

No Condemnation

Romans 8:1

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I've never been known for traveling light when our family headed out on a trip. Even though I have four daughters, I would bring more baggage than anyone else. My problem is that I put off packing as long as possible and then in a panic I just empty my dresser drawers into my suitcase.

I can remember going on a trip to Mississippi with our previous church to help with Hurricane Katrina cleanup. We all slept in sleeping bags in the sanctuary so everyone could see how many suitcases each person had. I was incessantly teased the whole week because I had the biggest suitcase.

The problem with packing so much is you have to lug your luggage around which can get tiresome and even embarrassing.

Anyone carrying the baggage of brokenness today? Are you rolling a suitcase of regret behind you? Are you groaning under the weight of guilt and shouldering shame? Are you hoisting hurts, habits and hang-ups? Are you tired of carrying condemnation wherever you go?

At the risk of over-promising and under-delivering, our text today from Romans 8:1 could be the most life-changing section of Scripture you will ever encounter. It can free you from guilt and shame and condemnation and regret. I'm going to ask you to lock in like never before, to listen attentively, and to allow God's Word to go down deep within you because this is truly great news.

Romans 8 is Great!

Many people have said Romans 8 is their favorite chapter in the Bible. Commentators describe this chapter as the "mountain peak" of Scripture and as a triumphant "hymn of hope." Douglas Moo refers to it as "*The inner sanctuary within the cathedral of Christian faith.*" Let me list some reasons why I think so many people have benefited from these verses.

1. Assurance is emphasized. In what has been called "*a rhapsody on assurance,*" this chapter begins with "***There is therefore now no condemnation...***" and ends with "***nothing will be able to separate us from the***

love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” It starts with no condemnation and closes with no separation, and in between you find no defeat. The believer’s standing is safe, secure and settled.

2. The Holy Spirit is prominent. The third member of the Trinity is mentioned 19 times in this chapter, almost once every two verses. Up to this point in Romans, the Holy Spirit appears by name only four times. This chapter is not so much *about* the Holy Spirit, as it is on what the Spirit *does* on behalf of the believer. The Holy Spirit is involved in our salvation (8:1-2) and in our sanctification (8:3-4).

He gives life and peace, guides us, empowers us, helps us, prays for us and assures us of our adoption into God’s family. It’s interesting to notice the personal pronouns “*I*” and “*me*” which are so prominent in chapter 7, largely disappear in Romans 8 because the Holy Spirit becomes the dominant person. He is not a possession to hold on to, but a Person to love and obey. God never intended for us to live the Christian life on our own, but through the power of the Spirit.

3. This chapter contains the essence of Christianity. Because of what Christ did on the cross, taking the condemnation that is rightfully ours, those who have put their faith in Him will never be condemned. Jesus completely and permanently paid the debt of sin and the penalty of the law. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 3:17-18: *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”*

4. There are no commands in this chapter. The focus is not on what we need to *do*, but on what has already been *done* for us. We must always come back to our position in Christ before we can effectively practice the Christian life. We’re reminded it’s all about what we receive, not what we achieve by our own efforts.

5. This chapter is astounding and unbelievable. The truths here are both attractive and yet elusive for many of us. We want this to be true, and yet for many of us we don’t really believe it because we know how unworthy we are. Some of you are convinced God has condemned you and believe you are spiritually disqualified because of what you’ve done. I pray you discover and delight in your position before God.

Breaking it Down

One of my favorite words in the English language is *ginormous*, which combines the words “gigantic” with “enormous.” Without a doubt, Romans 8:1 is “ginormous.”

We’re going to repeat this verse several times so by the time we’re done today, we’ll have it memorized. Some of you have shut down already because you think you have a mental memorization block. You can do it. We must do it because if we can get this verse into our heads, into our hearts and then live it out through our hands, we will never be the same! Once we have it memorized, we will be able to draw on it for the rest of our lives. Trust me, you will need this verse, over and over again.

Let’s say Romans 8:1 together: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*** Here’s what I’m hoping we get today: *If you are in Christ, you are commended, and will never be condemned.*

Let’s break it down so we can get it down by looking at *why, when, what, and who.*

Why: ***“There is therefore...”***

The word ***“therefore”*** serves to tie the proceeding seven chapters with chapter 8 by serving as a link to everything Paul has established. In the original this is very emphatic, indicating what he is about to say is extremely important. It can be translated this way: *“So, then, consequently.”* I’ve picked just one verse from each of the first seven chapters to remind us what Paul taught about.

Romans 1:18: ***“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”***

Romans 2:5: ***“But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”***

Romans 3:12: ***“All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”***

Romans 4:13: ***“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”***

Romans 5:18: *“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”*

Romans 6:11: *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

Romans 7:24: *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*

Romans 7:24 leaves us hanging in despair but verse 25 gives us a glimmer of hope which will be unpacked in Romans 8: *“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Let’s work on that first phrase together: *“There is therefore...”* Let’s say it again.

When: *“Now...”*

For the born-again believer, there is assurance there will be no judgment to come in the future, but I want you to notice we can and should experience this assurance right *now* in the present. 1 John 3:2: *“Beloved, we are God’s children **now**, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”* Therefore, there is *today* no condemnation. If you are redeemed then *right now*, at this very moment you are secure. One pastor put it this way: *“No condemnation means there is neither judgment from God on me, nor annoyance with God with respect to me—neither on the last day nor today!”*

Now we’ll add just one word to the phrase we’ve already learned: *“There is therefore now...”* Say it with me.

What: *“No condemnation...”*

Interestingly, in the original word construction in Greek, the first word is an emphatic *“no.”* It almost explodes off the page. In addition, Paul chose a strong negation to make the point there is absolutely nothing by way of condemnation for the Christian. Here’s a literal translation: *“Not even one, therefore now no condemnation whatsoever...”* We could say it like this: *“Not even one will ever be condemned to hell who is in Christ Jesus.”* God now commends and doesn’t condemn the Christian – not even once, not even one bit.

The word *“condemn”* comes from two Greek words; one which means *“down”* and the other which means *“to judge.”* Literally it means to *“judge down”* and

was used of the Roman emperor as he sat on a throne when prisoners were brought before him. As he heard their cases, he would either “*judge down*” or “*judge up*.” I wonder if that’s where we get the “thumbs up” and “thumbs down” expression?

Brothers and sisters, if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus as your sacrificial substitute, the Almighty Judge gives you a “thumbs up.” God won’t “judge down” because He sent Christ to “come down.” The judgment we deserved settled on the Savior and now God’s blessings “rain down” on us. God has a gavel of grace for the believer as He pronounces this verdict: “*No condemnation – you are now a saint, not a sinner; you are not unrighteous because I have declared you righteous.*”

This word was used for more than the sentencing of a criminal; it also included the paying of a penalty after the sentencing. If you are in Christ, you have been pardoned and will never have to pay the penalty for your sins.

Paul is reinforcing what he stated in Romans 5:1: “***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***” Jesus said it this way in John 5:24: “***Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.***” God’s judgment will not come down now or ever for the believer. Those in Christ will not be condemned because Jesus was condemned in their stead; there is no punishment because Christ bore the punishment.

If you are in Christ, you are commended, and will never be condemned.

Here’s an important truth to remember, when God says “no condemnation” it’s not based upon our performance but on our position. God declares it to be so because of the finished work of Christ on our behalf. He doesn’t revoke it when we rebel, nor does He suddenly seethe with anger towards us when we sin. We have peace with God; we are not condemned.

Think about the implications of this statement by Pastor Steve Brown: “*How would you behave if you knew that your behavior was not the deciding factor when it comes to God’s acceptance of you?*”

Having said that, let’s think about what this *doesn’t mean*. Paul is not saying there’s no cause for our condemnation. There are plenty of reasons for us to be condemned. If you’re not convinced, just reread the first seven chapters of

Romans. Or just look at the sins you committed this week alone and you know God has cause to condemn you. He's not saying the follower of Christ has not failed, because we all fail. He's not saying that saints don't *struggle* or *stumble*, because we do. Ray Pritchard offers this perspective: "*When Jesus saved you, He didn't say He would take away all your problems. No, but He did say this. In your problems, there is no condemnation. In your struggles there is no condemnation. In your going astray there is no condemnation.*"

The commentator Matthew Henry adds these golden words:

"He does not say, '*There is no accusation against them,*' for this there is; but the accusation is thrown out, and the indictment quashed. He does not say, '*There is nothing in them that deserves condemnation,*' for this there is, and they see it, and own it, and mourn over it, and condemn themselves for it; but it shall not be their ruin...He is their Advocate...In Christ God does not only not condemn them, but is well pleased with them."

One of my favorite hymns is "*And Can it Be?*" by Charles Wesley. The last verse could have come right from Romans 8...

*No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.*

OK, let's add the phrase "no condemnation" to the first part of the verse. Ready? Let's say it together: "***There is therefore now no condemnation...***" Let's say it again.

Who: "***For those who are in Christ Jesus.***"

This promise of no condemnation is available for all but applied only to those who are in Christ Jesus. It's not automatic just because you're an American or just because you go to church or just because you've given some money or done some cool things for others. It's only for those who are "***in Christ Jesus.***" This is one of Paul's favorite phrases, as he used "***in Christ***" 164 different times. To be a Christian is to be in Christ. Turn over to Romans 16:7: "***Greet Andronicus and***

Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.”

You can be in church and be lost.
You can be in a good family and be lost.
You can be a good neighbor and be lost.
But if you are in Christ, you will never be condemned.

The only way you can be declared righteous and to have your sins forgiven is to be in Christ. Listen to Philippians 3:9: ***“And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”***

Because we are “in Christ,” His righteousness is credited to us. Because Jesus is free from condemnation, so are we because we are in Him. If you are a born again believer, you are no less in Christ than Billy Graham was. There are no second-class Christians and there are no elite Christians. It doesn’t matter how mature or immature you are in the faith; whether you are ordinary or ornery, tough or tender. You are either in Christ or you are not according to 1 Corinthians 15:22: ***“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”***

It’s like Noah and the ark. When God told Noah to build the ark, He told him He was going to send judgment on the earth and the only way to escape was to be *in* the ark when the floods came. Genesis 7:15-16: ***“They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the LORD shut him in.”*** Those in the ark were safe; those who were outside were condemned. And once the door was shut, it guaranteed safety and security for those inside, but it was too late for anyone else to enter. Don’t wait any longer!

All of what we’ve been saying so far is applicable only to those who are ***“in Christ Jesus.”*** The Bible is very clear. You are either “in Adam” and doomed to condemnation or you are “in Christ” and destined for commendation. You are in the light or in the darkness. You are a child of God or a child of the Devil. And if you’re in Christ, when God looks at you, He sees Jesus Christ and credits you with the righteousness of Christ and you will never be condemned.

I like how Geoff Thomas captures this: *“Jesus said, ‘I will take their judgment and bear the condemnation that they deserve by standing in their place.’”* Jesus paid

the unpayable debt. He bore the immeasurable burden of our condemnation and appeased the infinite just anger of God towards our wretched sins.

If you are in Christ, you are commended, and will never be condemned.

Personalizing the Promise

Let's face it. Some of us think this is too good to be true. In a sin-soaked world filled with sickness and disappointment and pain and agony, how can this be possible? In fact, this is so difficult to believe, that some of you have secretly changed this verse to read something like this: ***"There is therefore now some or a lot of condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

I wonder if some of you feel like God has put you on probation. You're worried if you mess up again, you'll be disqualified.

If you have accepted Christ, God is not angry with you, regardless of what you have done. He loves you and cherishes you. He's giving you a thumbs-up because you matter to Him. While we may celebrate this Scripture and be able to memorize it, I know many of you struggle to personally put it into practice so let's get really specific. I'm going to make a statement which will reflect what some people think, and I want all of us to respond with the promise of Romans 8:1: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

- If you were raised in a legalistic environment which has caused you to be filled with guilt and shame, we say to you: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***
- If your memories of what you did in the past are paralyzing you, we say to you: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***
- If your memories of what someone else did to you in the past are haunting you and eroding your self-image, we say to you: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***
- If you're struggling and have begun to think God is somehow paying you back for your sins, we say to you: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***
- If you see your problems as punishment from God, we say to you: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

- If you find yourself thinking God is angry with you and out to get you, we say to you: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***
- If someone near you is condemning you and putting you down and you think you are worthless, we say to you: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***
- If your relationships always seem to rupture and you feel like no one cares, we say to you: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***
- If your children are breaking your heart and you feel like it’s all your fault, we say to you: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***
- If you find yourself falling continuously short when you compare yourself with other Christians, we say to you: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***
- If Satan is accusing and condemning you as he will because he is the accuser, tell him he has nothing on you: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***

I was greatly helped by a post by Scott Hubbard called, “Against Every Accusation: What to Say When Satan Whispers.”

The devil is not only a liar who seeks to deceive us, a tempter who seeks to ensnare us, and a murderer who seeks to kill us. He is an accuser who seeks to condemn us. The very name ‘Satan’ means, “accuser.” Revelation 12:10 says he accuses the brethren day and night. He brings sins to our attention and fills us with accusation.

And for those whom he cannot condemn (because they are in Christ), he labors night and day to destroy their spiritual peace. No matter how much these saints hate their sin and long to please their God, the devil will strive to blot out the light of God’s favor. He will meet them at midnight with visions of God’s wrath. He will send them deep within themselves to scrutinize every motive and feeling. He will whisper alongside all the promises of God, “But does this really apply to a sinner like you?” Sometimes, even after recalling Jesus’s death and resurrection, doubts still darken our assurance. A vague sense of condemnation still clings to us, and the redemption Christ won in the past seems disconnected from the guilt we feel in the present.

The prophet Zechariah in 3:1 once saw a vision of “Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.” As long as we are in this world, we may feel, with Joshua, that the devil is always at our right hand, ready to parade our filth before the throne of God as stated in Zechariah 3:3. Infinitely more important than who is at our right hand, however, is who is at God’s right hand: “Christ Jesus is the one . . . who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:34).

At our right hand is our accuser, but at God’s right hand is our Advocate. And for every argument the devil speaks against us, Jesus speaks a greater one. He not only died to remove our sins, and He not only rose with His finished work in hand — glorious events of the ancient past — but he also lives now and forever to plead his people’s cause.

Are you ready to quote Romans 8:1? Let’s try it together: **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

I love what Charles Spurgeon had to say when preaching on this passage:

“Oh, for faith to lay hold on this! Oh, for an overpowering faith that shall get the victory over doubts and fears and make us enjoy the liberty with which Christ makes men free! You that believe in Christ, go to your beds this night and say, ‘If I die in my bed, I cannot be condemned!’ Should you wake the next morning, go into the world and say, ‘I am not condemned!’ When the devil howls at you, tell him, ‘You may accuse, but I am not condemned!’”

If you are in Christ, you are commended, and will never be condemned.

If you are in Christ, revel in the fact God commends you. If you are outside of Christ, you are condemned already, and judgment is still in front of you. Come to Him now. Run to Him for safety. Let’s say our verse together one more time: **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

In his book called, “Pilgrim’s Progress,” John Bunyan gives us an allegory of the Christian life as he describes the journey of a man named Christian.

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulcher [a tomb]. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulcher, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death."

Invitation