, reflecting on how he had wasted his great opportunity, he became drowsy and drifted off to sleep.

It so happened that on that very night Czar Nicholas, dressed like a common soldier, entered the fortress to make an inspection of the battlements. According to regulations every light should have been out. But when he passed the office of the exchequer, where the son of his friend was dozing, he noticed that the light was on and went in. There were the sleeping young man, the revolver, the open books and the total that were missing, and the cryptic note. It was all quite clear. The young officer had betrayed his trust. He had been stealing systematically for months.

At first the czar thought to awaken him and place him under arrest. But he felt sorry for the young man, and he remembered the father, his friend, and how brokenhearted he would be if his son were to be arrested. So, instead of proceeding harshly, he stopped over and wrote something below the young man's pathetic summation and went out.

The soldier slept for hours when suddenly, awakened by some noise, he sprang to his feet. It was long past midnight. He grabbed the revolver, pointed it to his head, and was about to pull the trigger when his eyes glanced down at the papers before him and he saw what had been written. Beneath his question, 'A great debt; who can pay?' there was a single word: 'Nicholas.' Could it be? Had the czar been present? He sprang to some files where

there were documents containing the czar's signature and made a careful comparison. The signature was authentic. 'The czar has been here,' he said to himself. 'He has seen the papers; he knows what I have done; he knows my guilt, but he has undertaken to pay the debt himself.' So instead of taking his life the young soldier waited for morning when, as he anticipated, a sack of gold coins arrived from Nicholas.' We were condemned, we were the ones in debt, but God paid for our sin debt that there might be no more condemnation for us.