



**BETHEL**  
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# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## No Condemnation

Romans 8:1-4a

The Wrath of God. It's NOT a popular topic today! When most think of God they think of love. And while God is love, nevertheless God's wrath is 1 of the 2 most frequently discussed subjects of Christ. And that with good cause. A consistent picture that emerges from the Bible about God is that while He is indeed loving, He also is angry and thus condemns! Describing God's wrath as a present reality, Paul wrote this:

Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all

ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Yet it is NOT only today. God’s wrath will be evident at the end of this world- speaking of many on the Last Day who would rather die than bow the knee to Christ.

Revelation 6:16-17, “And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?’”

In fact, since the Fall there has never been a time when God’s wrath isn’t operating in this world. David wrote this:

Psalms 7:11, “God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day.”

And yet at this point there is much misunderstanding NOT ONLY in our world, BUT even in the church. Satan has blinded the eyes of so many such that they believe that as a sovereign and independent individual, man has the right to be happy, healthy, content, and satisfied. And it is God’s purpose to see that man gets these things. As a result, it is man who has the right to be angry with God when confronted with:

- Natural disaster.
- A bad boss.
- Sickness.
- The loss of a job.
- Tragedy.
- And much more.

And of course, God’s perceived response is that He sits in heaven, wringing His hands, wanting so badly to be given a second chance.

What a shock it will be upon the non-Christian’s death to discover that while man’s anger is finite, temporal, mutable, and unjust, God’s anger is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, and just!

Indeed, God is angry! According to the book of Romans there are three reasons for God’s anger.

- All men, through their lineage from Adam, share in the guilt of original sin.

Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and

death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

- All men, though created for God’s glory (Is. 43:6b-7) have willfully turned away from God.

Romans 1:22-23, “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

- All therefore are guilty of foul revolt against God.

Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Accordingly, God most certainly is angry!

Considering this we ask this: What mortal is there who can stand before an angry God? The answer is, “No one!” The Hebrew writer describes the sinner before God. It says that the only anticipation they have is this:

Hebrews 10:27, 31: “...a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries... It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Indeed, there is NOT a soul on this earth who in themselves are beyond condemnation! And thus, there is NO ONE present today who should NOT look upon themselves as ones NOT deserving of God’s anger. And yet, against this dark backdrop emerges a light whose radiance is almost incomprehensible: It is possible for a sinful man to stand before God without condemnation!

That is the glorious message Paul heralds in Romans 8:1-4a. Paul speaks of a promise that should fill our hearts with immeasurable joy! Listen to the words of our passage:

Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

This has been called the most hopeful verse in the Bible. And yet, that is the greatest tragedy of sin: It deafens the sinner to the life-giving promises of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4)! It predisposes him to trust the false and condemning lies of Satan.

I invite you to rejoice over this text which describes an incredible benefit that flows from a saving relationship with Christ, NO CONDEMNATION! Let’s begin by looking at the content of this benefit.

## The Benefit Described

Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

This is a strong term. In the Bible condemnation has two facets to it: (1) the declaration of “guilty” and (2) the resulting punishment established in the sentencing. It is important to note that BOTH are implied by way of condemnation! In our legal system we draw a distinction between condemnation and execution. Yet in Scripture, both of these are embodied in one term: Condemnation. And thus, to be condemned is to undergo the execution of justice on account of one’s guilt — which according to the Bible is death!<sup>1</sup>

Yet in the passage before us “condemnation” is negated. We read, “There is therefore now NO condemnation...” The word for “no” is in the emphatic position. It is a negative adverb of time and carries the idea of complete cessation.<sup>2</sup> It denotes, *“not a single one of any kind.”*

And so, to be a child of God is to receive NOT “a single one of any kind” and so the smallest element of condemnation on account of our sin! NOT a frown, a passing thought, or an urge on the part of God to judgment. The thought of punishment (which as we just saw is a facet of “condemnation”) NEVER crosses God’s mind when you sin!<sup>3</sup> That is the essence of the Benefit described in this verse!

What ought to be the response? Nothing less than joy and rejoicing.

That is the nuance of this verse. Is Paul still teaching here? Most certainly. However, you must see that the tenor of this verse has left the classroom and entered into the temple! You can’t read this verse without a sense of gladness, relief, praise, adoration, and rejoicing...

Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

If the conversion of a sinner brings joy and celebration to heaven (Luke 15:10), I can’t imagine that any verbal declaration of this verse would not do the same!

This truth has been the source of so many hymns written throughout church history. Fanny Crosby put it this way:

Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;  
Redeemed thro’ His infinite mercy, His child and forever I am.

Redeemed, and so happy in Jesus, no language my rapture can tell;

I know that the light of His presence with me doth continually dwell.

I think of my blessed Redeemer, I think of Him all the day long;  
I sing, for I cannot be silent; His love is the theme of my song. (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 701)

Yet my favorite was penned by Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf which includes these lines:

Bold shall I stand in Thy great day; for who ought to my charge shall lay? Fully absolved through these I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

Jesus, be endless praise to Thee, whose boundless mercy hath for me- for me a full atonement made, an everlasting ransom paid. (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 520)

Is this your disposition today? For most it is NOT! Why is that? Because we don't understand this benefit.

### [The Benefit Supplied, v. 2.](#)

Romans 8:2a, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free..."

The statement, "the law of the Spirit of life" is an unusual expression. "For the law" in the context, this word is used in the sense of a "principle." In Romans 7:23, we read of the "law of sin" which speaks of a principle that governs our conduct. That is the nuance here. Paul is speaking of a principle/"law" by which the Holy Spirit works. Notice that work: "For the law of the Spirit of life [or 'who works life'] in Christ Jesus." That's the principle! "*The Spirit of God*" works in our life to give life — NOT death, fear, regret, shame, etc.

And what is the result?

The result is "the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and of death." To "set free" is an aorist tense which carries the idea of a once-for-all, never-to-be-repeated act. And thus, through the work of the Spirit, we are "set free" from the "law"/principle of slavery to sin and death!

Paul is talking here about what theologians' term the Doctrine of Definitive Sanctification. Hopefully you all know this doctrine. But if not, a passage which explains this most clearly is found in Romans 6.

Romans 6:5-7, "For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this,

that our old self was crucified with *Him*, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.”

The salvation we have in Christ involves a moral breach from the dominion of sin. Sin’s power over the non-Christian is its ability to enslave them so that they CANNOT do moral good, serve God, or love Him. Yet on account of Christ, the Holy Spirit works a miracle of deliverance by which He once and for all crushes sin’s power over the believer. Robert Reymond put it this way:

The doctrine of definitive sanctification does not mean that the Christian actually achieves, personally and existentially, sinless perfection the moment he trusts Christ... But what it does mean is that every Christian, the moment he becomes a Christian, by virtue of his union with Christ, is instantly constituted a ‘saint’ and enters into a new relationship with respect to the former reign of sin in his life and with God himself, in which new relationship he ceases to be a slave to sin and becomes a servant of Christ and of God. (Reymond, 1998, p. 758)

John Murray added:

...the decisive and definitive breach with sin that occurs at the inception of Christian life is one necessitated by the fact that the death of Christ was decisive and definitive. It is just because we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of Christ’s death on the tree that we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer has died to sin and no longer lives under its dominion. (Murray, 1977, pp. 2: 289, 293)

And so, the “Law/principle of the Spirit of Life” crushes sin’s active power over the believer!

Does this mean if we are in Christ, we won’t struggle with the same sin over and over and over again? No! For while the power of sin has been broken by Christ, its presence still remains with us on this side of the grave. As such, though we are saved, we will continue to struggle against sin throughout our Christian lives (cf. Romans 7:14-25)! In this regard the Reformers said that we are “*Simul iustus Et Peccator*”- simultaneously just and sinful!

All that being said, how is it that we can be assured that in Christ we never will be “condemned”? It is because of the work of the Spirit who has affected a moral breach between us and sin! He truly gives life! T. W. Manson wrote:

Moses’ law has right but not might [to follow it perfectly is to live, yet no one can do this]; sin’s law has might but no right [sin controls, yet it only condemns; it can never save]; the law of the Spirit has both right [He leads to life] and might

[He enables us to get there]. (Morris, 2012, p. 301)

All this means that when the Holy Spirit enters into the life of the child of God, He FREES the one “in Christ” from the power of sin!

You say, “As wonderful as this sounds, there are questions.” Anticipating that, Paul gave further explanation describing the ground or basis upon which this benefit is secured.

The Benefit Secured, vv. 3-4a.

Romans 8:3a, “For what the Law could not do [that is, save us by ‘condemn[ing] sin in the flesh’ v. 3b], weak as it was through the flesh...”

This is NOT a new concept in this Epistle. In Romans 7, Paul shows that it is NOT the law that is to blame for man’s failure to follow it, BUT man. He is the one to blame for “his flesh is weak”- “the things he wants to do, he does not do” (cf. Romans 7:7-23)! So, get this:

- If followed perfectly, the Law is a path to life and prosperity.
- And yet, because of the weakness of man — you and I — the Law can never perfectly be followed. Adam teaches us that!

This leads to the conclusion that the Law though wonderful is impotent to destroy sin — it is “weak... through the flesh”!

Do you understand what this means? Everything within us wants to relate to God on the basis of our performance. Yet because our flesh is weak, we will always fall short! That means if we continue to live by our performance before God, we will always think that God is NOT pleased with us because we will always fail! Truly, our trust and hope therefore can NEVER be in what we do, even as Christians! RATHER, our trust and hope are in what God has done on our behalf in Christ!

Romans 8:3b, “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son...”

That which man could NOT do, that which the Law was incapable of doing, GOD DID- He effected man’s salvation! How? By “sending His own Son...”- notice the three qualifying statements.

- In the likeness of sinful flesh: this is NOT to say that Christ took upon Himself a sinful body,<sup>4</sup> BUT that Christ took on Himself human nature!<sup>5</sup> And that means first of all that on the throne of the universe sits a King who understands our struggles and our weaknesses.<sup>6</sup> Yet secondly this also means that in His coming,

Christ was born UNDER the Covenant of Works! And because He did NOT sin (unlike Adam), notice what He was able to do: Christ gave Himself as...

- And as an offering for sin: in the LXX, this is the regular expression for the Sin Offering [περὶ ἁμαρτίας (*peri hamartias*)! Recall how this offering worked. The worshipper took a spotless lamb, brought it to the temple, placed his hands on the head of the sacrifice, and then confessed his sin. This symbolically transferred his sin to the animal. With that, he then cut the animal's throat signifying that *"this is what he deserved on account of his sin."* That is what Christ became on account of our sin! He is "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29) on whose head we laid our hands and confessed our sin. He is our Sin Offering by which we received His life, and He received our death. By this...
- He condemned sin in the flesh: this speaks of the once-for-all nature of Christ's atoning work. When you became a Christian, Christ NOT ONLY forgave the sins you were able to confess at that moment, BUT He forgave them all! That was the scope of the Cross-work of Christ. For each and everyone in Christ, Jesus condemned their sin! And what was the result?

Romans 8:4a, "...in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us."

What is the requirement of the law? Perfect obedience! Speaking of those who would seek to relate to God on the basis of their effort like circumcision, Paul said this:

Galatians 5:3, "And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law."

That is the nature of performance-based religion. You can't pick and choose which religious activity you are going to perform in order to please God. ALL of it is necessary, that is "the requirement of the Law"! Earlier in Galatians Paul put it this way:

Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.'"

That is the requirement of the Law! When God created this world, He entered into a relationship with man based upon law-keeping (Genesis 2:16-17). What did Adam do? He rebelled which condemned the human race. Speaking of Adam, Paul wrote this:

Romans 5:18a, "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men..."

So, what did Christ do when He died on the cross? Look at the verse before you



Romans 8:3-4a, “For what the Law could not do [grant us a relationship with God], 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 sin in the flesh [and what was the result?], in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us...”

Do you understand the basis of this first benefit referenced here: No Condemnation? Because Christ’s life was the payment for sin, there could never come a time in your life where God could condemn. And again, what does that mean? What is condemnation? It references both our execution as well as:

- Any thought on the part of God that we are guilty of sin.
- Any inclination of disapproval.
- Any notion of rejection.
- Any dour look!

Truly, if you are in Christ, then you could never in this life or the next receive a condemning glance from God, much less condemnation. Our sins have been removed! What a glory! What a joy! In the words of Horatio Spafford:

My sin- O the bliss of this glorious thought!- my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more; praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 691)

So, let’s end where we began... with rejoicing! What may be the most hopeful verse in the Bible applies to you!

## References

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Romans 6:23; cf. also Romans 2:5-6; Hebrews 10:27!

<sup>2</sup> Paul does NOT use the typical word for negation here, οὐ (*ou*). Here he uses οὐδέν (*ouden*)

which is stronger than the former translated as “not one.”

<sup>3</sup> Punishment is a facet of condemnation. That is not to imply that the thought of discipline doesn't enter God's mind when the child of God lives in unrepentant sin. It most certainly does as that in part makes up His disciplining love (cf. Matthew 18:17; Proverbs 5:21-22).

<sup>4</sup> We do not read “in sinful flesh.”

<sup>5</sup> This doctrine is so important- the doctrine of the Incarnation. Though we were imprisoned on account of our sin Christ entered our prison cell, broke the chains that imprisoned us, and set us free! Now, if Christ had not become one of us, He could not have saved us. (This is why fallen angels are not redeemed in Christ- Christ did not assume their nature, Hebrews 2:16)! And so, without the incarnation, we would still be enslaved to sin!

<sup>6</sup> In the words of Andrew of Crete, “Hear the words of Jesus: ‘O my servant true; thou art very weary, I was weary too...’” (Great Commision Publications, 1990, p. 574) it is as Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”