

## No Condemnation: Part 2

Romans 8:1-4

### Introduction

Last time we were in Romans, we focused all of our attention on [8:1].

So many of us have a cloud of condemnation hanging over our heads all the time. We just can't get out from under it. "I'm a failure in my home, work, church, as a man, as woman, as a parent, as a Christian, as a human." And that ongoing sense of failure can be debilitating. Therefore, to hear the words from God himself, "I do not condemn you..." Are there better words than that?

But how can you know it's true? How can we be sure there is no condemnation?... Not now, not ever! Frankly, this is hard to believe for many people. **Christians** struggle with whether there is condemnation from God on them. *Like, "How could God NOT condemn me after what I did last week...or twenty years ago?"*

Sometimes this is one of the biggest hang-ups for **non-Christians** to become Christians. *“It’s just too hard to believe that based on what Jesus did FOR me, God doesn’t condemn me? I gotta make myself worthy enough of that freedom from condemnation. I gotta clean myself up a bit, and then I’ll be a good candidate for God’s grace.”*

So if you are a Christian who struggles with whether you are a Christian...OR if you are not yet a Christians who finds the gospel too hard to believe because you have engrained in you that it’s all on you to be accepted by God...OR if you just need a good reminder of the joyful reality that God is not against you but he’s FOR you...

THEN what you need to hear is: LOGIC! That’s where Paul goes in this passage! He gives *logical* support that upholds the weighty/glorious reality that you are not condemned before God.

Here’s the flow of the passage: He gave his **main point** in v1—There’s no condemnation for those who are in Jesus. (That was last time’s sermon.) And then, he gives **two reasons** you can be

confident condemnation no longer exists for you (vv2-3). And then, he closes with the ***purpose*** of it (v4). WHY has God done what he has done to bring you no condemnation? (I suspect the answer to that question may surprise you.) So consider first...

**Reason #1** (why there is now no condemnation, is this): **A new law has set you free.** Notice the word “for” in v2, indicating he’s giving the *reason* why there is no condemnation. **[v2]**

I admit, some of the phrases in this verse are difficult interpret. But I think the main point is clear: Something happened to set you free from sin’s condemnation. The question is: What happened? We gotta figure out what he means by these two “laws”—“the law of the Spirit of life” and “the law of sin and death.” The first one sets us FREE from the second one. What are they? We get a clue of the second one—the law of sin and death—when we go back to what he said in **[7:22-23]**.

He seems to be using the word “law” here in a few different ways, kind of as a play on words.

Notice he says, “The *law of sin* that dwells in my members.” That’s the shortened phrase he uses in 8:2. We were captive to “the law of sin and death.” When you compare these two verses, it seems he’s referring to this principal power that resided within us, making us slaves of sin. A law-like power that holds us captive to sin. Again, he seems to be using the language of “law” as a play on words to denote principal power.

And we need to be set free from THAT law/principal power. How are we set free from that? He says in 8:2, by “the law of the Spirit of life.” What’s that? Again, I think we get a clue by looking back on how he already used the language of “law” and “Spirit.” [7:6]

“NEW way of the Spirit” sounds like 8:2, “the law of the Spirit of life.” This is where I’m getting the idea that a NEW law is what sets us free. What? How can a new LAW set us free? Paul’s already established that rules and laws, no matter how good they are, will only bind us, they can’t save us! So what is he talking about?

Again, he seems to be using the word “law” as a play on words. He’s saying, “The OC law cannot set you free from the binding power of sin, so you need a new ‘LAW’ to set you free...which is really no LAW at all; it’s not a list of rules. It’s the POWER produced by the HS who gives life.”

There seems to be an allusion here to the NC promise that, by the power of his Spirit, God would give new hearts to his people—new desires, new affections, new life—so that they can obey. God’s law was promised to be written on the hearts of his people.

So that phrase in 8:2 “the law of the Spirit of life” is another way of describing (what is called) the work of REGENERATION (which means, new life) given to you by the Spirit of God. Your dead heart needed to be awakened so that you could be set free from sin’s powerful hold on you.

That’s one way you can know you’re not condemned by God... because the Spirit of God set you free.

**Reason #2** for how you can know you're not condemned before God is this: **God did what the old law couldn't do [8:3a]**

What couldn't the OC law do? Set us free from captivity to our sin. The law couldn't do that. Why? Because it was "weakened by the flesh." That's the whole point of ch7! When a person is IN THE FLESH—bound by their old sinful nature—the law is powerless; it's weak. It cannot set a person free from bondage.

Therefore, God did what the law couldn't do. What did he do? Well, he set us free by the Spirit (v2), but notice what else he did. **[v3b]** The nuance is incredible. Read it again. **[v3b]**

Paul is being very careful in the way he words this sentence. He is very careful NOT to attribute sin to Jesus. It says, "He came FOR sin." Could be translated "concerning sin," or some of your translations say, "as a sin offering." That's the idea. "He came FOR sin"...which implies ***substitution***. He didn't come to commit sin; he came to take care of the sin committed by others!

How'd he come? V3: He came "in the *likeness* of sinful flesh." What's he mean by that? We know he doesn't mean, "Jesus became LIKE a human but not *actually* a human." The Scripture is clear: He REALLY became a man.

But Paul doesn't just say, "He came in the likeness *of flesh*." It says, "He came in the likeness of SINFUL flesh." What's that mean? That can't mean Jesus became a sinner. He clarified that by saying he came FOR sin, not TO sin. So, what does it mean, "He came in the likeness of sinful flesh"?

I think his point is: When Jesus became a human, he experienced the effects of living in a sin-cursed world—he got sick, he got hungry, he died. But he did not and could not sin. Here's how John Stott puts it: It doesn't [merely] say, "...the Son came... 'in the likeness of flesh,' only seeming to be human... [because] his humanity was real; nor [does it only say, he came] 'in sinful flesh,' assuming a fallen nature, [because] his humanity was sinless, but [it says, he came] in the *likeness of sinful flesh*,' because his

humanity was both real and sinless simultaneously.” (Stott, 219)

As a real human who experienced the fallenness of this sin-cursed world, Jesus NEVER sinned. Now, why is that so important FOR YOU? Because of what Paul says next: **[v3b, “condemned sin in the flesh”]**

“God *condemned* sin.” That is a staggering statement! What does it mean? Paul already used the *noun form* of this word in v1: There is no CONDEMNATION. So we know what it means to HAVE condemnation: It means a pronouncement of guilt is upon you because you’ve failed a standard and so you receive the due punishment.

But here, in v3, Paul uses the *verb form*: God CONDEMNED. Same word in the form of an action: He *condemned* sin. What does it mean to CONDEMN something? *It could be to be to pronounce complete disapproval. Like, “the city condemned that abandoned apartment.” It’s not approved of for safe living.*



That may be included in what Paul means when he says, “God condemned sin”...Like, he disapproved of it. But that’s too weak. Another way of condemning something is to sentence a punishment upon it. In fact, the Greek dictionary defines this word like this: “to pronounce a sentence after determination of guilt.” It’s a sentencing.

*Ever seen a judge do that? Everyone is on the edge of their seat, waiting to hear the verdict/sentence: “Guilty” or “NOT guilty.”*

The word “condemned” is THAT pronouncement. But this is usually in relation to people. People are condemned, like in the court of law. But here Paul says, “God condemned...” WHAT? SIN! He pronounce a sentence of punishment upon sin!

What was the sentence? Look carefully at what he says, **[v3b, “in the flesh”]** That’s WHERE sin was condemned. That doesn’t tell us exactly WHAT the sentence for sin was. It just tells us WHERE the sentence happened. But does the WHERE give us any indication of the WHAT?

It does, but we gotta understand what he means by “in the flesh.” Who’s flesh? YOUR sin was punished/condemned IN THE FLESH. That’s talking about a human body. Who’s body? “God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful FLESH and for sin, he condemned sin in the FLESH.” God condemned your sin in the flesh of his own Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you get this? Do you realize why there is no condemnation FOR YOU, **Christian**? Do you understand, **non-Christian**, why you don’t have to be condemned before God if you trust in Jesus? It’s because Jesus was condemned for you, when his flesh/body hung suspended on a cross. God condemned/punished sin by killing it IN THE FLESH of Jesus! That was sin’s sentence.

Do you hear this, weary **Christian** who constantly feels like a failure? Jesus condemned your sin by being condemned. Do you hear this, **non-Christian** who keeps trying to turn over a new leaf and do better, only to find defeat and failure at every turn? Trust in Jesus who

condemned sin in his flesh so that you would stand not condemned before God.

It is wonderful and astounding news to hear we don't stand condemned before God because 1) we've been set free from the power of sin by the *Spirit of God*, and 2) we've been released from the punishment of sin because of the work of the *Son of God*. So what? What's the purpose of all this? You might say, "So that I could go to heaven and not hell!" And that would be true, but why doesn't just send you straight to heaven as soon as you trust in Jesus?

There's a purpose in this life for why you don't stand condemned before God for eternity. And that's how this passage concludes...with the...

***Purpose*** of all this, namely, that: ***The requirement of the law would be fulfilled.*** [v4]

That's the goal of the Spirit's work of regeneration (v2—giving new life) and that's the goal of the Son's work of redemption (v3—condemning sin on the cross). The goal is that the requirement of the law would be fulfilled. Now what does that mean?

I think we have two options. This could be a further elaboration on what he has been saying already in v3: God did for us IN CHRIST what we could not do for ourselves. And therefore, THAT is what he means by: the requirement of the law was fulfilled. In other words, what God required of us in his law—the RIGHTEOUS requirement... it was a standard of righteousness/ obedience/ holiness that he required—that righteous requirement was MET for us BY JESUS.

That could be what he means in v4. And I would ask: Is that true? Is it true that Jesus obeyed the law of God FOR US and met the standard of righteousness FOR US because we couldn't meet it perfectly?

Absolutely! That's a key ingredient of the gospel! And that's something Paul has already argued in Romans. Romans 5:19, "...by the one man's obedience the many were made righteous." For all who trust Christ, HIS obedience is credited to their account.

That's 100% true and gloriously true! But the question is NOT whether that's true. The

question is: Is that Paul's point in v4? I wanna show you why that's NOT actually Paul's argument in v4. What he's arguing here is NOT that the righteous requirement of the law was met by Jesus for our justification (our right standing before God); RATHER he's arguing that the righteous requirement for the law is fulfilled in OUR obedience to God in sanctification (meaning, AS JUSTIFIED CHRISTIANS, we are called to pursue a life of holiness).

In other words, God sent the Spirit to give us new hearts (v2) and he sent his Son to pay the penalty for our sins (v3) NOT MERELY that we would have a free ticket to heaven, BUT SO THAT we would walk in obedience as Christians in this life (v4).

Let me give you 3 reasons why I think v4 is talking about our obedience to God as Christians. **1) He says that the requirement of the law is fulfilled IN us.** (v4a, "in us") He doesn't say it is fulfilled FOR us. Saying the requirement of the law is fulfilled IN us rather than FOR us implies that it's something WE do. No doubt, it's by the power of the Spirit of God

at work within us. But it's something happening within us and not outside of us. Like, redemption is not something that happened IN us. That's something that was accomplished OUTSIDE of us and FOR us, namely, when Jesus died on the cross.

*2) The word "fulfilled" indicates this is something we do.* (v4b, "fulfilled") Notice, it doesn't say "the requirement was met/kept." It says, it was "fulfilled," and the reason that's important is because Paul uses this same word is later on in Romans when he describes the Christian's relationship to the law. **[13:8-10]**

See the connection? The "fulfilling" of the law is...what? LOVE. Love each other. Love God. Love one another. And so, FULFILL the law. That's a summary of the Christian life. And that's what Paul's arguing in 8:4. (Go back.) This is something WE do.

*3) The second half of v4 explains the first half.* **[v4, "who..."]** That's how the righteous requirement of the law is FULLFILLED IN us—we walk according to the Spirit, not according to the

flesh...MEANING, we live lives that are in line with the Spirit's work in us (the work that produces love for God and love for others). We don't walk according to the flesh—meaning our sinful inclinations that are bent towards self.

Here's the point: God saved you UNTO an obedient life. That's the connection between v3 and v4. One person said, "...everything Christ did for us—his incarnation..., his death and his resurrection—was all in order...that we might live a holy life." (Keller, 15)

Are grasping the weightiness of this? Jesus left the glories of heaven to come to this sin cursed world and take on real flesh and blood to die the most excruciating kind of death—namely, death on a cross, to atone for all your sins and provide for you the eternal status before God title: NO CONDEMNATION! Why? SO THAT... You just go straight to heaven? No! SO THAT *in this life*, you would walk in obedience to God. Jesus purchased your holiness for this life when he died on the cross for you.

There is an unbreakable link between the atonement of Christ for you and your holy living as a Christian. And the link is NOT: Jesus died for those who ARE holy/obedient. The link is: Jesus died for sinners SO THAT, as forgiven and justified people, they would walk in holiness.

Some of you hear this and immediately wonder, "Am I even a Christian? Because when I look at my life, I don't see a pattern of holiness/walking in love for God. I see a pattern of walking in love for myself and indifference towards God."

If that's what you're wondering, I'd actually encourage you to lean into that. Don't immediately dismiss it. An implication of v4 is: if you're NOT walking in love for God and others, then you may not a Christian! (I'd love to talk to you more about what it means to truly trust in Jesus.)

But listen, there are others of you who ARE CHRISTIANS who hear this and automatically conclude, "I must not be a Christian," when you SHOULDN'T conclude that! We're still sinners. We have not arrived. Take a deep breath, and



understand this connection between Jesus' death for you and your holy life. WHY is he pointing out this unbreakable link? The reason why is NOT to make you call into question your salvation. That's the OPPOSITE of what he's aiming to do!

This point is actually meant to assure that you are a Christian. That's Paul's aim! That's the whole point of Romans 8. It's to help you as a Christian know you ARE a Christian and that you are secure in Christ! You can know that!

How? One way is: Look at the fruit of what has been produced in your life. Think about before you were a Christian or even early on in your Christian life compared to where you are now. How have you seen growth? Ask those closest to you, "How have you seen me grow as a Christian?"

- Have I grown in my love for God?
- Have I grown in my fight against sins that used to be totally overwhelming and enslaving?

Still, some of you will say, “I honestly have a hard time seeing growth because I’ve become so much more aware of how sinful I am.” To which I would respond: “Don’t you realize that’s a sign of the Holy Spirit’s work within you? To go from being unaware of sin that you engaged in TO becoming more aware of sin that you know you shouldn’t engage in and your fighting...that sounds like growth!”

There’s a reason why he uses the language “walk.” It’s a way of life. As Christians who have been given the Spirit of God and who have had their sins paid for by Jesus...they have a new WALK—the pattern of their life is according to the Spirit.

*I’ve heard someone put it like this, “It’s not about perfection, but direction. NOT: Are you now perfect? We know you’re not. But what direction are you heading? Is it a walk towards God, where sometimes you take two steps back? Or are you heading the opposite direction?”*

Be encouraged, Christian: God is at work in you. He sent his Son to die for you to ensure your walk of obedience. Therefore, know this: In every victory over sin—even if it's seemingly small and insignificant...like, "I was more patient with my kids today." "I wasn't as fearful in sharing the gospel." "I really felt the pull to take a second glance at immodesty but I didn't."—in every victory over sin, you should celebrate the cross.

Know why? Because Jesus died for you...not only to forgive you of your impatience or fear or lust, but to secure for you the POWER to be patient and be pure and be fearless.

## **Conclusion**

There is no more condemnation because the Spirit of life has set you free from sin AND God did for you through Christ's death what you couldn't do for yourself. And thus, secured a walk of obedience. Therefore, let us obey, knowing that God is for us and not against us.