

Sermon preached by Pastor Robert Barnett at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, May 6, 2007

NO CONDEMNATION!

Romans 8:1-4

The apostle John told the story of Jesus and an adulterous woman. The account is recorded in chapter eight of John's gospel. Jesus was teaching at the temple in Jerusalem. Some scribes and Pharisees are there listening to him. You may remember these folks. They are the religious leaders of Jewish society, the good people who took great care to follow every precept of the Old Testament law. They want to see how Jesus would deal with a sinner.

They brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and looked for Jesus' reaction. Old Testament law required death for adultery and they wanted to see if Jesus, who was known to be a friend to sinners, would slip up and deny the law. But Jesus surprised them. He bent down, knelt in the dirt and scribbled in the dirt. Remember His words: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Not knowing what to do, one by one, these religious leaders just walked away.

That left Jesus alone with the startled woman. He asked her: "Is there anyone left to condemn you?" She replied "No one, Lord." Then Jesus spoke those famous words, "Neither do I condemn you; go. From now on sin no more." What a fantastic thing to say! "No condemnation for your adultery. Now because you are forgiven, stop sinning!"

We are told the same thing. We know that when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior; when we confessed our sins and asked for forgiveness we became different – new creatures, as Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 5:17. As Christians, we are supposed to live holy lives, to obey Christ in all that we do, say or think. But do you? Every one of us, if we're honest about it, will admit that we still get caught up in disobedience, even though Jesus tells us what He told the woman: "You are not condemned, from now on sin no more!"

How can we do what the woman was called to do? How can you and I make Jesus' words a reality in our own lives? In our passage from Romans 8, Paul helps us. He expresses virtually the same thought as Jesus: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This morning, I want us to look at three questions: What does Paul mean when he said there is no condemnation? How did God make it happen? And finally, for what purpose?

WHAT DOES PAUL MEAN BY NO CONDEMNATION?

In verse 2, Paul says "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." To understand that we are not condemned, we must first see that we were once condemned. That is, we must first understand the law of sin and death.

This is the most difficult part for us to accept. The law of sin and death is another way of saying there is condemnation for sin. It is the operating principle of disobedience in God's world: "You sin, you die!" It began with Adam and Eve and it continues today. All of us have sinned and fall short of God's glory. The wages of sin is death. The principle: "You sin, you die!"

God is a holy and righteous Judge and He has declared His judgment for sin and has condemned us. The condemnation we receive is just. We are created beings made to obey and glorify God, but we do not. Instead of giving glory to God, humanity always seeks its own glory. It began in the Garden of Eden: "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." Human beings seek for themselves the glory that belongs to God alone.

Put another way, condemnation is God's wrath against our sin – the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men according to Romans 1:18. Rico Tice defined God's wrath as "His settled, controlled hostility to all that is evil." All of our disobedience deserves the wrath of God. God is angry at your sin and He is angry at mine! It deserves a sentence of death.

Certainly, the death sentence refers to an eternal punishment. The Bible promises hell for those who die without Christ. Revelation 20:15, for example, tells us that "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

That is a terrible truth. But hell is not the only part of the death sentence. When we disobey Him, God also abandons us to wallow in our sinful desires. We are captive by total depravity, or as R.C. Sproul put it, by "radical corruption." Sin radically penetrates to the very root and core of our being. It reaches into every aspect of our lives and corrupts our actions, our words, our very thoughts. We are slaves to sin. We can not help but disobey God.

We may not be as bad as we could be and God may even prevent us from doing all that we could, but we are enslaved by our sin. We are slaves to sin. We cannot help but disobey God. Let's look at a few verses in Romans 7 as Paul describes this dilemma.

Verses 14-15: We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

Verse 19: For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.

Verses 23-24: but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Radical corruption! Total depravity. Slavery to sin. It should be no surprise that you and I struggle to obey God.

God is holy, so His requirement is for us to live in holiness before Him, as He revealed to us in His moral law – summed up in the Ten Commandments. However, because we are slaves to sin, we are not capable of meeting the requirements of His law. We are so radically corrupt that we are unable to fully and completely obey God. The law is powerless to change us, as verse 8:3 says, because it is weakened by our corrupt and sinful nature. All the law can do is show that we are powerless to change. All it does is point out the problem. That’s why the scribes and Pharisees walked away from Jesus.

But in our passage Paul’s emphasis is on freedom – through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free! There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus – absolutely none!

Don’t overlook the connection here. If our condemnation means both future punishment in hell and God’s giving us over to disobedience, then “no condemnation” means the opposite – eternity in heaven and freedom today from being a prisoner to the captivating power of our sin. Freedom from slavery to the power of sin means we can live holy lives. No condemnation means go and sin no more.

Our question then, is if God is angry at our sin, how can He not condemn us?

HOW CAN GOD NO LONGER CONDEMN US?

In verse 3, Paul says “what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man.”

God the Father sent God the Son to die in our place. Think about that for a moment. The Son, who existed from all eternity, became like us. Don’t miss what that means. John wrote at the start of his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.” When Isaiah appeared before the throne of God, he heard angels praise the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – by crying out “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” and he cried out for mercy. When John saw Christ in all His glory, he fell at His feet as if he were dead. The Son is full of majesty and glory. One day, everyone will see His great splendor; every knee will bow before Him in worship and every tongue will confess Him as Lord.

This is the Son who came in the likeness of sinful man. He was completely God while at the same time completely man. Jesus suffered like we do – He got hungry and tired and sore, He had headaches and backaches, He was tempted in every way just as we are – yet as Hebrews 4:15 tells us, without giving in to sin. There in the temple in Jerusalem was

God the Son, Creator and Judge of the universe, kneeling in the dirt talking to Pharisees and an adulterous woman.

This Jesus became a sin offering. The term carries a religious sense. A sin offering turns aside the wrath of God. Jesus endured God the Father's anger at our sin by receiving the death sentence in our place. God is angry at sin. If He is to remain holy and just, He must condemn sin and He must punish the sinner. We deserve death, but He kills His Son on the Cross.

C. J. Mahaney writes in his book *Living the Cross-Centered Life*, about a Newsweek article that came out during the premiere of the movie *Passion of the Christ*. The headline asked: "Who Really Killed Jesus?" Was it the Roman authorities? Jewish religious leaders? An angry mob? Sinners like you and me? Mahaney gives an answer that squares with Romans 8:

Who killed Jesus? God did! God the Father was ultimately responsible for the death of His Son. God is telling us, "I purposefully determined to crush My Son with My wrath – for your sins, as your substitute." Why? "Because I love you!"

Listen also to Sinclair Ferguson's words on the staggering implications of the crucifixion:

When we think of Christ's dying on the cross we are shown the lengths to which God's love goes in order to win us back to Himself. We would almost think that God loved us more than He loves His Son. We cannot measure His love by any other standard. He is saying to us, "I love you this much."

God is angry at our sin, but He loves us. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending His Son. By doing this, He dealt with both the guilt and power of sin in our lives. He fulfilled, on our behalf, God's requirement to live a holy life.

That brings us to our final question: For what purpose did God condemn His Son?

FOR WHAT PURPOSE DID GOD CONDEMN HIS SON?

We see the answer in verse 4. ". . . in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

Of course Jesus bought our salvation so that we can go to heaven. But that is only part of the promise. Our future hope and our present call to holiness are the same. We are delivered from sin's ultimate penalty and we are delivered from sin's power.

God the Father pronounced us not guilty. Jesus made this possible by His death. The Holy Spirit accomplished in us what the law was powerless to do. We are redeemed

from slavery so that we can be set free to live a holy life. It is not our own effort. It is the work of God. The same idea is in Ephesians 2:8-10:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Just as the operating principle of our disobedience in God's world is death, the operating principle of Christ's obedience is life. When we acknowledged that we are rebellious, deserve God's wrath and need His rescue, He gave us His life. You and I have been covered with the perfect righteousness of Christ. His life lives in us and enables us to fulfill the righteous requirements of the law by living according to the Spirit.

So what does that mean? We walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. The word the New International Version translates as "live according to" actually means "walk." Because we are not condemned, we can follow in the footsteps of Jesus who went before us as the perfect Man. We do so not in our righteousness – we don't have any – but because we have His righteousness when we are united to Him by faith. James Montgomery Boice explained that:

This word portrays the Christian life as a path along which we walk, following Jesus Christ who goes before us. The path has a direction, and it has boundaries. The direction is the character of God, which is expressed in the law but which we see fully in Jesus. The boundaries are the requirements God's law imposes. We must not cross over these requirements. If we do, we are not on the path. We are not following after Christ. On the other hand, if we do follow, our eyes are not fixed on the law primarily – that was the error of the Pharisees – but on Jesus, whom we love and desire to serve by our obedience.

But we live in the tension between a future unhindered communion with God and our present struggle with sin. Dr. Boice writes further:

Can Christians sin? Of course, they can – and do. We all do. But there is all the difference in the world between stumbling on the path, getting up and then going on, and not being on the path of discipleship at all. Those who are on the path may fall, but they are following after Jesus Christ and are never fully content unless they follow Him.

So, even though we still deal with sin every day, we can live holy lives before God by remembering that we no longer face the death sentence for sin. That promise is the starting place for pursuing holiness. We need to daily remind ourselves that apart from Christ, we are powerless. We stand condemned, under a sentence of death and unable to do what is right. But in Christ, we have His life and freedom to obey. The beginning place for holiness – the only place – is the Cross.

Because of the Cross, we are no longer condemned by God; we no longer face the penalty and power of sin and therefore can “go and sin no more.” The Christian life must be focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Obedience to God always begins and ends at the Cross where we daily acknowledge our inability to live holy lives and daily accept the redemption we have in the Son.

Want to live a holy life? Remember that you are not condemned!