



January 27-28, 2018
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No Condemnation

Romans 8:1-4

My name is Ellis, I am one of the pastors here at Chapel Hill. And Pastor Mark would have loved to have been sharing the word with you this weekend but he's feeling pretty sick, so let's be praying for him.

If you remember last week I shared with you that the gospel means we are free from the law—we no longer have to follow the instruction manual. And the reason is that the law had no power to overcome sin, in fact, sin used the law to kill us. But now, we do have a power in our lives that can enable us to overcome sin, and can guide us into right living. That power is the Holy Spirit.

Over the next six weeks we are going to press into what it looks like, as Christians to live life in the power of the Holy Spirit. And we're going to do so through what is without a doubt my favorite chapter in the book of Romans, and perhaps even in the entire Bible: Romans 8.

I remember aged 21 being so captivated by this chapter that I decided for a month I would read it every single day. And every single day I was blown away once again by the good news of what it contains. The good news that we are free from condemnation, we have power to overcome sin, that we have been adopted as children of God, that our eternity is secure, that God is working all things together for our good, and that nothing can separate us from his love. It is incredible stuff! Make the next 6 weeks of church a priority because this is going to transform your life.

Romans 8 is also significant because of how important it is to our understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Up until now, Paul has mentioned the Holy Spirit 5 times. But in this chapter alone he mentions Him 21 times. More than any other chapter in the whole Bible!

And for many of us the Holy Spirit is kind of the hidden person of the Trinity. We can understand the Father and the Son, but the Spirit is a little harder to wrap our heads around. But the Spirit is just as much God as the Father and the Son, and He has been present from the very beginning where He was involved in creation. And over the next six weeks, we are going to come to a greater understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Today we begin with the first few verses of Romans 8. So grab your Bibles/phones. It will be on the screens too. Paul is going to refer back to an idea that he hasn't really talked about since chapter 5, where we were before Thanksgiving. As a reminder, Paul started his letter by arguing that every single one of us is guilty of sin—that is guilty of going our own way, rather than God's. But through the death of Jesus Christ we have been justified, that is, made righteous. In many senses, Paul is picking up where he left off in chapter 5, with chapters 6-7, serving as an excursus from Paul's main argument. So here, we pick things back up... let's read Romans 8:1

"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.”
(Romans 8:1–4)

One of the big stories this week has been the trial of the former USA Gymnastics and Michigan State doctor Larry Nassar. He was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison after more than 150 women and girls said in court that he sexually abused them over the past two decades. As the judge handed down the sentence she said these words: “I just signed your death warrant.”

Perhaps the most incredible moment of the whole trial, though, was the testimony of the first athlete to make an accusation against Nassar: Rachel Denhollender. She was the final victim to take the floor in court and I want you to watch a portion of her testimony.

[VIDEO from 26:47-28:27. Transcript below.

“In our early hearings, you brought your Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness. And so it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God himself loving so sacrificially that he gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin he did not commit. By his grace, I, too, choose to love this way.

You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things, as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen this courtroom today.

The Bible you carry says it is better for a stone to be thrown around your neck and you throw into a lake than for you to make even one child stumble. And you have damaged hundreds.

The Bible you speak carries a final judgment where all of God's wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.”]

And that is the crazy good news of the gospel. If Larry Nassar turns to Christ in repentance, he will find grace, and hope and mercy. And if that is true for a man such as Larry Nassar, that is true for you.

No matter what you have done or left undone, no matter what you've said or left unsaid, and no matter what you've thought, if you are in Christ Jesus, the death warrant that was hanging over your head has gone. And it doesn't matter if you've been as bad as Larry Nassar, or as good as Mother Theresa. Because every single one of us has fallen short of God's standards, every single one of us has had the verdict guilty read over us, and every single one of us has signed our own death warrant.

But here is the good news of Romans 8... “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) That death warrant has now been torn up. We no longer stand condemned. This is the conclusion to Paul's argument of seven chapters. This is the good news of the gospel! God's grace is greater than our sin.

And how has this taken place? By the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God has transferred us from the realm of death to the realm of life. That's what Paul is talking about in verse 2: “For the law
Sermon Notes 2

of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2) Here, he uses the word law, in a similar way to the way he used it at the very end of chapter 7, not to refer to the Law of God in the Old Testament, but rather to a principle or authority or power. Paul says, in effect, for the power and authority of the Spirit of life has set you free from the power and authority of sin and death. We have been taken off of death row, our chains have been broken, and we have been transferred back to the land of the living.

] “July 31, 1941, sirens rang out from cell block 14 in Auschwitz concentration camp... a prisoner had escaped. And as a reprisal the Gestapo selected ten men arbitrarily to die in a starvation bunker. The ninth man selected was a man called Francis Gajowniczek [Guy-ov-nicheck]. And when he was selected, he cried out. He said, ‘Oh, my poor wife and my children – they’ll never see me again!’ And at that moment a little guy, a Polish man in glasses, wire frames, stepped out of line, he took off his cap, and he said: ‘Look, I’m a Catholic priest, so I don’t have a wife or children.’ He said, ‘I would like to die instead of that man.’

To everyone’s amazement, his offer was accepted. The name of that man was Maximilian Kolbe, 47 years old. And he was taken with the other 9 to the starvation bunker. Amazing guy. He got them praying, singing hymns. The atmosphere in there was incredible; apparently it felt like a church in that starvation bunker. Eventually, though, they needed the starvation bunker for other people and so on August 14, 1941 he was given a lethal injection of carbolic acid.

Forty-one years later, on October 10, 1982, the death of Maximilian Kolbe was put in its proper perspective. There, in St Peter’s Square, Rome, in a crowd of 150,000 people, with 26 cardinals, 300 archbishops and bishops, was Francis Gajowniczek. And the Pope described the death of Maximilian Kolbe on that occasion in these terms. He said ‘it was a victory like the one won by our Lord Jesus Christ’: because Maximilian Kolbe had died for someone else, instead of someone else.

That someone else was Francis Gajowniczek, who eventually died at the age of ninety-three. According to his obituary, he’d spent the rest of his life going around the world telling people what Maximilian Kolbe had done for him. Because he had died in his place.”

In the same way... We have been saved from death, and given life, because one man took our place: Jesus. Take a look at verse 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, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”

God sent his son Jesus, in the likeness of sinful flesh to this earth. He came as a man, but unlike the rest of humanity, he did not sin. Jesus was the only man to ever fulfill the law—to perfectly love God and neighbor. And it was on this man—Jesus Christ—that our condemnation was placed. He was our sin-offering (that’s what “for sin” means in these verses); he was sacrificed in our place, to take the penalty for our sin. He received our death sentence for our disobedience... and we received his life for his perfect obedience.

And as a result, the Spirit has transferred us from the realm of death to the realm of life. We are no longer under the power and authority of sin, but instead, we are under the power and authority of the Spirit. We have been raised from death to life and we now stand free! Free from condemnation. Free from the death sentence! And this is the good news of the gospel!

When we were in England in November, as many of you were aware, we went to the US Embassy in London to renew our visa. It was unexpectedly denied. The reason for the denial was that we were accused of intending to permanently immigrate to the US, when the visa we were applying to renew

would only allow us to stay for a 2 year period. This was not true, and we couldn't believe it. Our attorney couldn't believe it. We were innocent, but we were condemned like illegal immigrants.

Perhaps the hardest thing about this time was the condemnation we found ourselves under. That we might never be able to even visit the US, that we might never again be able to see friends who have become so close, and that we might never step foot in Chapel Hill again. We had been condemned for a crime of which we were innocent.

As the days wore on, what became most difficult was that we started to question our own innocence. Did we do something wrong? Did we say something wrong? But the more we read, the more researched, the more counsel we took, the more everything seemed to point to the fact that we were, in fact, innocent of what we were being condemned for. And let me tell you, it is crushing to live under condemnation for something that you are innocent of; it is crushing.

And for many of us here this morning, that is how we are living spiritually. Spiritually we are innocent because Jesus took the guilt upon himself. Spiritually we are innocent. But... for many of us, we still live and walk under condemnation. We still live and believe that, yes, Jesus might have paid for my sin, but I'm still not worthy enough to receive God's love, or I'm still not good enough to receive his gifts, or I'm still not free enough to receive his blessings. We may believe it up here [head], but we don't believe it down here [heart.]

Why? Because this is where our spiritual Enemy wants to keep us. Satan—the Accuser—knows Jesus has won the victory, we have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, but Satan is doing everything in his power to keep us from believing that.

It's like we were living in a dump. We were living in the kingdom of sin. But God has transferred us out. We now live in a house in the kingdom of God, far away from the dump. And yes, every day we produce more trash, but we put it outside on the curb and it's taken away.

Well, here's what Satan does... He comes from the dump with your old bag of trash, and he starts picking things out of it and throwing it back in our front yard. Like those words we spoke in anger, or that website we clicked on in lust, or those extra three glasses of wine we drank in comfort, or those new clothes we thought would make us happy, or that old girlfriend or boyfriend we slept with, or that kid we beat up in school.

And every time he takes a piece of trash out, it's like he's saying: "You're not really free of this. You've still got to clean your act up. You're not good enough for God really. He might say you are, but really, do you think he wants someone like you?" And do you know what's the worst part. We just keep letting him throw that trash back at us! We just stand there and take it!

Brothers and sisters, we are in a spiritual battle. We are at war. The decisive victory has been won, but the battle is still going. We have been set free from our Enemy, but he isn't giving up. He wants us back. And since he can't have us back, he's doing everything in his power to prevent us from living in the freedom we have.

Church, we need to fight the condemnation of the Enemy, because he has no right to condemn us. We need to fight condemnation with confrontation. You know if someone started throwing trash into your front yard at home, what would you do? You'd confront them! You'd get out there and tell them to get the heck out of my yard, wouldn't you? You'd tell them they have no rights there, that they need to get out.

Well, do the same to Satan! Don't let him bring condemnation. What he needs is confrontation. Tell him, "Be gone, Satan." Tell him, "I am free from condemnation." Tell him, "You have no power over me anymore," Tell him, "I belong to Jesus now." Fight back! Memorize Romans 8:1 and use it. Use the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Don't let him bring condemnation. What he needs is confrontation!

But let me be honest with you... Sometimes this just isn't going to work. Do you know why? Because for some of us, we aren't willing to get out there and own the fact that what he's throwing back at us was at one time our trash, because we're scared of what our neighbors will think. Satan loves nothing more than to take what we've tried to cover up, the sin we've done that we don't want anyone to know about, and use it to bring condemnation on us. He loves it when we conceal our sin.

I know this... I know that when I have struggled with sin and kept it to myself, I don't know God's peace. I live with a constant feeling of guilt and shame. So, not only do we need to fight condemnation with confrontation, but we need to fight it with confession.

If you are hiding something, you are never going to experience freedom from condemnation. Now, that freedom is there. You have it, all right. But you are never going to experience it in your heart. Because Satan is going to use what you're hiding to tell you things like: no one could ever forgive you of that, or, if anyone found out about that, they'd disown you. And as long as you stay in that place, you will never experience the freedom from condemnation we have in Christ.

What we must practice is confession. When we bring our sin out into the light, and tell someone, it takes all the power out of Satan's condemnation. Why? Because in the moment we confess, that person can show us what it means to experience no condemnation. That person can, for us, be the voice of Jesus, and say, "Neither do I condemn you." (John 8:11)

So this weekend, I want to create space for confession. Not to unnecessarily dig up past sins. But if you have been covering something up, I want to give you the space, this weekend, to come and confess it. If you want to experience freedom from condemnation, it has to start with confession. Come, receive freedom, it's yours for the taking.

I'm going to invite our prayer team and elders to come forward. If you want someone to confess to right now, we're going to make space for that. Our team would love to hear you out. And they would love to minister these words of Jesus to you: "Neither do I condemn you." And they would love to pray with you. And unless someone is in danger, they will keep your confession confidential.

And I want to preface this time by saying, if you are going to stand there and watch people come forward and try and guess why they are coming forward... I would rather that you left the room, and I will not be offended if you do. This is a room with no condemnation in it. So don't quietly condemn people who are brave enough to come and confess, because they want to experience the fullness that Jesus has to offer. Amen? Let's pray.