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Romans #29
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The Two Most Glorious Words a Sinful Soul Can Hear Romans 8:1-4

What are the two most glorious words that a sinful soul can hear? What are the two most encouraging and heartwarming words that I could speak to you today? What two words have more power to lift you out of depression than any others? What two words can put your fears to rest and deliver you from anxiety and doubt? What two words do each and every one of you here today need to hear from God? ***No condemnation!***

If I were to change the title of this message and ask the question yet again, it should probably be: What are the **four** most glorious words that a sinful soul can hear? I have expanded it from two words to four because of how Romans 8 concludes. It opens with the almost unimaginably splendid words “***no condemnation***” and concludes with the equally stupendous words, “***no separation***” (Rom. 8:39).

I could easily stop right there. I’m not sure there is anything more I need to say to you that you need to hear. If you are “in Christ Jesus” by faith there are four inescapable, undeniable, unimaginably beautiful and unfathomably glorious words that are enough to sustain you through the worst of times and set you free from despair and discouragement. Those four words are: ***no condemnation*** and ***no separation!***

But the greater news still is that not only will you never suffer condemnation from God, you will experience indescribably joyful happiness and peace and bliss in your relationship with him. You have not simply been delivered from something, but also **to** something. You are no longer under the penalty of the law, but you are in Christ and thus destined for an eternity of profoundly loving fellowship and intimacy with him. It is one thing for a person to be forgiven. It is something else for that same person to be reconciled and able to enjoy God and the blessing of his presence.

But there’s more. It is one thing to be saved. It is something else entirely to know with absolute assurance that the relationship you have with him will never end. Saved! Praise God. But also never to be separated. That salvation you have in Jesus will never be taken from you. If you are in Christ Jesus, if he is your Lord and Savior, if his life, death, and resurrection are your only hope for forgiveness and eternal life, I can assure you today that there is ***no condemnation*** that you need to fear and that there is ***no possibility of separation*** for you in your relationship to God.

These two, two-word declarations, function much like bookends for the eighth chapter of Romans. They serve well as summary statements of the gospel and what God has done and will do for us in Jesus Christ. We will have to wait several weeks before we arrive at the close of Romans 8 and its promise of ***no separation*** from the love of Christ, but today we will dive deeply into the good news that there is now ***no condemnation*** for those in Jesus.

One more brief observation is in order before we dive into our text today. Many regard Romans 8 as the most important chapter in the Bible. I won’t argue with that. One thing about this chapter that often catches many by surprise is the frequency of references to the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word for “spirit,” *pneuma* occurs 21x in Romans 8 and all but two of them refer to the Holy Spirit (see v. 15a and 16b). The word *pneuma*, or “spirit”, is found only 5x in chapters 1-7 and 8x in chapters 9-16. The fact that it occurs 21x in chapter 8 alone means that it appears in this chapter more often than in any other single chapter in the NT. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in

Romans 8 almost once every two verses. Compare that with 1 Corinthians 12, the chapter on spiritual gifts, where the Spirit is mentioned once in every three verses. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 15x in vv. 1-17 and 4x in vv. 18-39.

This is simply to alert you to the fact that although Paul didn't say much about the Spirit in the preceding seven chapters, he cannot envision the truth of the gospel and the dynamics of Christian living apart from the work of the Spirit.

But it is also a clear and unmistakable reminder that God's provision for weak, broken, struggling people like you and me isn't more scoldings or threats or intimidation or fear-based and shame-driven horror stories about what happens when you mess up and sin. God's provision is the Holy Spirit living in you and empowering you to obey what God has commanded.

The Holy Spirit operates in each of us internally to give us reasons why trusting the joy that Jesus gives is more satisfying than the fleeting pleasures of sin that the world, the flesh, and the Devil offer. What we will see in Romans 8 is that the role of the Spirit is to reveal to our clouded minds and illumine our darkened souls and give us eyes to see and a heart to feel the joy and beauty of what it means to have these two words spoken over our lives: No Condemnation!

"therefore" (v. 1a)

By now you have undoubtedly grown accustomed to hearing me direct your attention to the word "therefore" any time it appears in Scripture. Well, here it is again. But there is a difference of opinion on what it is that Paul has already said that now leads him to draw the conclusion that there is no condemnation for those in Christ.

Clearly Paul is saying that the verdict of "no condemnation" is based on something. It is because of something that Paul has said earlier in Romans that he can now declare with unquestioned confidence that whoever is in Christ Jesus will never, ever face condemnation. But what is it? What is it in Romans 1-7 that justifies the conclusion that you and I are not under the condemnation that our sin would otherwise warrant?

Some point to Paul's statement in Romans 7:24-25 that a day is coming when God will deliver us from the body of death. Since God will in the future fully and finally set us free from the presence of sin in our bodies, we now, today, can rejoice and rest in the fact that there is no condemnation awaiting us. The verdict has been rendered on your behalf in the present. You are no longer condemned! You are forgiven! The condemnation you deserved and otherwise should and would have suffered has been suffered and endured in your place by Jesus. That is why Paul could speak so confidently in 7:24-25 about being set free from his body of death.

Others think Paul is pointing back to all that he has said in Romans 7:14-25. Perhaps you have emerged from this challenging text feeling hopelessly lost and condemned. As you reflect on the numerous ways and instances when you failed to live by the good and righteous law of God, as you contemplate the times you did the very opposite of what you knew to be right, instead doing what was wrong, you may have concluded that there is no hope for you. The only possible outcome of your struggle with indwelling sin is condemnation.

But Romans 8:1 loudly and unmistakably shouts otherwise! When you first see that word "therefore" with which v. 1 begins, you may likely conclude that the only outcome of your battle with indwelling sin is eternal separation from Christ. But if you are "in Christ" Paul says that "therefore" there is "no condemnation" for you. The very thing that hovers over your head like an ever-present dark cloud of death, threatening to undermine your joy and zeal in life, namely, condemnation, is gone!

Although there is certainly a measure of truth in each of these suggestions, I think the word “therefore” is designed to point us back to everything Paul has said in the first seven chapters of Romans, specifically what God has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Why is there “no condemnation”? If condemnation is what we deserve, and God is just and holy, how is it that Paul can speak with such confidence that it is something we need never fear? It is because God has sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (Rom. 3:25) and has redeemed us from the sin in which we were so deeply immersed (Rom. 3:24).

No condemnation awaits us because Jesus endured the full penalty of the law in our place on the cross. There is no condemnation for those who have faith in Jesus because they are the ones whom God has already justified (Rom. 3:28; 4:5; 5:1). As if that were not enough to warrant the conclusion that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, Paul said so clearly in Romans 5:6-11 that God loved us even when we were sinners and at enmity with him. We have been “reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom. 5:10). “Therefore . . .”

“condemnation” (v. 1b)

Let’s be honest about the word “condemnation.” It’s ugly and foreboding and depressing and hope-killing. It just sounds nasty. There are only three places in the NT where this particular word is used, and they are all in Romans. There are other words that are synonymous with it, but this word occurs only here in Romans 8:1 and in Romans 5:16 and 18. You may remember that when Paul was describing the effect of Adam’s fall on the human race, he used the word condemnation:

“And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought **condemnation**, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification” (Rom. 5:16).

“Therefore, as one trespass led to **condemnation** for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18).

Condemnation points to the condition of being lost and damned and alienated from God. But God has decided not to punish or impose any penalty whatsoever on those who are in Christ Jesus. The “condemnation” that came upon us by virtue of our having been “in Adam” has now been removed because we are now “in Christ Jesus.” The way we use this word in English helps to illustrate the good news that Paul is declaring. Several examples will suffice.

A dilapidated building that is old and poorly constructed is scheduled for demolition. A sign is placed on the outside that says, “Condemned.”

The President “condemned” the actions of a deranged gunman who randomly shot 8 people at his former place of employment.

A man on death row is “condemned” to die for having committed premeditated murder.

As ugly, sinister, and ominous as the word “condemnation” is when used in these ways, it is worse still when it comes to the question of a person’s eternal destiny. To be condemned by God means that you are liable to endure and suffer the penal consequences of your sin. To be condemned by God means you are heading for hell, unless you repent and turn to faith in Jesus.

Thus *to be “condemned” is the absolute antithesis of what it means to be “justified.”* We’ve seen on several occasions that justification means we are righteous in God’s sight and accepted into his presence. Condemnation, on the other hand, means that a person is unrighteous in God’s sight and to be rejected and excluded from his presence. If to be justified is to stand boldly before

God clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to be condemned is to stand guilty before God clothed in your own unrighteousness.

As unpleasant as it is, I want you to think about the word condemnation and all that it entails: the uncertainty of today, the loss of hope, fear of the future, shattered dreams, painful separation, paralyzing guilt, rejection, shameful exposure, and the list could go on and on. When you give full weight to the implications of that term, Paul's declaration of "no condemnation" suddenly begins to echo and reverberate in our hearts with a power and force that makes it feel as if we are going to explode with joy, exuberance, and gratitude.

If you are in Christ Jesus, there is no valid reason why you should ever again experience fear, apprehension, doubt, or suspicion about your relationship with God or your eternal destiny. That doesn't mean you *won't* experience such fear. It does mean there is no valid reason why you *should*. Will you at times find doubt and anxiety rising up in your heart that perhaps God is really against you rather than for you? Yes. But you shouldn't! You don't have to! Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains:

"There are many who misunderstand this. They seem to think of the Christian as a man who, if he confesses his sin and asks for forgiveness, is forgiven. At that moment he is not under condemnation. But then if he should sin again, he is back once more under condemnation. Then he repents and confesses his sin again, and asks for pardon, and he is cleansed once more. So to them the Christian is a man who is constantly passing from one state to the other; back and forth; condemned, not condemned. Now that, according to the Apostle, is a wholly mistaken notion, and a complete failure to understand the position. The Christian is a man who can never be condemned; he can never come into a state of condemnation again. 'No condemnation!' The Apostle is not talking about his experience, but about his position, his standing, his status; he is in a position in which, being justified, he can never again come under condemnation. That is the meaning of this word 'no'. It means 'Never'."

Regardless of how you may feel, regardless of the heaviness in your heart when you think of the many ways you have failed, if you are in Christ Jesus through faith, you will never, ever face the prospect of condemnation.

Why is it so important that you and I know this? Why am I taking the time to press home this point? The reason is simple. There is little hope that you will make any progress in your battle with sin until such time as you know that ***in spite of your sin there is no condemnation for you.*** Someone once said that the only sin that can be defeated is the sin that has been forgiven. You and I will find the power and incentive to pursue obedience and a life of holiness only when we come to fully grasp what it means to say, No condemnation!

I'm sure that all of you are aware of how most people in the professing Christian world try to motivate and encourage others to turn from sin and to live a godly life. They use fear tactics. They describe in vivid and often gory detail the horrid consequences of sin and immorality and idolatry. They threaten you with images of hell fire. They try to induce shame and self-loathing in your heart. Sometimes they will even hold forgiveness and salvation in front of you like the proverbial carrot on a stick, to be yours only if you avoid certain sins and perform deeds of kindness.

But that is not the strategy of Paul and the rest of the NT. Do you know what Paul says to motivate you to obedience, to pursue holiness, to present your members to God for righteousness rather than to sin unto death? He declares: No condemnation!

Consider the very worst experiences you've had in life, be that physical sickness or disease or divorce or the betrayal by someone you considered a trustworthy friend. Did you at any time while in the midst of these heartbreaking realities stop and think: It must be because God hates me. It must be because I am still under the threat of divine condemnation. No! For example, you desperately long to be accepted and enjoyed by others, but you experience only rejection. Or you invest your life savings in a business and devote all your energy to building it into a successful enterprise only to watch it crumble into bankruptcy. Or your child informs you that she is attracted only to other girls. Or your spouse informs you that he has been unfaithful to his marriage vows.

It is precisely in those moments when you find it most difficult to enjoy your relationship with God and to feel his love and affection. And the only thing that will elevate your heart and enable your spirit to find hope and purpose and power is when you hear God say to you, No condemnation! Simply put, *being* right with God must precede *doing* right for God.

Nothing paralyzes us as quickly and powerfully as shame and guilt. And nothing does more to liberate us and lift us up than the declaration, No condemnation! As my friend Mike Bickle would often say, "When you feel beautiful before God, you feel powerful before sin."

"But Sam. Won't this encourage people to sin? If you so strongly emphasize that there is now no condemnation for those in Christ, what keeps those who are in Christ from turning to immorality and licentiousness and sinful self-indulgence?" It's a good question to ask. Do you use this truth as an excuse to defect to the other side or to rationalize sin? Or does it create such joy in your soul that your only thoughts are of how you can enjoy this God who has made salvation possible?

In fact, living under condemnation actually strengthens and solidifies sin in your life. How? The pressure of condemnation, the feeling of shame, the fear of judgment, eventually become unbearable. We despair of ever being free or ever feeling good about ourselves. Sinning then becomes even more attractive: an outlet, an appealing escape, a way of easing the pressure of bringing some measure of feeling alive and valuable. We so often sin because it anesthetizes the pain of depression and despair. The person who uses the truth of "no condemnation" to justify their sin should carefully examine whether or not they are truly in Christ Jesus.

"in Christ Jesus" (v. 1c)

But note well: Paul does not say Christians are free from condemnation because they are sinless, but because they are in Christ. *No Condemnation* is not a universal blessing. It is reserved for those who are *in Christ* through faith. We must be careful to resist the temptation of false sentimentality that beckons us to give false assurance to a non-Christian simply because they are "sincere," "nice," "religious," or because they "believe in God."

This is yet one more proof that Paul was not a universalist. He did not believe that everyone, regardless of what they think of Christ or regardless of their relationship with or response to Christ, are saved. No. The promise and assurance of "no condemnation" is only for those who are "in Christ Jesus." And it is for **all** who are "in Christ Jesus."

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? We saw the answer back in Romans 6 where Paul spoke of this spiritual solidarity or covenant union that God has established between the believer and the Lord Jesus. To be "in Christ Jesus" is simply a metaphor of personal communion with Christ via the indwelling Holy Spirit; an undefinable, mystical oneness or spiritual fellowship with the Lord.

Thus there are two levels of experience for the believer, two kingdoms of which he/she is a citizen, two perspectives from which we may view life. For us today, we are in Oklahoma City. In

a real sense, that is *where* we are. But it cannot and must not ever exhaust *what* we are. We are more than citizens of an earthly city or state or country.

No matter where you are geographically and physically, what you are spiritually will never change. You may be *at* work, *at* play, *overseas*, *under* the weather, *out of* money, but you are always and unchangeably *in* Christ! You may be *down* in the dumps, *over* the hill, or *beside* yourself, but you are always and unchangeably *in* Christ! You may be *at* paradise or *in* prison, *at* the movies or *in* Edmond, but you are always and unchangeably *in* Christ!

And when is this true? **Now!** Not when we get older or more mature. Not when we overcome all sinful habits. Not when we get past being hurt by others. Not when all our bills are paid. Not when we get a new job. Not when we learn more of the Bible. Not when people start treating us nicely and with respect. Not when we get the praise and public adulation we think we deserve. Not when our enemies stop persecuting us. Not when the wrongs against us have been put right. Not when we've been vindicated. Not when we stop making fools of ourselves in public. **Now!**

This is what you need to hear and understand and believe today. God's attitude toward you, his thoughts of you, all his intentions toward you are driven by love, not anger or disappointment or frustration or wrath. When Paul says that there is "no condemnation" he means for you to hear the positive side of that truth, namely, that instead of "condemnation" there is only commitment and compassion and forgiveness and heartfelt affection and mercy. It doesn't matter if you are suffering through a bad or disastrous day, or a wonderfully successful and joyful day. God's attitude is always and ever one in which there is "no condemnation"!

How would your daily existence be different if you truly understood and believed this? How would your marriage and your approach to your job and your co-workers be different if you truly understood and believed this? How would your battle with temptation from the world, the flesh, and the Devil be impacted if you truly understood and believed this? How would your worship on a Sunday or on any day be affected by this truth?

Where did our Condemnation go? (vv. 2-4)

So, what happened to the "condemnation" under which we used to live? Did it just vanish of its own accord? When God recorded our sins and transgressions, was he using some sort of magical disappearing ink? Was God sitting at his computer one day, contemplating your countless failures in life, and he accidentally hit the delete button, removing from sight and memory all your sins? No. The removal from us of all condemnation was neither accidental nor inadvertent. So, how did we go from being condemned to being forgiven and reconciled? The answer is in vv. 2-4.

First of all, it didn't happen because we obeyed the law of God. Obedience to the law could not, cannot, and never will save a single soul. This isn't because the law is sinful. We are! The law was weak or impotent to save us because we were impotent to obey it. But what the law could not, cannot, and never will do, God can, has, and always will accomplish!

What Paul called "condemnation" in v. 1, he now refers to as "the law of sin and death" in v. 2. That law is the requirement that whoever fails to live up to the perfect standard of God's holiness must suffer death. But there is another law, "the law of the Spirit of life" that has secured for us, through Jesus Christ, forgiveness and freedom from all condemnation. The Holy Spirit has set us free from this death and condemnation by working in us faith in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. Simply put, the Holy Spirit brings to us life in the place of condemnation by leading us to faith in God's Son who suffered that condemnation in our place. How did that come about? Verse 3 gives us the answer.

What the law couldn't do, God did. And he did it by sending "his own Son" (v. 3). Why didn't Paul simply say that God the Father sent "the Son"? Why "*his own*" Son? He says this to emphasize to us the cost of "no condemnation"! The condemnation we deserved was taken from us and laid on God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

It was by sending his own son that God "condemned sin in the flesh"? Whose "flesh"? Surely it is the flesh or body of Jesus. When his body was nailed to a cross, God condemned him instead of us. The sentence of death, incurred because of our sin, was carried out in and on the person of Jesus. The guilt and condemnation that you and I deserved was imputed to Jesus who endured its penalty in our place.

But wait a minute. How could God "condemn" sin in the flesh of Jesus if Jesus was himself without sin? Wouldn't that be unjust? It would, were it not for the fact that "for our sake he [God the Father] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). That is to say, God imputed or reckoned unto Christ the guilt and condemnation we deserved. He was treated as guilty of our sin, and punished accordingly, that we might be recipients of his righteousness and thereby saved.

Now, notice carefully how vv. 1-3 are followed by v. 4. In other words, it is our justification, our being set free from the condemnation of the law, that leads to our sanctification, our obedience to it. Here is how John Piper put it: "There is a necessary priority to pardon before power. There is a necessary priority to justification before sanctification. If you are going to get victory over particular sins you have to have joyful confidence that those sins are forgiven. The confidence of 'no condemnation' must precede and empower the radical warfare of transformation."

How truly amazing is the grace of God! The law that we could not obey, the law that consequently brought us under condemnation, is now fulfilled in and through us by means of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. It is fulfilled in our obedience, not in order that we might be saved, but because we already are! Pardon produces power! And those two can never be reversed. Praise be to God!