

Romans 8:1-4

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. Today we're starting a new series. This summer we did a series in the book of Proverbs, and studying the book of Proverbs is sort of like eating a big salad with all kinds of veggies, maybe some nuts, dried fruits, goat cheese, all kinds of stuff. It's tasty, it's healthy, full of all kinds of different ingredients, but you can eat as much as you want because it's full of God's wisdom. Now, studying the book of Romans is a little bit different. It's a little bit like biting into a thick, juicy steak. Or if you don't like steak, think about a piece of flourless chocolate cake, something that's rich and dense, and you have to eat it slowly and chew it patiently in order to appreciate it and digest it. So, this fall we're going to spend three months on just one chapter in the book of Romans, Romans chapter 8. We're going to take it slowly, just a few verses each week, because these verses are packed with spiritual life and power, and we don't want to just skim through them quickly. We want to delve into them deeply and let them sink deeply into us. Now, the pastors at Trinity have committed to memorizing this chapter over the course of our sermon series this fall. And so, you can hold us accountable to that.

And we want to encourage you and challenge you to join us in doing this. So, we have about 13 weeks. We'll be spending 39 verses. That's about three verses a week. You can just go along with the sermons. But memorizing Scripture is a way to help it get more deeply into us. So, I want to encourage you and challenge you to join us in memorizing this chapter with us this fall. Today, we're looking at verses 1 to 4, and Paul says these words, 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 requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank You for these words. We pray that as we unpack them that they would be full of spiritual power and life for us through Your Spirit who is at work in us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Now, before we delve into today's verses, let me introduce our series in Romans by giving three brief accounts of how the book of Romans has been so impactful in the history of the church.

[3 : 1 4] I just want to begin with three brief stories of three people who became very influential in the history of the church who were deeply impacted at crucial turning points in their lives by this book.

So first, Augustine, maybe you've heard of him. He was a fifth century church leader and theologian. But before he was a Christian, he was an up-and-coming young scholar. He was a professor. He had made his way from North Africa where he was born to Milan in Italy where he was a university professor.

He was successful, but he was searching. He searched different philosophies and religious groups and went from one to the other looking for meaning. At the same time, he was increasingly troubled internally by his self-indulgent appetites and his inability to control them. And one day, he was particularly perplexed. He was talking with his friend in a backyard garden, and he writes this.

He says, Romans 13, 13 and 14, which says this.

He wrote later, Well, ten centuries later, a monk in the Augustinian order named Martin Luther attributed his spiritual awakening and the eventual Protestant Reformation that resulted as well to the book of Romans.

[5 : 16] And Luther writes this. He writes, I'd been captivated with an eagerness for understanding Paul in the epistle to the Romans, but a single saying in chapter 1 stood in my way. The righteousness of God is revealed.

I hated that word, righteousness of God, because I had been taught that God's righteousness was referred to his punishment of sinners. And though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt I was a sinner before God with a most disturbed conscience. I did not love. Indeed, I hated the righteous God who punished sinners. Secretly, I was angry with God.

Finally, by the mercy of God, as I meditated day and night, I paid attention to the context. In it, the righteousness of God is revealed. As it is written, he who through faith is righteous shall live. Then I began to understand the meaning. The righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, the good news, the righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith. As it is written, the righteous one lives by faith. Here I felt that I was altogether born again, and it entered paradise itself through open gates. I began to see the whole of Scripture in a totally new way. Whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul and Romans became to me a gateway to heaven. And one more, in the 18th century, John Wesley, who would become the founder of Methodism and the preacher in the evangelical revival in England, wrote this in his journal,

In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading, guess who, Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation.

An assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. The book of Romans has had a deep and wide impact in the lives of many individuals and even spurring movements in the history of the church. In the eighth chapter of Romans, what we're looking at this fall is the high point of the book. It's the climax of what chapters one through seven have been leading up to. It's the precursor to all that follows in nine through sixteen. So, some have compared Romans eight to the highest peak in a mountain range. And our hope as we soak in this chapter in the next three months is that we would experience what Augustine and Luther and Wesley and many other believers in the history of the church have experienced. The light of God's peace flooding our heart and driving out doubt and despair. The righteousness of God becoming inexpressibly sweet to us. Our hearts being strangely warmed, knowing that we belong to Christ and He belongs to us.

[8 : 35] And chapter eight begins on this great note of Christian assurance. There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. And chapter eight ends on another ringing declaration. If you look at verse 39, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Christ Jesus there is no condemnation for us and there's no separation from the love of God.

Now, this morning we're going to look at three things about this assurance in verse one of no condemnation. We're going to look at why we need this assurance in verse one. We're going to look at why we can have this assurance in verses two and three.

And finally, we'll look at what difference does it make in verse four. So, first, why we need this assurance? Now, to be clear what Paul's talking about here, the Greek word that's translated condemnation is a legal term. The Greek word is *katakrema*. *Kata* usually means according to or following from, and *crema* means a judgment or legal verdict. So, *katakrema* would be that which is according to a legal judgment or that follows from a legal verdict. It's a penalty or burden or punishment that results specifically from a guilty verdict. And now, in the context of Romans, Paul's referring to God's verdict, God's judgment on humanity. Paul announced this in chapter three, verse nine and ten, where he writes, all are under sin. No one is righteous. No, not one.

In Romans 6.23, he writes, the wages of sin is death. And elsewhere, Paul says that sin results in bondage, shame, and God's wrath, his righteous judgment on sin. We read earlier in chapter five, verse 18, one trespass led to condemnation for all humanity. According to Romans, this is the natural state of human being. Every human being is made in God's image and therefore worthy of respect. But ever since the beginning of the human race, every human being has disobeyed God and rejected his authority. And as a result, we stand under God's righteous judgment. And according to the Bible, we respond to this reality of unrighteousness in a sort of complicated way. We both manifest an awareness of our unrighteousness, and at the same time, we mask it. We try to hide from it. We try to run away from it. Think about how we do this. Sometimes we acknowledge that deep down, we have a gnawing sense of guilt and unease. We sense not only that all is not right in the world outside of us, but that all is not right inside of us either. And yet, don't we also run away from that sense of guilt and unease?

Isn't that why addictions are so alluring? Not just drugs and alcohol, but even things like sweets and Facebook. Good things become obsessions that we can't live without because they temporarily deliver us from that gnawing sense of guilt and unease. For some of us, our sense of guilt and unworthiness manifests itself, especially when we come to church to meet with the people of God.

[12:19] There's something inside us that says, you don't really belong here. More than one of you has told me, the first time I walked into this church, I was terrified that the roof would cave in. That's not just being paranoid. Some people are paranoid every moment of the day that something's going to happen. But somehow the church building and the church community gathered to worship the one true God confronts us with the reality that there is a God in heaven and that He is holy. And when you face a holy God, you sense your own unrighteousness.

Or perhaps our unrighteousness manifests itself in a constant drive to prove ourselves. And before somebody whose verdict on us really matters, we're desperate for somebody to say to us, you're right. You're worthy of being loved. You make a difference in this world for the better.

Because when we look down inside ourselves, we're completely insecure about whether any of those things are true of ourselves. And so we can't bear when people criticize us. We become defensive and combative. Or we withdraw into silence and try to run away and escape.

We both manifest this awareness of our unrighteousness, and at the same time we try to mask it and run away from it. But the Bible's diagnosis of the human condition is that all of us live under this verdict of unrighteousness.

And the fear of condemnation that results from it. But now in verse 1, Paul says, there's wonderful good news. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No more penalty that God's law would prescribe.

[14 : 24] No more punishment that our sins would deserve. No more burden of a legal threat hanging over us. No more living under the weight of guilt and shame and fear. No further need to prove ourselves because we are justified before the judge of all the universe.

You might say, boy, that does sound sort of nice. But how could you ever be confident of that? How could you ever know that that's true of you?

Well, that brings us to our second point. Not just why we need this assurance, but why we can have this assurance. Verse 2 and 3. Notice in verse 1, before we go on, there are two crucial words.

There is therefore now. Therefore now. Now by using these words, Paul's referring back to some things that he's already said in Romans 1 through 7. If you haven't read the first seven chapters of Romans, if you've never read them or if you haven't read them in a long time, let me encourage you to read them this week.

Starting at chapter 8, verse 1 is a bit like being airlifted to the top of a mountain peak. You can appreciate the view, but you'll appreciate it even more if you've walked the trail that leads all the way up to the top by reading 1 through 7.

[15 : 40] So let me encourage you to read 1 through 7. They'll set the stage for what we're looking at the rest of the fall. But briefly, the first four chapters of Romans focus on justification by faith in Christ.

And chapter 3, verses 21 and 22 is a key verse in the first four chapters. It says, but now, notice that word now, the righteousness of God has been manifested, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

In other words, because of Jesus Christ's faithful obedience, the righteousness of God is now available through faith to all who believe. We're justified by faith.

Romans 5 through 7 focuses on life in union with Christ. So these twin themes, justification by faith in Christ, life in union with Christ, are the two main themes of 1 through 7.

And a key verse in 5 through 7 is 7-6, which says again, but now we are released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit. So when Paul says, therefore now, he's looking back to what he's already said in chapters 1 through 7, and especially what he said is true now of us in Christ Jesus, that we're justified by faith, and that we're united with Christ through His Spirit.

[17 : 02] But he's also pointing forward by these words to what he says in verses 2 and 3. Notice verse 2 and verse 3 begin with the word for, or because. Paul gives two reasons why we can have this assurance.

Verse 2, For the Spirit of life has set you free. Now what does Paul mean, you might ask, by the law of the Spirit, and then the law of sin and death?

Paul uses the word law a lot in these verses. In fact, he uses the word law quite a lot in Romans, and especially in this section. Look up at chapter 7, verse 21.

Paul uses the word law in a couple different ways, so let me just show those to you. Chapter 7, verse 21, Paul says, So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

What the law means in this verse is a general principle. I find it to be a general principle that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. Go to the next verse, 722. For I delight in the law of God in my inner being.

[18 : 09] Now here Paul's using law to talk about the righteous standard of God. Sometimes law is a general principle, sometimes it's God's righteous standard, and then in 23, law is a power.

I see in my members another law, that is a power waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin. So there's three main ways Paul uses the word law in Romans.

One is to refer to God's righteous standards, sometimes expressed specifically in the law of Moses. One is referring to a general principle, and the other is referring to a power. In chapter 8, verse 2, I think the best understanding of the word law in that verse is as a power or as an authority.

So we could understand the verse as saying, the power or the authority of the Spirit of life has set me free from the authority of sin and death. In other words, the Holy Spirit personally liberates us from the power of sin to which we would otherwise be captive and from the sentence of death to which we would otherwise be doomed.

The picture Paul's painting in these verses is of a prisoner under the authority of sin, locked up in his cell, helpless in his bondage, one day doomed to die.

[19 : 27] But then a higher authority arrives who enters the prison, walks down the long hallway, takes out the key, opens the door, and says to him, you are now a free man.

You are set free from the law of sin and death. Paul says, this is what the Holy Spirit of life has done. For you personally, that word you in this verse is singular.

It's not plural. It's not just saying he's done it in a general way. He's saying he's done it for you personally. He's come and opened the door and set you free.

The Bible says that every one of you, through faith in Jesus Christ, can experience this personally liberating power of the Holy Spirit, who is stronger than everything else that binds you and stronger even than death.

Now, Paul will talk more about the work of the Holy Spirit as we continue in this chapter, but that's the first reason we can know that we can have this assurance, because the Spirit personally and powerfully sets us free from sin and death.

[20 : 43] The second reason why we can have this assurance is found in verse 3. Again, another 4 verse. 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. You know, you will never find freedom from the fear of condemnation just by trying harder to obey God's laws or live up to his standards.

God's law and commandments are good, because they express God's good and holy will. But God's law by itself can never deliver you from that sense we have deep down that we are unrighteous and that there's a verdict of condemnation hanging over us.

Not because the law is flawed, but because you and I are flawed. We have a rebellious nature, what Paul calls the flesh. And so we'll never live up to God's law and God's standards. We'll either seriously minimize them or we will find ourselves crushed by them.

Trying harder to obey God's law will never be the way to resolve the problem of our unrighteous standing before God and that insecurity that we feel as a result.

[22 : 06] But Paul says here, there's good news. God has done for us what the law could never do, what we could never do for ourselves. God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Verse 3.

The point of verse 3 is this. The Son of God took on what was ours in order to give us what was His. The Son of God took on our human nature, Paul says, He came in the likeness of sinful flesh.

Now, Paul chooses his words very carefully here. Again, this is thick stuff. It's packed. Densely packed. And every word matters.

Paul chooses his words very carefully here because Jesus never sinned. Not in thought, not in word, not in deed. And so Paul is careful. Paul doesn't just say, the Son of God came in sinful flesh.

That would be too strong a way of saying it because that would imply that Christ was actually sinful, which He wasn't. No, He says He came in the likeness of sinful flesh.

[23 : 07] His flesh was like ours, but it was not sinful and corrupted like ours. At the same time, Paul wants to emphasize how completely the Son of God identified with us.

He came in the likeness of our flesh. He didn't just appear to be human. He became human. He didn't just float through this world with a protective bubble around Him.

Hebrews 4 says, He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin. He never turned away from God. So He took on our human nature, but not just that, He willingly received the condemnation our sins deserve.

God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son. Verses 3 and 4 together are actually one long and very complex sentence in the Greek. But this is the main clause.

God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son. Now in some sense, that happened throughout Jesus' whole life. Jesus constantly submitted His humanity to the will of God the Father.

[24 : 17] He faithfully resisted the temptations that the world and the devil confronted Him with. But ultimately, this verse is speaking of what happened when Christ died on the cross.

N.T. Wright put it this way in his commentary on this verse. In the death of the Messiah, the judicial punishment of sin was meted out fully and finally so that sinners over whose head the condemnation had hung might be liberated from this threat once and for all.

The punishment that our sins deserved was meted out fully and finally on Christ at the cross so that sinners over whose head that condemnation had hung might be free from it once and for all.

Isn't that good news? Because Christ took on what was ours, our human nature and even our sin, we can now have what is His.

He has sent His Spirit to set us free from the law of sin and death. In Him we have peace and joy and hope and assurance and life. The Spirit has set us free because Christ has taken the penalty that our sins deserved and there is no more condemnation for us.

[25 : 46] That's why we can have this assurance. That's why we can be confident in it. Not because we've tried harder to obey the law but because of what the Spirit has done and because of what Christ has done.

And of course it was all the plan of God the Father. It's a work of the whole Trinity. But finally we need to ask if we have this assurance what difference does it make?

And this is what verse 4 addresses. Earlier this week I was visiting with somebody and we read these verses together and we talked about what it means that there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus.

That Jesus died for every last one of our sins on the cross. That we don't have to be afraid of God punishing us for them anymore. Our punishment has been taken. Our debt has been paid in full glorious forgiveness.

And I asked I said what difference does that make to you? And he said that's amazing. I know that God has forgiven everything that I've done and it's a lot.

[26 : 50] But he said I also have a question. Sometimes I go ahead and choose to sin because I know God has forgiven me and I know He'll forgive me again. Can I do that?

He's more honest than most of us. He's more honest than most of us. He asked a straight question so I gave him a straight answer. I said no. I've become more blunt.

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