

Sermon #1,140: Romans 8:1-11

4-19-15 (Easter 3, Good Shepherd Sunday), Bethany-Princeton MN

Hymns: 345, 372, 426, *Te Deum*, 370)

THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION TO THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST

Dear fellow redeemed in the Risen One who frees us from condemnation: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

For the next five Sundays we will work our way through the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of Romans. It's one of the greatest chapters of the Bible, especially the glorious ending to the chapter which this year's confirmands are learning by heart. But it's especially important that we are familiar with this chapter, and that we get used to thinking in the terms it teaches us to think in.

We begin with the first 11 verses.

**The Text, Romans 8:1-11.** <sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. <sup>8</sup>So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup>But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. <sup>10</sup>And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Through Your Word give us the gift of a good conscience, since You say that if we are in Christ we have no condemnation. When we are tempted to despair or to give up hope, help us to believe that we are "not condemned" for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The first verse is one that you should really know well. It is the sermon theme, and I repeated its words in the prayer. So you know it already. But this is a verse which we should not only know, these words should be often in our mind and on our lips, and come out of us easily. But they don't. It's because this is not the way we think. In fact, we think the opposite. Which is why we need an overdose of this verse, as medication if you will, as a protecting wall around us: **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."**

"There is no condemnation. To you who are in Christ Jesus." If there is one thing I want our young confirmands-to-be to know and remember, it is this. "There is no condemnation. To you."

But perhaps their parents are thinking, *"Wait a minute. They are entering high school, a time of great temptation of the flesh, all those pitfalls. They don't need to hear there is no condemnation, that they can't be judged. That's what they hear from the world. They need to be on their guard, they need to hear it's quite possible for condemnation to come, they need to want to avoid it. They need advice about what to do, how to live and how not to live. 'There is no condemnation' – they might think they can never do any wrong. It will make them think they are invincible. They don't need any help thinking that, they are teenagers, after all!"*

It is true, such a statement as **"there is no condemnation,"** or there is no judgment, does sound like something we hear from the world. There are lots of people saying, "Don't judge me," for the wrong reasons. A lot of them don't care two hoots about God's Law. They live like swine and it doesn't bother them. They do whatever they please. They are scornful of what the Bible says. They have a potty mouth. They think everything should be approved. They live under the post-modern way of thinking, that truth is relative, morality is relative, what is true for you or good for you isn't necessarily true for me or good for me; that everyone can just make their own choices, none of which should be condemned.

If you condemn what the Bible condemns – abortion, suicide, promiscuous behavior, homosexuality, drunkenness, using illegal drugs – then people who do these things are quick to say that you are extremely judgmental, and you know the rest. They refuse to be judged. This Bible verse, **“there is no condemnation,”** would appear to just give them ammunition. Their consciences aren’t bothered.

But that’s the point. These words, **“There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,”** are not spoken to people whose consciences are not bothered. When we come to this verse we land in the middle of a conversation.

In the preceding verses at the end of chapter 7, the apostle Paul is writing about a struggle that goes on inside you. It is between the sinful flesh – as St. Paul calls it, *“the sin that dwells in me”* – and, on the other hand, the new man – as St. Paul says, *“the inward man.”* My catechism class could tell you how I’ve taught them to think of this: your sinful self struggling with your forgiven self.

After Romans 8:1, St. Paul explores this struggle more in verses 2-11. He speaks of those **“who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”** He contrasts **“those who live according to the flesh”** with **“those who live according to the Spirit.”** He presents being **“carnally minded,”** which means to have your mind driven by the sinful flesh, with being **“spiritually minded,”** which means to have your mind driven by the Holy Spirit. He places **“if you are in the flesh,”** against **“if you are in the Spirit.”**

So what is this conversation we have landed in the middle of? It is the conversation you have with yourself. It is the voice of your conscience. All these “if’s” – **“if you are in the flesh”** vs. **“if you are in the Spirit.”** This talk of how you live -- whether you **“live according to the flesh”** or you **“live according to the Spirit.”** This is the voice of the conscience. What’s going on here is a constant evaluation. That is what the conscience is. It doesn’t just tell you what is right or wrong. The conscience is always judging and evaluating how you are doing.

That is why the issue is whether you have a bad conscience or a good conscience. And especially important is on what basis your conscience is good or bad.

Even the people whom we might say have no conscience – the sheep who from the fold have strayed and lost their way (*ELH 426 v. 3*), or other sheep who are not yet of this fold, whom Christ has yet to gather (*Jn 10:16*) – they do have a conscience that is judging and condemning what they do. They might be ignoring it, not heeding it or not caring. But there are only two kinds of people: those whose conscience troubles them, and those whose conscience will trouble them.

This is why I want our confirmands-to-be to know and remember this above all else: that **“there is no condemnation”** to them who **“are in Christ Jesus.”** The issue is not avoiding doing wrong vs. successfully doing right and living godly. It is not about your performance. That is what the Muslim, Jewish, Mormon and every false religion in the world is about and is obsessed with.

While it is important how you live and whether you do God’s will, the issue is having a good conscience. This cannot be done by you. You can’t guarantee your own good conscience by avoiding bad behavior or making enough right choices. The solution isn’t ignoring what your conscience says. Nor is it saying such unhelpful things as *“Well, nobody can be perfect,”* or *“At least I try,”* or *“I’m so bad,”* or *“I’m a big disappointment.”* This is what naturally comes out of us.

This is why you need these words, **“There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”** They are so opposite of how we are usually thinking. In fact it seems impossible that there would be no condemnation for me. It is impossible for me not to be judgmental of myself. I am always judging myself to be lacking. This is how we all are. And when you have a bad conscience about yourself you are not less judging of others, but you are harder on them just as you are hard on yourself. Your conscience speaks judgment to you. You repeat these words of condemnation to yourself.

But there is one who does not speak this way to you. It is Jesus, your Good Shepherd, the Shepherd who lay down His life for the sheep. In fact, this is what St. Paul refers to in verse 3: **“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin.”** This is the Good Shepherd laying down His life for you. This has everything to do with your conscience and your guilt.

He says that what you can't do – overcome your sinful flesh – God did. He sent Christ to take your same human flesh upon Himself, to be in it, and win the victory. Paul even says here that Christ became the Sin Offering. He atoned for you. Then Paul says, **“He condemned sin in the flesh,”** that is, God condemned sin – He punished all of it, He punished all of your sin too, in Jesus' flesh. That's where the condemnation ended up. Not in you. But in Jesus' flesh.

This is why he can say – and you can believe – **“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Jesus took the condemnation that belongs to you. He gives you His holiness. He gives you a cleansed conscience. He gives you His innocence. God pronounces you good and holy for Jesus' sake. He announces this to you every time you hear the absolution from the pastor. This is why to come to church. It's the only reason, really. To hear that no matter how you feel about it, there is no condemnation to you. To be given a good conscience by Christ, your True Shepherd. For us who are shepherds, pastors, this is our whole job. To give you God's gift of a good conscience. To declare, **No condemnation! ... to you.** This is how *“Christ, the Shepherd, gently taketh [you]/ In His arms that you may live” (#426 v. 3).*

You don't just need a little of this. You need a lot of it. You need to overdose on this, and really you can't overdose on it. You need this to be a protecting wall around you. So that whenever your mind focuses you on your failed performance, and the accusations of the conscience come, you have a shield, and

emblazoned on this shield – with Christ’s cross – is: **“No condemnation!”** For you are in Christ Jesus. You were baptized into Him. In the Lord’s Supper He is in you and you are in Him. You are connected to Him and He to you.

**“Therefore ... no condemnation!”** I promise you, young confirmands-to-be, and everyone else, if you ever have a troubled conscience, no matter what it is, and you come to me, your pastor, or whoever your pastor is, the only thing you’ll hear is: *“There is no condemnation. To you. You are in Christ Jesus.”* Amen!