

# NO CONDEMNATION!

Romans 8:1-17

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

July 16, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The epistle lesson comes from *Paul's letter to the Romans*, chapter 8, verses 1 through 17. Please stand as you are able for God's Holy Word. From Romans 8, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> 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!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> 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.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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No condemnation. "There is ... no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). That is just about the sweetest declaration we could ever hear. No condemnation. It's not a little bit less condemnation. It's not 50% less condemnation. It's not even a door-buster 75% less condemnation. There is not even a scrap of condemnation that remains. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Whatever it is that you may feel condemned for, it is completely gone in Christ Jesus.

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We often feel condemned. We might think, “Man, if these people knew the stuff that is in my past, they would want nothing to do with me.” Or maybe even, “If they knew the stuff that is in my present, they would kick me out of here.” Last week we talked about those habitual sins, the ones that we know are wrong, and we want to do right, but we keep doing the evil that we hate. Even the sins that still persist in our lives fall into the category of “no condemnation.” “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” And “no” means “no.”

So why not? Why is there no condemnation? And why do we so often feel like there is?

First, let’s talk about why we feel like there is condemnation. We feel like there is condemnation because we know that we deserve it. In our consciences, we know God’s commandments. Our consciences might not get them right 100% of the time, because we are corrupted after the fall into sin. But, most of the time, our consciences get it right. Now, this doesn’t mean that our minds always have it right. Sometimes our minds and our consciences disagree with one another. We can persuade our minds that evil is good. We can justify our sin in our minds. But the conscience is harder to trick. Sometimes we just decide that something is okay. We rationalize it in our minds. And the whole world might tell us it’s okay. But then we still feel guilt and shame. That’s because the conscience is harder to trick. Now, the conscience can become numbed by long-term resistance to it, but as long as it’s still working, it will convict us of sin.

And this is not a bad thing. This is good. This is what the conscience is supposed to do. It’s not pleasant, but such is the case with many good things. The conscience is supposed to convict us of sin so that we will sin less and, therefore, cause less harm to our neighbors. And it convicts us so that we will know our need for a Savior and seek forgiveness in Jesus Christ. When we know the answer to a guilty conscience, then it is good and safe for our consciences to convict us. But if we do not know the answer, then we just feel condemned.

“But there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” And why not? Because God condemned all sin in the flesh of Jesus. Hear what the Scripture says: “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” (8:3). All that sin that we feel condemned for has already been condemned. How did God condemn it? In the flesh of Jesus Christ.

This is, perhaps, the most shocking and offensive teaching of the Bible: God the Father condemned Jesus. He did. God condemned God. The Father condemned Jesus. Jesus became sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and the Father judged him. The Father punished him. Jesus was being completely truthful when he cried out from the cross, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). He really was forsaken of God. He bore our sins in his body (2:24), and God poured out his wrath on that sin. He condemned all sin in the flesh of Jesus.

This might be the most shocking and offensive teaching in the entire Bible, because it seems so unfair. It seems so wrong that God the Father would do this to his Son. But the Father did not do this against the will of Jesus. From the foundation of the world, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were in perfect agreement that this must happen. The Son willingly bore the sin of the world. He wanted to. It was painful, I assume, for all three persons of the Trinity. But they knew this must be done. They did this not in hate, but as an act of love for you and for the entire world. This is why I can say to you without reservation: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” It doesn’t matter how big or bad your sins are. Jesus was condemned in your place. So anytime you feel condemned by God, remember that whatever sin you feel condemned for has already been condemned in the flesh of Jesus. It was already condemned. It was already punished. It doesn’t need to be condemned again. “There is ... no condemnation.”

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The condemnation was taken away by Jesus, and you have received his righteousness. Paul says that “[God] condemned sin in the flesh [of Jesus], 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” (8:4-5). Therefore, you are righteous. It’s not just a matter of God taking away the condemnation. It’s also a matter of him putting something good in its place. Your sin is taken away, and Jesus’ righteousness is given to you in its place. So condemnation is taken away, and God’s favor rests upon you instead. That’s the end result of this. That is God’s purpose. He declares you to be righteous. This is what we see in the first four verses of this reading.

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Then verses 5 through 17 contrast the flesh and the Spirit. These are the two ways of living. A Christian may live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. And we mean “Spirit” with a capital “S,” as in, “The Holy Spirit.” An unbeliever only lives according to the sinful flesh. But God has given his Holy Spirit to all of his children, and he calls us to live according to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives within us, and this results in a meaningful and substantial change. You with the Holy Spirit should be different than you without the Holy Spirit.

So what does that mean? Does it mean we should do more good works? Yeah. Absolutely. Does it mean we should commit fewer sins? Definitely. Does it mean we will become sinless? No. Our sinful flesh will not improve at all. But there is a new spirit, which lives in God’s Holy Spirit. Does it mean people will like us more? Maybe, or maybe not. Even if Christians are kinder and more generous than anyone else in the world, which seems to be true, Jesus warns us that we will be hated for his sake (e.g., Matt. 10:22). Does it mean we will be happier? Not necessarily. There is a definite joy that comes from knowing Jesus and having assurance that our sins are forgiven, but there is still a struggle with sin. If anything, this struggle becomes even more intense. If you once lived only in the sinful flesh, you might not have cared all that much about your sin. Maybe it didn’t bother you very much. Maybe you enjoyed it. But being a Christian means that your sin probably bothers you more than it used to. You probably have a greater desire for your sin to cease. This is a godly desire, but it’s one that won’t be satisfied until the resurrection of the dead and the transformation we will experience on that day. So we live with a longing for something better. We long to be better.

Christians live with one foot in this world and one in the next. We live with a sinful nature, just like everyone else in the world, but we also have a new nature. We are in Jesus Christ, and God’s Holy Spirit dwells within us. So we are constantly pulled in different directions.

So God calls us to set our minds on the things of the Spirit (8:5-7). The difference between the flesh and the Spirit is the same as the difference between death and life. Paul says, “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (8:6). If we set our minds on the flesh, if we follow the sinful desires of our old natures, we will be pulled away from the Spirit, we will be pulled away from Christ, and the end of that is death. It’s a return to condemnation. Instead, set your minds on the things of the Spirit.

So what does that mean? It means a lot of things. It means we seek to know God and his Word. We treasure the Scriptures, and we seek to know and understand them. It means we call upon the one true God in every time of need. And it means we seek his virtues. For example, in Galatians 6, Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (6:22-23). These are virtues the Holy Spirit works in God’s children, and we should desire them in greater measure.

Sin will still remain in us as long as we live, so we should not try to measure ourselves by checking our fruit. This is a mistake that a lot of Christians make, and it leads to a bad place. If

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we look to find the fruit in our lives, and we see good works, we will be led to pride, which is sinful. This can tempt us to trust in ourselves. It can tempt us to take credit for what God has done, which is blasphemy. Or we might look for fruit, but our sins still stand out to us, and this leads to despair. Both outcomes are bad. So we need to be careful about this. Seek virtue. Live by the Spirit. Put to death the deeds of the flesh. That means confess them, and turn away from them. But do not measure your performance. This is one of the worst mistakes we could ever make. Do not try to measure your performance. It always leads to pride or despair. Seek virtue, but measure yourself by the same standard God uses: Jesus Christ. No matter how many good works you do, you will never come close to comparing to the righteousness God gives to you. And no matter how much your old sins persist, they cannot undo the righteousness of Jesus Christ. So live by the Spirit, and trust the grace of Jesus. That's the Christian life.

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So a Christian can live by flesh or by the Spirit. And we might be tempted to take God's grace for granted and indulge the flesh. Saint Paul talks about this in many places. And my paraphrase of all those passages is this: *Don't be stupid*. Yeah, you could indulge the flesh. But why? Is that really what you want? Is that who you want to be? Having been freed from slavery and death, do you really want to go back to it? Paul says, "Brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (8:12-14).

We need to accept the reality that, as humans, we are debtors. This is true for every person. We are debtors, either to the flesh or to God. Everyone belongs to someone or something else. There is no such thing as a human free agent, and we need to come to grips with this. If we don't come to grips with this, we will remain slaves to the flesh, and the end of that is death. "But all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." So think about this: would you rather be a slave or a child? And it's not even the difference between being a slave of God or a child of God. It's the difference between being a slave to death or a child of God. Don't be stupid. Would you rather be a slave to the worst thing ever or a child to the good and gracious God?

So when we're tempted with sin, and this happens quite often, ask yourself, "Who am I? And how do I want to live?" Answer: *You are a child of God*. So how do you want to live in that moment? Do you want to live as a slave to death, or do you want to live as a child to God?

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And take comfort in the reward for who you are. A slave gets nothing in the end. A slave to sin gets only death. But a child gains the inheritance of his Father. And an inheritance is not based on what you do; it's based on who you are. So the children of God inherit his entire kingdom. This is the reward for all God's children. We receive it because of what the Son of God did. He was condemned in the flesh so that we would receive his righteousness. All who are baptized into Jesus Christ and who trust in him have no condemnation. Your condemnation is taken away. You are given Jesus' righteousness instead. And you are named a child of God. So live in the Spirit, and fear no condemnation. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.