

Romans 8:1-11

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you^[a] free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,^[b] God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.^[c] And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life^[d] because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of^[e] his Spirit who lives in you.

The greatest danger today in all the talk about faith-based social organizations is that Christians will begin to think about their faith the way the world does. For over twenty years, I have battled in my own mind not to think this way, because the temptation is tremendous, and comes from outside and inside the church.

The world views Christianity and other religions as useful, depending on what social, psychological, or physical benefits it may bring. In other words, the world doesn't assess Christianity in the categories of *true* or *false*, but in the categories

of *useful* or *harmful*. The world does not think of Christianity as divine *revelation* but as human *opinion*. The world does not believe that God must reveal our deepest need, and then provide the remedy in Jesus Christ. The world believes that we know our deepest needs and that religion can be respectable if it helps meet them.

The danger that Christians start to think this way is huge and deadly. A reporter interviews a minister, and immediately defines, by his questions, the categories for explaining Christianity: "What are you doing about affordable housing? How do you help people get jobs? What's your strategy for improving health care?"

Those are valid questions. But if you let the secular mind determine your starting point and then define the categories for explaining Christianity, then you will promote the erroneous notion that the church of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ are not an authoritative revelation from God that is true and necessary, but instead, an activity of man that is useful.

I begin this way because I am going to come back in a few minutes to point to some of the sweet, precious, practical effects of truth from our text. But I want you to know from the outset, and to feel, that if you start where the world starts — by thinking you know your real needs and that God is useful in meeting them — you will not know what Christianity is.

The Essence of the Christian Faith - The essence of Christianity is that God is the supreme value in the universe, not that we honour him as supremely valuable. We are therefore guilty of sin and under his omnipotent wrath, and he alone can rescue us from his own condemnation, which he has done through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ, for

everyone who is in Christ. Knowing this, if what we promote is housing, jobs, healthcare, sobriety, family life, minus this message, we are not Christian — we are cruel. I found this quote which struck a chord with me "We comb man's hair in the electric chair and hide his freedom in our hands".

Romans 1–7 lays it all out. In a nutshell: holy God, sinful man, coming wrath, perfect Saviour, Jesus Christ crucified and risen, justification by faith, sanctification by faith. And now Paul sums up the message of Christianity in the great conclusion of Romans 8:1: "Therefore [in view of all that] there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." That's the essence of Christianity. That's the central, foundational message of God to the world. This is what we announce. This is what we plead. This is what we lay down our lives to communicate to the nations, to our neighbourhoods, to our families and friends : **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

Let's look at it in two parts: What is the gift and who enjoys it? The gift is: "now no condemnation;" and those who enjoy it are: "those who are in Christ Jesus."

What Is the Gift? - The word "now" can have two different connotations. One is that finally, everything is in place, everything has been done, finally, *now* I can receive what I was promised. A grandfather sends a package to his granddaughter and says, "Do not open until your birthday." Every day the little girl says, "Now? Can I open it now?" "No, not now. Only on your birthday." When it comes then she says, "Finally, now!" The "now" that comes after waiting.

The other connotation for "now" is the now that comes before you thought it would. That same grandfather writes to his son

and sends him a £5,000 cheque and says, "Son, you know that someday you will inherit my estate. But I know that now is when your needs are great, so I am sending you this in advance." Here the "now" is not "*finally now*," but "*already now*."

Both of these meanings for "now" in Romans 8:1 are not far away. "There is now no condemnation." Is it "finally now" or "already now." We can see them both in Romans 8. Look at verse 3: "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, he *condemned* [there's the word!] sin in the flesh."

Finally Now No Condemnation - So here is the *finally now*. All those years the law commanded and the law condemned law-breakers and the law pointed to a righteousness and a sacrifice that would someday come (Romans 3:21), but the law could not remove condemnation from sinners. If there was to come a time when sinners could experience "no condemnation!" — when the ungodly could be justified by faith — then God would have to do something besides give a law. And what he did was send his Son in human nature, as our representative and substitute and there on the cross in the suffering of his Son, God condemned sin!

Whose sin? Jesus had none (see "*likeness of sinful flesh*," verse 3) — not his, ours. This is the gospel. This is Christianity. All of us were under God's condemnation because of our sin. But, as Romans 5:6 says, "While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." What does that mean — he died for the ungodly? Now we see what it means in Romans 8:3. It means that God poured out on his Son the condemnation that we deserved. He condemned sin (my sin! your sin!) in the flesh (Christ's flesh!). **Do you believe this?**

Therefore, finally, now, there is no condemnation. Now that everything has been done that has to be done to absorb the wrath of God. Now, finally, there is no condemnation.

Already Now No Condemnation - But what about *already now*? Look at Romans 8:33–34. Paul looks to the future. He considers the fact that the final judgment is yet to come. And on the way to it, there are many days when our adversary, the devil, will try to deceive us and blind us and accuse us and swallow us up in feelings of guilt. So Paul writes about “already now” of no condemnation:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:33-34).

So here we not only have the backward look to remind us that Christ has died and become our condemnation, but the forward look to remind us that, even though there is a judgment coming, and we will sometimes tremble at the thought of it, nevertheless, already now there is no condemnation. You don't have to wait for the final inheritance to know what this portion will be. “Who will bring a charge against God's elect?” In that last day when your whole life — with all its Romans 7 imperfections is spread before you — this alone will be your hope: “It is God who justifies . . . it is Christ Jesus who died . . . who was raised . . . who intercedes.”

The verdict of the last judgment was given in AD 33: Not guilty! No condemnation. Already *now*. This is the heart of Christianity. This is the gift of God.

Who Enjoys It? Two simple points:

First, not everyone can say, “There is now no condemnation over my life.” Only those “who are in Christ Jesus.” Some are in him and some are not. Paul assumes this everywhere in his writings. There are those “in Christ” and there are those “outside.” Paul is not a universalist. He says explicitly in Romans 9:3, with grief, that there are those who are “accursed, *separated* from Christ.” The opposite of the precious phrase “in Christ” (*en christō*) is the terrible phrased “[separated] from Christ” (*apo tou christou*) Where are you? In Christ? Or separated from Christ?

The *second* point is this: only by being in Christ does Christ's condemnation become your condemnation. If you want to be able to say now and at the last judgment, “There is no condemnation for me, because Jesus endured it for me,” then you must be “in Jesus.” If you are in him, what happened to him, happened to you. If you are “separated from him,” you have no warrant for saying that what happened to him happened to you.

If you say, “Ah, but he died for the whole world. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Yes, indeed. And what that means is that there is infinite room in Jesus. Christ is not a small hotel. There is room for everyone. And everyone is invited and commanded, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden. . . . Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. . . . The one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out” (Matthew 11:28; Revelation 22:17; John 6:37).

But what if you don't come? What if you don't believe? What if you don't receive the free gift? Jesus tells us in John 3:36, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not

obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” The wrath of God — the condemnation of God is taken away in Christ. Not outside Christ.

So where are you? In Christ? Or outside Christ? Free from condemnation? Or under condemnation? You don’t have to stay under condemnation. There is room in Christ. There is always room in Christ. And Christ’s word to every sinner is, “Come! Trust me! Enter! I will be your life, your righteousness, your pardon, because I have been your condemnation.”

The No-Condemnation Difference - There is much more to say about being “in Christ” but I want to close like I said I would, with some sweet and precious practical effects of truth from our text. What difference does “no condemnation” make now? Even if you said to me, “It’s of no help now whatsoever in my practical problems,” I might answer, “Even so, it is ten thousand times more valuable than any other help you might receive. Because eternity is so long and life here is so short.” Even total misery here for 85 years, and no condemnation in the presence of the all-satisfying God for 85 million ages of years would not be a bad exchange.

But I will mention some benefits anyway. I am only going to mention them for you to ponder and pursue. These are for those of you who believe — who are in Christ Jesus. And I hope a spiritual enticement for the rest to come to Christ.

No Condemnation in Physical Pain When you suffer physical pain, and it lasts a long time, and seems to get worse instead of better, and it even seems that it may end in death and not healing, the accuser (our own thoughts, the devil, Job’s friends) comes and says, “It’s punishment. You are under God’s condemnation. That’s why you are suffering so much.” How are you going to survive that assault? Answer: With Romans 8:1:

“No, I am not under condemnation. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And I trust Christ, my Righteousness and my Pardon. My sins are covered. I will not come into condemnation. I have passed from death to life (John 5:24). Be gone tempter. O Christ, let your power be perfected in my pain.”

No Condemnation in Marriage Difficulties - Suppose you feel disappointed or even deeply wronged in your marriage. Where will you find the moral power to forgive and keep on loving and wooing and hoping and not resort to returning evil for evil and condemning? Answer: Romans 8:1. You will remind yourself again and again that, even though you are a sinner, in Christ Jesus God does not condemn you, and your future is free for everlasting joy. From that reservoir of mercy and hope you will draw up buckets of mercy for your spouse. And God will work wonders of grace in your life.

No Condemnation in the Failures of Parenting What are you going to do if your children break your heart? We will find ample reason for thinking it was our fault. And you will never be able to sort that out — ever. Only God can. So how will you keep going? How will you keep loving? Answer: Romans 8:1. In the end, you don’t have to sort that out. Your standing with God does not hang on your figuring out how much was yours and how much was not. Your standing before God as a loved and forgiven child is this: there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. With that freedom, you will admit your failings freely and you will humble yourselves before your children and God may heal.

No Condemnation in Anything On and on we could go. No condemnation and ministry. No condemnation and peer pressure. No condemnation and sexual temptation. No

condemnation and pride. No condemnation and racism. Oh, how little does racial bigotry and prejudice and discrimination know of this truth! And on and on. The practical implications of this glorious truth are endless.

So where are you? Has the world shaped your mind so that you don't even think about your need to escape God's condemnation? Do you just think about how religion might be practically useful? Most importantly, are you in Christ, by faith, or are you outside? Don't stay outside. There is always room in Christ. Come