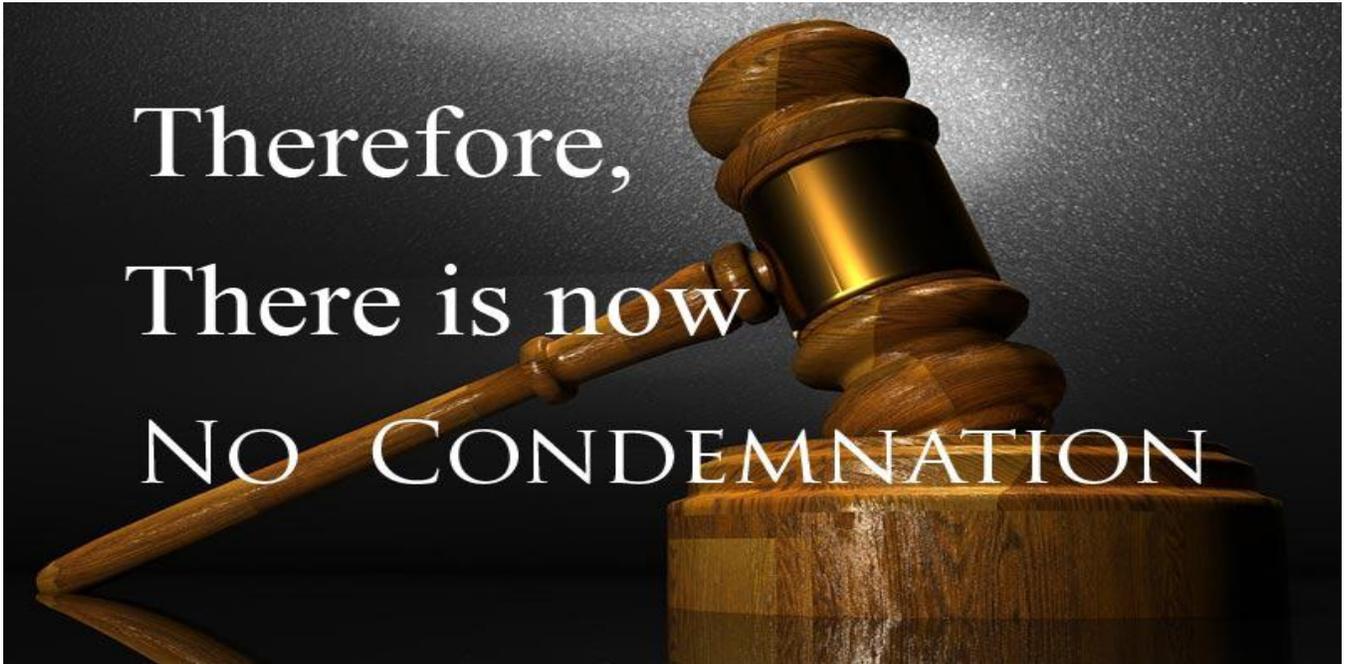


Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 8:1-8 – No Condemnation!

Sermon Notes



Background

In the last verse of chapter seven the Apostle Paul was thanking God for the fact that with his mind he serves the Law of God even though with the flesh he serves the law of sin. He has spent most of the past three chapters discussing the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, and also the fact that sin has had dominion over us. Finally, he pointed out that a battle exists in every Christian between the sin nature and the intellect. Paul even admitted that he, himself, fails in this battle over and over again, saying that he is suffering miserably because of his repeated failure to resist his own sin nature.

Previously, Paul talked about the fact that righteousness was reckoned, or imputed, to us by grace, that is, by God's sovereign choice. This reckoning, or crediting, is a legal term that means that righteousness is declared and placed in one's account where righteousness did not exist before. Now, since we have been declared righteous by God, there can be no ruling of condemnation against us, ever!

As we finished up chapter seven, we noted that there is a difference between our legal standing before God, and our ability to fellowship with Him. Remember, when a Christian sins, it does not affect him or her legally, but it does affect him or her relationally. We don't cease to be God's child, we don't get unsaved, but we do break our fellowship with Him and that can only be restored by confession, agreeing with God regarding the sinfulness of our actions. Also, keep in mind that our legal standing before God is that we are righteous, we are completely sinless! Therefore -

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Paul now proclaims one of the most amazing facts about our salvation which he has been building up to for the past three chapters. Even though sin has dominion over us in the flesh, because we have been declared as righteous by God, “There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Even though our sin nature still causes us to fall and commit sin and, as Paul said back in **Romans 6:23**, “The wages of sin is death,” he also said in that same verse, “the gracious gift of God is eternal life.” Because God has declared us righteous and has given us eternal life, there is no condemnation on us.

Now, let’s dig a little deeper for a few minutes. This verse starts off with four words *ouden ara nun katakrima*. We have talked before about the two different words of negation. They are *me*, which is a relative negative or a conditional negative and *ou*, which is the absolute negative. The first word in this verse is a combination of *ou*, the absolute negative and *heis*, meaning one. So, we see that *ouden* means “not one,” but it is actually more emphatic than that. It means “not even one!”

The word *ara*, if it appears as the first word of a sentence, indicates a question. However, if it appears after the first word in a sentence, as it does here, it indicates the following is a conclusion, and is most often translated as, “therefore.” The third word, *nun*, is a time-related word meaning, right now, not in the future, not in the past, but absolutely right this very minute. These three words lead up to *katakrima*, which refers to a judgment of condemnation. It is roughly equivalent to a judge striking his gavel and proclaiming, “Guilty!” It is most often translated as “condemnation.”

So what Paul is saying is that as of this very moment in time, there is absolutely no condemnation of any kind that can be laid against any one of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. It is not referring to the day that Jesus died or the day He arose from the grave, it is not referring to the day we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and it most certainly is not referring to the day we got baptized. It is referring to right now, this very moment! If you are a born-again Christian, then there is absolutely no condemnation of any kind against you, because in God’s record book you are perfectly sinless!

Following this declaration of total innocence, some translations insert, “who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” This phrase does not appear in the best manuscripts of the book of Romans neither does it agree with the flow of Paul’s context here. It appears that it may have been inserted from the end of verse 4. Here’s what Charles Spurgeon said about this verse, “The most learned men assure us that it is not part of the original text... The oldest copies are without it, the versions do not sustain it, and the fathers who quoted abundance of Scripture do not quote this sentence.”

Paul now explains why there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. It is because, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” The expression, “the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” refers not to a written law but a natural law as we have discussed previously. The Spirit of life mentioned in this verse refers to the Holy Spirit who brings life.

So, what Paul is telling us is that there is no condemnation against those of us who are saved because the natural law of the Holy Spirit, providing life through our faith in Jesus Christ, has made us free from the control of sin and the death which results from that sin. We were set free from the law of sin and death at the moment we were saved.

Because we believed God's message about the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross, God's grace has been bestowed on us and the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a seal of our salvation. The Holy Spirit gives us both eternal life and the ability to overcome our own sin nature. Therefore, we have free will to obey God or not. Before we were saved, we did not have this free will, we were slaves to sin.

Why, then was Paul so frustrated back in **Romans 7:15**? Remember what he said there? **"For what I am working out, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."**

Why? Because for a Christian, having a free will does not mean that we always do what is right. It means that we have the choice to sin or not to sin, and when we choose to sin, we are convicted by our conscience (and by the Holy Spirit) and we regret doing it. This sin, which separates us from fellowship with God, requires us to confess it to restore that fellowship and to restore our peace. Unsaved people don't have this free will; they are under the dominion of their sin nature without any ability to resist. Now, Paul continues -

Romans 8:3-4

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

This is another potentially very confusing verse so let's look at it one phrase at a time. **"For what the Law could not do"** is a reference to what Paul has said in the seventh chapter of this letter. The Law cannot, and clearly never could, produce righteousness in man. Why? Paul says that, **"... it [the law] was weak through the flesh."** You see, the reason the law could not produce righteousness is because man tried to produce righteousness through acts of the flesh. But the flesh is weak because of the sin nature and could not satisfy the law; therefore, the law could not, and cannot, produce this righteousness.

But what the Law could not do, Paul says God sent his son to do for us: **"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."** In other words, even though Christ took on human flesh, he did not take on sinful human flesh. He had the appearance of sinful flesh, but He was not sinful human flesh. For emphasis, let me restate that, this passage says that Christ took on human flesh, but he did not take on **sinful** human flesh.

God the Father sent Jesus in the **form** of sinful human flesh, **"on account of sin;"** that is, Christ came to earth and took on human flesh in order to deal with sin. He dealt with sin by living a sinless life that was then freely offered for sinful lives. Because he perfectly fulfilled the Law and committed no sin, He **"condemned sin in the flesh."** In other words, in human flesh Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law and therefore made a judgment of condemnation against sin.

In order to get the full impact of this verse we have to go back and join it with the second half of the previous:

... sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The reason that God sent His son was to fulfill the Law and to make a judgment against sin so that the righteousness of the Law might be completely satisfied in us.

But, how does Christ's fulfilling the Law translate into the righteousness of the law being fulfilled in us? Back in **Romans 3:21-28** Paul talked about the righteousness that is imputed by grace upon all those who believe, and he concluded:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

The only way that God can satisfy his own justice, which requires that sin be penalized (and we know that the penalty for sin is death), is for someone who has perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the Law to then offer His life as a substitution for ours. This is precisely what Christ did when he came in the "likeness of sinful flesh." And - it is by faith that we receive the grace of God through which He credits Christ's righteousness to our account. By faith we believe that Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, and by grace God then imputes Christ's righteousness to us. Therefore, the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us.

Romans 8:5-8

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh are not able to please God.

This verse is an explanation of the last part of the previous verse which said, "... who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Paul says that we conduct our manner of life either "according to our flesh" or "according to the Spirit." So, if we are "walking according to the flesh," it means that we are walking through life in a manner that is characterized by the things of the flesh. If we are "walking according to the Spirit," it means that we are walking through life in a manner that is characterized by things of the Spirit of God.

Notice, however, that Paul does not talk about "those who walk" in this verse, but "those who are." A person's **walk** is the outward evidence of how he or she **is**, that is, how he or she lives his or her life. If we live according to the flesh, then we will walk according to the flesh. But, if we live a life controlled by the Spirit of God, then the way we act will also be controlled by the Spirit.

Now, by way of explaining that phrase further, Paul says that those who "are" according to flesh "**set their minds on the things of flesh.**" That is, those who live according to flesh are continually thinking about fleshly things; their thoughts are about how to please self. Those who live according to the Spirit, however, are continually thinking about spiritual things; their thoughts are about how to please God.

He then says, "**For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.**" We've said before that death actually refers to separation. Regarding physical death, it is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body. With respect to spiritual death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the presence and favor of God. In the current verse it indicates the separation of fellowship with God. This verse is tightly coupled with the preceding and the following verses. Putting all three together we have:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit *is* life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,

What Paul is saying is that a mind that is constantly focused on the flesh, on self-gratification, the mind that is always “looking out for good ol’ number one,” is dead. Since death implies separation, the notion is that those who are fleshly minded are separated from God. But God has promised all believers, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,” (Hebrews 13:5) so what does Paul mean? The simplest way to understand this is to recognize that when we are acting fleshly we are separated from the fellowship of God who cannot tolerate the presence of sin, but we are not separated from the presence of God. And - our fellowship is restored when we confess our sin.

The second half of this verse describes the state of the mind that is focused on the Spirit of God. He says “the mind set on the Spirit *is* life and peace.” In other words, the person who is focused on the things of God is characterized as not being separated from God, but in fellowship with Him and at peace.

The reason that being fleshly minded is death is because it is in open hostility to God. Therefore, it cannot be in submission to God or His law. When we place ourselves in a position of submission to another, we are by definition at peace with them and recognize their authority over us. When we refuse to be in submission, we rise up in revolt and are by definition in open hostility and rebellion against their authority. These are opposite ends of the spectrum and are mutually exclusive. That is, you can’t be both in submission and in rebellion. You are either one or the other. In fact, Paul goes on to tell us that when we are being controlled by our flesh, we **cannot** place ourselves in submission to God. It’s impossible!

When we are being carnally minded, when we are allowing our fleshly lusts to control our thoughts and actions, we are not being submissive to God and we are, in fact, in open rebellion to His will. When we are in open rebellion to God, we have separated ourselves from Him. This, by definition, means that we are dead to God; we have broken fellowship with Him and we are not at peace.

Paul now takes this argument one step further. He has just said that the person who is fleshly minded, the one who is preoccupied with and controlled by the desires of the flesh, is openly hostile toward God and is not subject to His laws. Therefore, He says, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But first, we have to ask ourselves, “What does Paul mean by the expression, “in the flesh?” He is not talking about everyone who has a body of flesh. He is talking about those who are fleshly minded. Their every waking moment is occupied with satisfying the desires and needs of the flesh. This is a description of unregenerate mankind, those who are not saved. We know this because in the following verse he will contrast them with those of us who are saved.

So, what Paul is telling us is this: unsaved people, who are controlled by their own flesh, cannot possibly please God. It doesn’t matter how many “Hail Mary’s” they say, and it doesn’t matter how many good works they do “for God.” It doesn’t matter how often they pray or read their Bible. It doesn’t matter how many years they have been a member of a church, how regularly they attend the services, or how much they give in the offering. If someone is not genuinely saved, it is not possible for him or her to please God, and he or she, therefore, is God’s enemy.

In the previous chapter Paul bemoaned the fact that he didn’t always do the things that please God. He told us that the law is spiritual but that he is carnal (fleshly). He then opened this chapter with:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

In other words, if you are not saved, you are God’s enemy. However, if you are saved, He sees you not only as His friend, but as someone who is without sin. He sees you as without condemnation of any kind!

So What?

I have had people ask me, “What do you think about Christians who get saved and then go back to living the same way they did before they got saved?” The only logical answer to this question, according to what Paul has just taught us is, “They never really got saved!” Jesus, during his earthly ministry, taught his disciples, “**Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.”** (Matthew 7:17-18)

So, what does your fruit say about you? Are you in Christ Jesus?

It’s easy for us to think that because we have been declared righteous by God we can sin and not suffer the consequence of it. However, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and prompts us to confess our sin. Thank you, Lord, for the freedom to obey and for the chastening work of the Holy Spirit in us when we don’t.

Paul has been teaching us that a person cannot be justified by obeying the law. But we know that we couldn’t completely obey the law even if we tried. We have a sin nature that causes us to sin, and with a single sin we lose the righteousness that perfectly keeping the law would have provided. As a result, God had to create a way for sinful man to receive His righteousness, which can only come by faith in the blood of Christ. Thank you, God, for giving me your righteousness through faith in the sacrifice of Your perfect Son.

So, now, as much as we can, let’s demonstrate the righteousness that has been imputed unto us by committing to living our lives characterized by things of the Spirit of God rather than the things of our flesh. After all, we are not our own, we’ve been bought with a price, the precious blood of the sinless Lamb of God! Even though we can’t completely live a righteous life due to our sin nature, let’s commit to trying!

We all need to ask ourselves, in what realm do I spend most of my time? Do I spend more time thinking about spiritual things and about how I can please God, or do I spend more time thinking about earthly things and how I can please myself? In other words, am I living according to the Spirit or according to the flesh? Ouch!

Do you have those times when you feel lifeless and totally separated from God? That’s the effect of sin. It breaks our fellowship with God. Were it not for the grace of God through the blood of Christ, we could never restore that fellowship. But - because of what Christ did for us, we can come to the throne of grace, confessing our sins and have our fellowship restored because God has declared us righteous.

So, my final question for each of us to consider is this: Do you feel lifeless and separated from God right now? Do you? Be honest with yourself!

If you do, get down on your knees (in your heart) and do something about it!

Let’s all strive for fellowship with God and the peace that it produces by keeping our thoughts fixed on the things of God! We should always focus on being pleasing to God, so our aim should be to walk in the spirit. Let’s all recommit ourselves to spending more time walking in the Spirit and less time walking in the flesh!

As we do, let’s keep in mind that **“there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”!**

Let’s pray.