

+ In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti + Amen.

Text: Romans 8:1

Theme: No Condemnation



Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

The Bible is full of history, God's work in history. So, the Bible is also filled with truth. It contains historical truths, moral truths, and theological truths. The historical truths of the Bible aren't all of the same importance. It rained for forty days and forty nights at the time of Noah's flood, not 30 days, or 50 days. Yet that fact hardly compares with the truth that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and then rose again on the third day. The truth that Mount Sinai was the place where God delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses is hardly on par with the truth that sin, left unresolved, separates humans eternally from God. But all of the truths of the Bible hang together. The truths of creation and redemption are "supra-truths", so to speak. They are reality-defining and destiny-changing. It's these truths especially, the ones that reveal God's love to us in the incarnate Jesus, that rightly occupy our attention.

For some time now we have been working through the letter of Saint Paul to the Christians in Rome in the Sunday lectionary. Consider committing yourself to reading through the Book of Romans. It will challenge you and edify you. It can only help to strengthen your faith. In this letter the apostle spells out clearly and comprehensively the implications of these core biblical teachings. He says today, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"<sup>1</sup> It follows on from last week's depiction on how the sinner grapples with the power of sin. Jesus removes the condemnation. This is Good News, truly fantastic news. It means Christ has made reparations for the offense of our sins, so the consciences of believers can be at ease. Life is completely re-orientated.

Christians are now led by the Holy Spirit. They are no longer in bondage to the sinful nature. Dear friends, you are now freed from the fear of judgment by obeying the law, by striving to follow the Ten Commandments. You are freed to follow God's will because Christ has released you from the punishment against sin. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus completely changes the relationship between the sinner and the law, between the sinner and God.

Previous to this intervention of Jesus, before the gifting of faith through the Holy Spirit, prior to the washing of regeneration in holy baptism, we are/were unable to truly love God in any way. The unbelieving only serve themselves and find security in false gods. The failure isn't due to lack of effort, but incapacity. Such is the power of original sin. The apostle says, "*The*

*mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*"<sup>2</sup>

The perpetual challenge of Christian living is our tendency to underestimate the power of sin and therefore underappreciate the power of the gospel. I say perpetual, because Satan is always trying to drag us back under a scheme of works-righteousness or pacify us with the deception that our sins are too petty to be concerned with. He doesn't have to do this with unbelievers, he targets us.

So, let's consider some of the implications St. Paul is speaking of in these verses. If, for example, you are convinced you are not a sinner (at least not a serious one that needs forgiveness), you are not able to hear the gospel. Yes, mechanically the words can be received into your ears and knock around in your head. But those words will bring you no comfort. They only transmit information to you. Need facilitates receptivity. It's not the healthy that need a physician. It's not the self-governed that need to be freed. It's not the wealthy that need charity. It's not the secure that need to be rescued. It's not those in a stable family that need to be adopted. It's not those whose bellies are full that need a meal. It's not the innocent that need a gracious judge.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit must still convict you, and He will only do that through the law. The Scriptures are full of specific examples. The Spirit sent Samuel to convict Saul<sup>3</sup>, Nathan to rebuke David<sup>4</sup>, and Elijah to confront Ahab<sup>5</sup>, just to name a few. All of us can be added to the list. In the public assembly of the gathered congregation, the pastor can't know who is too puffed up in self-righteousness to be able to hear the gospel. Only the Holy Spirit can know this. Even the sinner in the complexity of self-deception doesn't always know. I don't know, unless you've personally communicated it to me, when you answer this question, "Do you confess that you have sinned, and do you repent of your sins?" whether your response is apathetic, a mindless repetition of the printed answer, heartfelt, or even honest. But the Spirit not only knows, He is the surgeon and the nursemaid of your heart.

Remember, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"<sup>6</sup> So, conversely, ideally, and specifically the repentant **only need to hear the gospel**. In other words, as soon as the law has done its work, the gospel is necessary and it alone can comfort the soul. The sick need a doctor. The enslaved need freedom. The poor need charity. The endangered need rescuing. The orphaned need adoption. The hungry need food. The guilty long for pardon. Obviously, in a public worship service the Holy Spirit must sort out who needs what, when and how much. But it's for this reason that the fulness of God's truth must always be proclaimed. We don't know who the Holy Spirit might bring into this space, but the fundamental needs are all the same.

This, dear friends, is the great privilege, the greatest joy of the Office of the Ministry. As a servant of the great Servant, an under shepherd of the Chief Shepherd, to announce the free and full forgiveness of sins. It's the only power that can thaw frozen hearts and enlighten

darkened minds. It overthrows Satan, subdues hell, and allows us to laugh in the face of death. We laugh not in ignorance, or arrogance, or madness, but because death no longer has any power over us. Why? Because of this central truth, *“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.”*<sup>7</sup>

If you are hanging out for the assurance of pardon, forgiveness, and peace you have come to the right place. This is the hall of reconciliation, where heaven meets earth, not in displays of pomp and circumstance, but in the proclamation of truth and the participation of divine blessings...in word and water, bread, and wine. If you are aching to know, to really be comforted about whether your transgression of betrayal, or unfaithfulness, or hardheartedness, or arrogance, your petty sins or haunting iniquities, really can be wiped clean and put in the past, whether you can really start anew and afresh, then there is Good News for you. The Saviour doesn't joke about such things. He doesn't jest. He doesn't make hollow promises. Jesus said, *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*<sup>8</sup>

In Christ, the empty are filled. The cast out are gathered in. The forgotten are remembered. The forsaken are loved. Dear friends, you are loved with such a joyous and unconditional love in and by and through the beloved Redeemer that you'll never comprehend it until the life to come. Next week we'll continue in Romans 8. It's enough now to say that the call to Christian discipleship is a call to the high and holy privilege of serving others with the same grace with which we have been served. *“There is...no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Amen.

+ In nomine Jesu +

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost  
12 July 2020  
Reverend Darrin L. Kohrt

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Samuel 15

<sup>5</sup> See 1 Kings 18

<sup>7</sup> Romans 6:9-10

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:7-8

<sup>4</sup> See 2 Samuel 12

<sup>6</sup> Romans 8:1

