

No Condemnation

Romans 8: 1–4¹

Therefore Now.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

Seriously.

¹ There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

It was almost exactly 2 years ago that we started going, on and off, to this deep, deep well that is the book of Romans and I wonder if I've done it justice. I wonder if we've really grasped the truth that overflows backward and forward from this one verse.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

“There is”, the first two English words in that sentence, are supplied (and wisely, I might add), by the translation, and the NIV puts them in at two and three (again, perhaps, wisely).

¹ **Therefore**, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1 NIV84

Without them, we would have an even more remarkable statement, especially since the last chapter ended with the words,

²⁵ ...So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin... Romans 7:25 ESV

reflecting the utter wretchedness of even a Christian who might vainly attempt to be sanctified—to be made holy—by the works of the law, operating on the motive or power of the flesh. Even with the best of intent, Paul wrote, even though we have the desire to do what is good, we do not, in our flesh, have the power to carry it out. Even though, in the inner man, we may delight in God's law, there is another law at work in the members of our bodies taking us captive to the law of sin that dwells there.

Again, we're reminded of question and answer 60 in the Heidelberg Catechism.

...my conscience...

(yours too, if you're a Christian)

...accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil,²

But,

²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Romans 7:25 ESV

¹ All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

² “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 60”, ed., CRCNA (Christian Reformed Church in North America), *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Publications, 1988), 38.

without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me.³

You too, if you have been brought to God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. If you have been saved, if you belong to Jesus Christ,

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1 NIV84

In a previous congregation, there was a man who would often greet me at the back of the sanctuary after the service by summarizing what I had said in a sentence or two, and today, that's it. I have not buried the lead this morning.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

No Condemnation.

Right now, right here.

¹ There is...no condemnation... Romans 8:1 ESV

Three years ago, I preached a sermon by this same title from John chapter 8—the story of the woman caught in adultery—and I have to confess, I was tempted to just recycle that one, because there's no better illustration. Jesus had gone up to the temple in the morning, and was sitting down teaching the crowd that inevitably gathered, when the scribes and Pharisees came to him bringing a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery—a sinful woman, a covenant breaker. Of course, adultery takes two, so we always have to wonder, but in this case, they brought the woman placed her in the midst of the crowd, and said,

⁴ ...“Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. **So what do you say?**” John 8:4–5 ESV

which was the whole point. They didn't really care about the woman. They didn't really care that much about the sin. They said this—they asked the question—to test Him, that they might have some charge to bring against Him. They were trying to get Jesus to say or do something that would contradict the Law of God, or maybe even get Him in trouble with the Roman authorities (although that seems less likely).

Jesus, who was already seated, bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground—and we just don't know what He wrote; if we needed to, John would have told us—but as they continue to press Him,

⁷ ...he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” John 8:7 ESV

Now, there's more going on in this whole story than we have time to deal with this morning, but notice that Jesus was not denying or even altering the law of God. He was upholding it. In Deuteronomy, chapter 17, verses 6 and 7, God said,

³ “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 60”, *Ecumenical Creeds*, 38.

⁶ On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. Deuteronomy 17:6–7
ESV

And furthermore,

⁷ **The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward** the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. Deuteronomy 17:6–7 ESV

The implication in John 8 may well be that the scribes and Pharisees who brought her were aware of her adultery because they were complicit in the crime, and would have been bearing witness against themselves. Perhaps that's what Jesus was writing about on the ground. Regardless,

⁸ ...once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. John 8:8 ESV

But here's the thing... Verse 9 says,

⁹ ...when they heard it... John 8:9 ESV

when they heard Jesus' answer,

“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” John 8:7 ESV

...they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. John 8:8–9 ESV

Which brings us to the best part. I think it would be safe to say that when these men took this woman, perhaps straight from her bed that morning, to see justice done upon her in accordance with the law of God, she was probably pretty convinced that this was going to be the very worst day of her life; the public humiliation alone... But in the end, the law brought her to Jesus, which is exactly what the law is meant to do (more about that this evening). And

¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” John 8:10 ESV

¹¹ She said, “No one, Lord.” John 8:11 ESV

(which must have been pretty obvious). And here it is again; the heart of the matter—the good in God's good news to sinners like you and me.

...Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you...” John 8:11 ESV

¹ There is therefore now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

...go, and from now on sin no more.” John 8:11 ESV

I think we can probably assume that she listened; that this daughter of Israel, whoever she was, a child of the covenant, found grace when the law brought her to Christ, and went away

justified, because the law brings us to the grace of Christ—again, that’s what it’s for—and in Jesus the mercy, the grace, the love of God are manifest, for

¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation... ^{1 John 4:10 ESV}

(He sent His Son to be the sacrifice that satisfies His wrath)

...for our sins. ^{1 John 4:10 ESV}

Fully Satisfied.

An older version of Lord’s Day 1 in the Heidelberg Catechism, even says it this way. We are asked, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” and we’re taught to answer,

That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ...⁴

(so far, it’s similar to the version that we all know, but it goes on). I (we)

...belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ who with his precious blood **has fully satisfied for all my sins**, and delivered me from all the power of the devil...⁵

The thing is, and this will sound very familiar to those who were here for the evening service last Sunday, this propitiation—this satisfaction—is the very heart of the gospel but not because God is paying off Satan to let a few repentant sinners return to Him. The fact is, it is God Himself who must be propitiated. He is terribly angry about both the sin we are born with and the sins that we personally commit, this according to Lord’s Day 4⁶ (and, more importantly, according to the Scriptures), and as a just judge, He must punish it both now and in eternity. In fact, His justice **demand**s that sin, committed against His supreme majesty be punished with the supreme penalty—eternal punishment of body and soul.

So, it is not Satan, or the lesser gods of the pagan religions, who need to be appeased. It is the God who created us for His glory. It is the God who made us to reflect His image in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness. And this is where Christianity differs from all the other religions of the world. In most, if not all, religions, if there is a need for someone to propitiate the gods, it is man who must do so. The sacrifice must be offered. The ritual must be observed. Payment must be made. This has had people from the idols of ancient Canaan to the ziggurats of Mesoamerica offering their children in the fire, and tearing the beating hearts from countless slaves to appease the wrath of their demon gods.

But God, who requires that His justice be satisfied—paid in full—is also rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved His chosen people.

4 “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1”, ed., CRCNA (Christian Reformed Church in North America), *Psalter Hymnal (Centennial Edition)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, Inc., 1959), 22.

5 “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1”, *Psalter Hymnal*, 22.

6 “The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 10”, *Ecumenical Creeds*, 16.

²² ...For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. Romans 3:22–25 ESV

For,

¹¹ ...when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:11–12 ESV

Our Lord Jesus Christ was given to satisfy for our sin, to set us completely free, and to make us right with God. In other words, He was given to save us, and in that salvation

¹⁰ ...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:10 ESV

He

...has fully satisfied for all [our] sins...⁷

the sin we were born with (original sin), and the sins that we have personally committed; the sins that we committed in the past, and the sins that we will commit in the future, And we have and we will, for, as we saw last week,

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:8 ESV

And that's all of us; you and me both. And

¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:10 ESV

But thanks be to God! Jesus Christ, our Faithful Savior,

...has fully satisfied for all [our] sins...⁸

So,

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

And it doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't matter what you have done. I once heard the story of a man who had gone off with the Germans during World War 2, and committed unspeakable crimes against the Jews in the concentration camps. He got away with it; because he was not ethnically German, people believed him when he said that he had been a prisoner himself. So, he moved to North America, married, raised a family, kept calm and carried on.

But in his spirit he was not calm. In his heart, the things that he had done, the murders in which he had been complicit were eating away at him for decades after the war, until he was

⁷ "The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1", *Psalter Hymnal*, 22.

⁸ "The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1", *Psalter Hymnal*, 22.

consumed by it. At one point, for other reasons, he was excommunicated by the church of which he was a member, but when the day came that his doctor said he didn't have much time, he called for the elders to come, and with a broken heart he vomited out the whole vile story. Then he asked, "Do you think God would ever forgive me? For that? For all that I have done? For the blood on my hands?"

The pastor was no doubt shocked. I'm certain that was not the story that he had expected to hear that evening. And what can you say? Well, wisely he retreated to God's own promise.

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ^{1 John 1:8 ESV}.

But, and this is of ultimate importance,

⁹ If we confess our sins, he... ^{1 John 1:8-9 ESV}

The Living God—the God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, the God whose love is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him⁹—He

...is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ^{1 John 1:9 ESV}

and

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. ^{Psalms 103:12 ESV}

It was true for that war criminal. It's true for me, and it's true for you. So, believe it. Take it home with you this morning and hold tight to it for the rest of your life. It's the promise of the Living God. Trust in Christ alone—turn from your sin—and whether you're just now looking to Him for the first time, or you've been a Christian all your life,

¹ There is therefore **now no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. ^{Romans 8:1 ESV}

9 Cf. Psalm 103:8-14.