**No Condemnation**
**Romans 8:1-11**

Imagine if you arrived at church this morning, met a friend, asked them how they're doing and they reply 'Well! I have just been diagnosed with this horrible, life-threatening medical condition which attacks every organ in my body, and its progress is relentless and its universally, 100% fatal. But… I have absolutely no health worries at all!'

Then tomorrow morning, you go into work for a meeting called by your boss, where he announces: 'our finances are in dire straits. Income is down to zero, but our costs are out of control. We're in debt up to our eyeballs; we can't pay the rent on the offices, and the loan company wants to repossess our furniture, and the landlord evict us. But… we have absolutely no financial concerns. Not a single one.'

How would you respond? You'd be left scratching your head wouldn't you? What is it with these people? - they've lost touch with reality!

Well, if you were here last week for Romans 7 and heard the apostle Paul's description of his inner struggles with sin - of how he wants to obey God but finds himself utterly powerless to do so; of how he hates his sin, but does it anyway; and then you get to chapter 8, and see how Paul starts it, you should be experiencing a similarly head scratching moment, shouldn't you? Is this guy living in reality?

Because look how he ends Romans 7: v24, 'Wretched man that I am!'

Wretched, because, v14, 'I am of the flesh, sold under sin.' Wretched, because, v18, 'I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.' Wretched because v19, 'I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.' Oh, wretched man that I am! And maybe you know what that feels like.

But then look how he immediately follows that up in chapter 8:1, 'There is therefore now no condemnation.'

Er, Paul, you've just given us all the reasons why you, and all of us, stand condemned: We know God's law, but we don't keep it, in fact we *can't* keep it. So on what possible grounds can you say 'no condemnation'?

Well that's what we're going to look at this morning. Firstly, how we stand; secondly, how we walk, and thirdly, where you get the power to do it.

**How We Stand**

You see, think what it means to stand condemned. Legally condemned. You've been brought before the courts on some charge. All the evidence has been presented, and the judge asks you how you plead and, like Paul in Romans 7, you say 'guilty'. Whereupon the judge formally declares your guilt and hands down your sentence. And you are now a condemned criminal.

It's what God does to all humanity. Here's my standard, my law: Love me will all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself. But all the evidence, and if we're honest, our own admission, says, we stand condemned. Legally condemned.

But it's not just legal, is it? Guilt is something you feel. When you know you've failed, failed to live up to your own standards, and more importantly failed to live up to God's. And if you're a Christian, guilt can feel like a pervasive cloud blocking out the sun - and it robs you of joy in worship and can leave you feeling unable to approach God in prayer - because you *feel*, you *know*, your unworthiness.

And yet, it's not just overtly religious people who feel it. Back in 2017, Wilfred McClay, a respected American Professor of History, wrote an influential paper titled, 'The Strange Persistence of Guilt' - and he's talking about deeply secular people. Because we were promised that if we threw off religion, we'd be done with guilt - it's just a social construct. But the opposite has proved true. And you may think you don't have a religious bone in your body, and yet even you can *feel* unworthy, you can have this pervasive sense that you're not right, that you *are* guilty. Even when you don't know for what.

And the Bible tells us that legally we do stand condemned, and experientially, we can feel it.

Except, like your friend with that body-destroying disease or your financially bankrupt boss who say, I have absolutely no concerns, Paul says, 'There is therefore now no condemnation.'

He doesn't even say, 'well, at this moment we're not condemned, because I haven't sinned for 10 minutes, but there's no telling for the future.' He says, there is therefore now *no* condemnation. Condemnation no longer exists for him or for you. It doesn't exist any more as a category for your life.

So this is not like wanting to order something online and it says, currently not in stock but will be again in 2 months time. No. This is, 'this product has ceased to exist and no matter how hard you look you're never going to find it again.' No condemnation. No guilt. No joy-destroying security-sapping alienation from God. No sentence to be passed. No more debt to be paid. No punishment to be borne. No need to prove yourself anymore.

The court of heaven has seen the long list of all the evidence against you. It's heard you say, 'I'm guilty', and the sentence is down: '*Not* Guilty.'

Eh? How did that happen?

Well, why did your friend with that disease from which one out of one die, say he had zero health concerns? And why did your bankrupt boss have no financial concerns? Because your friend is under a doctor with a 100% cure rate: one out of one lives. And your boss has a backer who has paid every debt and promised him limitless credit.

And Paul says, v1: 'There is <u>*therefore*</u> now no condemnation…' So something else - better still - *someone* else has come into play.

Verse 1 again, 'for those who are in Christ Jesus.' So imagine you're hiking in the mountains, miles from anywhere, but you fall and break an ankle. What do you do? You call the emergency services, and after getting your location, they ask you something, don't they? 'Are you a member of REGA?'

Or imagine your car breaks down, and you're stranded on the side of the motorway. What do you do? You call TCS. What's the first thing they want to know? 'Are you a member?'

Why? Because the blessings of membership are for the members. And if you're one of ours, we're on our way, and we have got this covered.

And so this standing before God - *No Condemnation* - is not for everyone. It's for the members. The members of Christ. Those who are united to him by faith. And in him, there is now no condemnation. In him, there's no need to be paralysed by guilt. In him, there's no need to constantly feel unworthy or keep trying to prove yourself. If you're a Christian, you are in Christ and there is no condemnation in him.

Why? Because, v2, 'The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.' And Bible scholars have debated: Is Paul talking about God's law or something else?

And personally, I think here he's referring to two different principles or powers at work in people's lives. That when Paul, or you and I, come to Christ and put our trust in him, a new principle, a new power comes into play in our lives. Before, we were under the realm and control of sin and death. But now, in Christ, you're in a different realm, you're under a different power, now there's a different ruling principle at work in your life. And if indwelling sin wants to wreck your life, the Holy Spirit is out to give you life.

Great, but if we're guilty, how come we're declared not guilty? If it's death we deserve, how come we get life?

Verse 3: 'For God has done what the law [and now he's back to God's law], weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.'

And so God's solution to our problem was not to send a whole load more rules, telling us, you've just got to obey. He sends his Son. And God the Son came in the *likeness* of *sinful* flesh. Not in the *likeness* of flesh - like he just appeared to be human. And not just '*in sinful flesh'* - like, 'sure he was a good teacher, but he wasn't perfect. He wasn't God.'

No, he came in the *likeness* of *sinful flesh*. Fully human, subject to all the temptations to sin we are and yet without that inbuilt bent to sin we're all born with.

And he came, Paul says, 'for sin.' To live the life we have all failed to live, to perfectly obey the law like none of us have, and at the cross to take all our sin and guilt upon himself. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, 'For our sake [God] made him *to be sin* who knew no sin' (2 Cor 5:21).

And at the cross, he stood in our place: the place of the condemned. And all God's righteous anger, all his just punishment, all the separation from him we deserve - including death itself - was poured upon him. And in him, v3 again, God 'condemned sin in the flesh.'

You know, in the Greco-Roman world, when a bill or outstanding debt was finally paid the word *tetelestai* was written across it: paid in full. Literally, it is finished. It's what Jesus cried with his final breath: 'It's finished.' But what's finished?

Your condemnation is finished. Your guilt and self-loathing are finished. That life-threatening disease of sin and your moral bankruptcy are finished. The law of sin and death over you is finished. Every sin on him was laid, and you bear it no more. God condemned sin in him. And there is nothing left to condemn.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus.

But if it's the end of condemnation, it's the start of something wonderful.

**How We Walk**

Verse 4: God condemned sin in Christ 'in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.'

Now, if you're a bit super-spiritual you might be tempted to say, 'now you're a Christian your problems with sin are over. No struggle with sin for you.' While if you're of a bit of a defeatist, or a cynic, you might think, 'man, when it comes to living God's ways, Christians are no better than anyone else.'

And in chapter 7, Paul argued against the super-spiritual types. No, Christians still face this daily battle with sin. But now he turns to nail the cynics. No - Christians really can begin to live up to what God asks of us.

You see, you could read verse 4 in a minimalistic sense, couldn't you? How is the righteous requirement of God's law fulfilled in us? By Jesus fulfilling the law for us. And our sin was counted to him and his righteousness has been counted to us. And Paul *is* absolutely saying that.

But that's not all he's saying. Verse 4 again, 'In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, *who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*.'

So this is not just about our standing before God, it's about our living, our walking through life. And Christ came for sin - not just to deal with it once and for all - but to transform the way you live. You see did you notice how Paul puts it? 'That the righteous require*ment* - *singular* - of the law might be fulfilled in you.' Not that the Son of God came so that you in your daily life would be scrupulously keeping the 600+ laws of the Old Testament, but that *the* righteous requirement might be fulfilled in you.

Which begs the question: what righteous requirement is Paul thinking of?

Well, remember which law it was that cut Paul to the heart? 'You shall not covet' - you shall not desire something so much you have to have it. You shall not love something or need something more than God. And think how Jesus summed up the law: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart… and your neighbour as yourself.'

And commentators reckon it's that command to love - God above all others and others as ourselves that Paul's thinking of. Because if, as Luther said, to live in the flesh is to live a life curved in on ourselves, holding God at arm's length, then as we walk in the Spirit, and as we see how Christ came to rescue me, and die for me, we begin to uncurl. And our love for him - and not for sin - grows. And we begin to live like we were meant to live. And as we do, we become just that bit more like him.

And in v5 Paul explains how that happens. '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 set their minds on the things of the Spirit.'

Now, if a guy has set his mind on winning a girl; or if an athlete has set his mind on making the team - it doesn't mean he has the odd passing thought about it, does it? What does it mean? It means this thing has captured and captivated them. It absorbs and engrosses their thinking.

And the person who's not a Christian is absorbed by a life apart from God. Their mindset is one where self takes centre stage and God, if he plays any part at all, is a supporting actor in the film of the story of their life.

But the Christian, Paul says, has a very different mindset. Because now we live with our minds set on the things of the Spirit. Which is not just listening to worship music when you run! It's about having what captivates the Spirit, captivate you. And read the New Testament and the Spirit is taken up with making the Son, the Lord Jesus, look great. And he's taken up with making all that Jesus has done for you real for you:

making you alive in Christ, telling you you're a beloved child of God in Christ, and helping you approach him and pray to him with Spirit-filled boldness.

And so to walk in the Spirit is to live in the good of all that God the Father sent God the Son into the world to do, as God the Holy Spirit takes that Gospel, that good news, and applies it to every area of your life.

So humanity is made up of two very different types of people, Paul says. And we're not divided by language or race or age or ability or politics. We're divided by whether we're in sin or in Christ. In the flesh or the Spirit. Whether we are self-focused or Christ focused.

You see, when I was a boy you could buy sticks of rock. They were pure, unadulterated, rock-hard sugar. And written through the rock was a word, like *love,* or *mum*, or the name of the place you bought it. And break the stick anywhere along its length and you'd find the same word written. And Paul is saying, for the person who's not yet a Christian, the word written throughout their life is 'flesh'. A life curved in. Self on the throne, It's what the default setting of their mind and heart is. It doesn't mean they don't do good things, but *why* they do them, or the inner resources with which they do them, are marked by self-reliance.

But when in God's grace, and by the intervention of God's Spirit, someone becomes a Christian, all that changes Paul says. Because now, there's a totally new identity and new words running through their life, influencing every part of it. And its Christ and the Spirit. And now, as one commentator puts it (Schroeder), 'obedience is not a burden imposed from without [by God's law] but a delight embraced from within.'

Because when you know how much you have been loved, and are loved, what you love most changes.

And these two ways of being, and walking, work themselves out in our lives, Paul says. And the result is either death, or life and peace. Verse 6-7, 'For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed it cannot.'

Now when Paul talks of death and life, is he talking about eternal outcomes? The end results of a life lived in hostility to God or at peace with God? Or is he talking about the fruit we reap in this life? And the answer is 'yes'! Because if you're not yet a Christian you might think a life lived for self is *the* authentic way to live. That anything else is *in*authentic, because it's allowing others to tell *you* how to live. It's why there's been this explosion is so called 'self-care.'

But Paul is saying, no, if you live like that there will be a slow but steady disintegration in your life. Your conscience will become harder, your motives will become more selfish, your need for others to tell you you're great will grow and with it, your fragility. And run that down over the next 10, 20, or 30 years and it will be death not life for you.

And even if you wanted to turn things around, you'd find yourself without the resources to do it. Because why would you want to be less self-centred? Answer: for self-centred reasons. So even your attempts to turn yourself from yourself turns you ever more into yourself.

It's why Paul says, v8, 'those who are in the flesh cannot please God.' It's not about obeying or disobeying the odd rule. It's about a disposition, an identity written throughout a life.

The question is, where do any of us get the power to change? Where does the power to live a life pleasing to God - to become a Christian if you're net yet one, or to live like one if you are - come from?

**The Power Within**
Verse 9: ‘You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.’

Last week, in Romans 7, we saw that one mark of being a true Christian is that we become more aware of our sin, and hate it. But now, Paul says, *the* hallmark of the Christian is the indwelling of God’s Spirit in your life. Is there indwelling sin? Yes. But now there is a far greater indwelling power to fight sin.

And every Christian, Paul says, has the Spirit: v9 again, ‘Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.’ But you do belong to him. By faith, you’re in him. And his Spirit is in you. That just as God’s presence indwelt the Tabernacle and the Temple. So now, he indwells you.

Verse 10: ‘But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.’ Now, Su and I have this dawning realisation that we are not getting any younger. But neither are you, are you? Since your very first breath you’ve been in the process of dying: the impact of sin on God’s good creation.

But now, because of the righteousness of Jesus, a righteousness that’s counted to us, there’s a counter-power at work, Paul says. And God looks at you and says, ‘I am pleased with you’, as his Spirit works life, not death in you. Verse 11, ‘If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.’

So maybe you look at your struggles with sin, or your feelings of guilt, and you wonder if you’re really a Christian, or if you’ll make it to the end. And you feel alone. But can you see how Paul is saying, you are anything but alone. The whole trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are at work to see you through.

God the Father sent the Son to rescue you. And he willingly gave his life for you. God the Father raised him from the dead so that, through God the Spirit, you might have new life - resurrection life, in this life and the next.

So sin and death do not have the last word over you, Paul says. God does. And the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you, today and every day.

And if you’re already a Christian, it’s available in the fight against sin. As the Spirit helps you turn your mind, and set your mind on the things he’s set upon. That this week, as you ponder Christ’s love for you, your love for him and your hatred of sin, will grow, and you’ll become more like him.

And if you’re not yet a Christian, there is a power available to make you one. Because by the Spirit of God you can have a new start. In Jesus’ words, you can be born again. The realities of God can become real for you. And you can know what it is for God to look at you and go: No condemnation - you’re in Christ.

Because Christ is offering you - as he offers all of us - something infinitely better than a life curved in on self.