

## Fresh Freedom from a New Identity

Romans 8:1-4

*“Nothing therefore now condemns those in Christ Jesus”*

**Introduction:** There is great confidence that comes in knowing who you are. Most have a hard time defining the fundamental question of *who they are*, and spend most of their lives at the mercy of what others think of them. Without a sure foundation of one’s identity, insecurity, wrongful comparison, and joylessness are sure to follow. Often people who *seem* the most confident are simply covering for deep seated self-doubt.

Our true identity cannot come outside of us. Most men, if you ask them about themselves, will tell you about their **job** ---- since often what we DO defines who we are in our minds ---- or accomplishments. The problem with this is the **Papa John** conundrum, where a whole pizza company was based on the name a likeness of John Schnatter, only to be undone after he was forced to resign from what he himself started, and distanced from the product he originated. Jobs and accomplishments can come and go, and are a terrible barometer for the worth and character of a man.

In a Lifeway research poll, over 1000 Americans were asked about markers they found important in terms of their identity.<sup>1</sup> Areas like the good they did, achievements, their role as a friend, hobbies, and things they endured dominated the top of the list, followed by education and political affiliation. But the overwhelming majority said that **role in the family** was the most important. This not only makes sense, but an identity that is foundationally planted in family is not easily shaken, puts more weight on *who we are* more than *what we do*, and lasts our entire lives. An identity in an unshakable source, then, will breed confidence and security in life, allowing an individual to serve others without needed approval and make decisions without needing constant affirmation.

This idea is what makes **Romans 8** such a powerful, clear, and needed chapter. In the first 7 chapters of Romans, we have seen that God is **holy**, that mankind is sinful and rebellious, which demanded and deserved wrath. But God put forth a perfect Savior, Jesus Christ who was crucified and rose from the dead in order to satisfy the wrath of God and offer *declared righteousness* to all who would believe. God’s grace along gives those who would believe faith, and that faith not only is what justifies but also sanctifies as we now live out of a newfound identity. This is the essence of salvation and Christianity, that we can now see God and worship Him for who He is out of who we are in Jesus Christ. But being a Christian is NOT only a transaction ---- from darkness to light, death to life ---- it is **a transfer**, from one reality to another, and we now are **IN CHRIST**, meaning we are NOT bound by the sin of Adam but are made new, given a **new identity** that includes the promise of security and thus confidence.

Romans 8 reads like a breath of fresh air, a resolution to the dissonance in the battle of sin in chapter 7. Though Paul ended with hope in 7:25 ---- *“thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”* ---- it ended with him still battling the law of sin which waged war against his flesh, the part of him yet to be sanctified. Each of us could feel the tension described, as we battle the flesh every day, often doing the things we **hate** and failing to do the things we **want** to. Coming off the heels of chapter 6, **we know** sin no longer dominates and we are free from its slavish hold, but our experience is more frustrating. So what hope do we cling to as our sin is exposed and aroused by the law? Where do we turn when we

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<sup>1</sup> <https://research.lifeway.com/2019/07/30/where-do-americans-find-their-identity/>

seem to fail far too often? What confidence can we have when some battles are lost? The answer to these come in a resounding way in a handful of words in 8:1.

### **Freedom from Condemnation (v. 1a)**

*There is therefore now no condemnation*

In four Greek words, Paul gives a fresh oxygen hit to those suffocating from the restriction of sin. It is like a pressure release and tension break. I remember that after taking my gallbladder out, they put a drainage tube into my stomach since there was concern of infection following the surgery. It created constant pain and discomfort. So on the day it was removed, there was much anticipation. The under 100 pound nurse who was assigned to wrench it out told me it would cause only *pressure*, but when she yanked the 3 feet of hose out of my side, my toes and fingers curled, body tensed, and words burst forth. If that was pressure, I don't want to experience pain! But what followed was a total relief from all that I had experienced the last week, as comfort was restored and healing progressed. Taking the tube out brought resolution from pain, as does these precious four words.

**NO CONDEMNATION**, which means there is neither *sentencing nor punishment* for the sins that believers commit or will ever commit. The word order in the original put the idea of "NO" in an emphatic position, "*Nothing therefore now*". Notice that Paul connects this with all that he said before, and gives a promise that not only resounds in the future (Rom. 8:23), but speaks in the present ('now'). This is the bone and marrow of the gospel --- the fact that Jesus satisfied the requirement of the law, permanently paying for our debt of sin and the penalty of the law, which is the definition of condemnation ---- for any and all who would humbly believe by faith. No fear of judgment, since love has overcome and frees us of the fear of future punishment (see 1 John 4:15-18).

There are a few important implications in knowing we are no longer condemned:

- **This is the answer for the *hypocritical AND hypercritical*** – A couple of weeks ago we looked at two poles in dealing with the reality of the **presence** of sin in our daily life (as opposed to the *penalty and power* that no longer enslave us). The *hypocritical* struggle to see the sinfulness of sin, focusing only on *external* morality and failing to see the MRI of their rebellion and x-ray of their sin of desire and motives. The *hypercritical* cannot come to grips with the victory Christ secured for sin and the freedom that comes, even as sin remains present. Both fail to understand the gospel and will miss out on the joy of true assurance: the first thinking they can do it on their own and the second thinking it an impossible task. Both are prideful, and thus lack true confidence in Christ. **NO CONDEMNATION** means that both can deal confidently with their sin without the fear of judgment. Too many people feel like they cannot open up about their struggle with sin, fearing others will judge. But the truth of the gospel shatters that false image of the church and how God views us.
- **No Condemnation bookends with No Separation** – Notice that if there is no condemnation in Christ, there is also nothing or no one who can separate us from being **in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Rom. 8:39). This is the assurance and confidence of security --- we are held by Christ, in Christ, and even our sin cannot separate us, any more than your child wrecking the car or losing the necklace you lent will separate them from being a part of your family. We are secure from Condemnation **BECAUSE** we will not be separated from Christ.

- **No Condemnation does not mean No Discipline** – The freedom from judgment does NOT mean there will be no consequences for actions ---- as we saw with King David ---- nor does it mean God will not discipline us as children (Heb. 12:6). In fact, because we are in Christ, He will discipline those that He loves. But discipline is for the purpose of maturity and correction, NOT punishment. We no longer have to fear either one when our identity is rooted in Christ.

### **Freedom *born out of* Justification (v. 1b-2)**

*for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*

The gospel is not something that only affects us *outwardly*, like a uniform we put on, but many act like it is. Justification is a work that affects us from the inside out, declaring us righteous, while the promise of the New Covenant gives us a **new heart** with *new desires* (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26-27). When this happens by faith, we are not just united **with Christ, but we are united IN HIM**. We are adopted as sons (Rom. 8:15), and our lives are transferred in Him. We are **born into a family** with all of its challenges and advantages, **but we are BORN AGAIN into Christ's family** as full sons and daughters This is how Paul said it in **Galatians 2:20-21**:

*20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

*“Those who are ‘in Christ’ have transferred from the realm ruled by sin, guilt, and condemnation, into God’s realm, where mercy, righteousness and freedom reign”<sup>2</sup>*

When we are declared righteous, we are transferred since we have been crucified and our old lives are dead, though we still live in these fleshly ones. This is an important point to pause, since it is clear by this description given by Paul that the promise of NO CONDEMNATION only comes to those who are IN CHRIST, which means there are those who are OUTSIDE of Christ, even those who may have some outward vestiges of following Christ. If you are one who believes that morality/good works or knowledge alone will save, you are outside of Christ. Only those who through humility trusts the work of Christ on your behalf, asks for forgiveness, and turns to follow Christ will be IN CHRIST. There is no middle ground nor shortcut around.

Now, Paul moves the argument along by introducing the work of the **Holy Spirit**, the Person of the Trinity that was NOT highlighted much in chapter 7. In fact, the Spirit was only mentioned once in 7:6, but is addressed **19 times in chapter 8!** The Spirit often gets attributed with the ecstatic and miraculous, which was certainly true in the book of Acts as He enabled new groups of believers to speak in real language they previously did not know (see Acts 2:5-8) or do miracles to validate their message. But the primary work of the Spirit is not to cause emotional responses but to help us see and understand our deliverance from sin IN CHRIST JESUS. He liberates our soul from bondage of sin to daily transformation of our inner man in the image of Christ through His Word. He helps us do what **2 Cor. 4:16-18** promised:

*“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”*

<sup>2</sup> Dan Doriani, “Romans: Reformed Expository Commentary”, p. 242.

### Freedom sourced in Substitution (v. 3)

*For God has done what the 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*

But how did God condemn sin but not those who committed it? The answer is a blatantly beautiful in verse 3, a vivid picture of **substitutionary atonement**, where Jesus died in our place on the cross. Again, the law could provoke and condemn, but it could never save, since OUR FLESH was weak our sin was deep, though the law itself was holy and righteous. How could God save weak, sinful man while maintaining His holiness? The answer is in the second part of the verse. God succeeded where the Law failed.

There are two main parts of this that we must understand:

- 1) **Christ took on the real likeness of humanity, but NEVER possessed the sin nature of humanity** – There is true beauty in knowing a Savior who lived our life in every way, yet was without sin. Jesus experienced all the things we do, from hunger and thirst, abandonment, tears, need for sleep, and proactively spending time with His Father. In the Westminster Confession of Faith 6.5, it says that Jesus' body was like ours, except that his flesh was not corrupted by Adam's original sin, by actual sin from his own deeds, or by a 'corruption of nature'. He was tempted, but not like we are, who are lured and enticed by our own desires (James 1:14). His temptation came from the outside, yet were still real (Heb. 2:14, 17). This is where **Philippians 2:6-7** is helpful:

*“Christ Jesus who, though he was in the **form of God**, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the **form of a servant**, being born in the **likeness of men.**”*

The key is that Jesus never ceased to be the **eternal Son of God**, meaning that though He came into humanity, He was the preexistent Son of God. He took on the form of man in every way, yet never stopped being divine, including giving up His glorious nature. He was the ONLY ONE who could accomplish the needed atonement on the cross, since a sinful man could not atone for all of sin, and God alone could not die in our place.

- 2) **Christ became a willing sin offering on our behalf** – ‘*For sin*’ is a technical term for a sin offering.<sup>3</sup> Jesus was a sacrifice, sent BY the Father, who willingly offered Himself in the flesh, or His very body, as a sacrifice for sin. The law could never do this. But God poured out wrath on the Son in the flesh to condemn sin, so that He could offer all those who believe the righteousness of Christ. Sin was judicially condemned, making the sacrificial death of the Son of God the **means by which sin is condemned**. This makes the cry of the heart of every redeemed sinner ---- “look at Christ, look to Christ, not yourself, and understand that you are no longer condemned because He took it all on Himself”. **The law was fulfilled when God attributed our sin to Jesus and His righteousness to us.**

### Freedom worked out in Sanctification (v. 4)

*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***

<sup>3</sup> This phrase appears in 10 biblical books and about 60 times in the Septuagint, primarily in Leviticus and Numbers (e.g. Lev. 5; 16; Num. 7, 29) – Doriani, p. 244

What is the culmination of knowing we are no longer condemned under the penalty of sin and the weight of the power of sin? We now have freedom to live and walk differently. In any family, there are expectations, and with those expectations come resources. The freedom that a righteous, redeemed believer in Jesus has is a choice, each day, each moment, of whom they will follow and what will have control.

What does the righteous requirement of the law mean? Since it's singular, it could mean the demands of God's law, including the stated cost of sin, be satisfied, which would point to Jesus work on the cross. But the verb is in the *passive* form, that righteousness should be fulfilled in us. This seems to be more in line with the context, and the focus is not on Jesus' atoning work as much as the way that the Spirit strengthens us for a life of obedience. Notice that Paul contrasts two types of "walks" possible for those who are not condemned.

We looked before at the fact that the whole law is fulfilled in one word: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:9-10). This command necessitates a **robust love for God** and a turning away from self, since love seeks the best of another, not your own. If we are truly changed from the inside out, we WANT to love God and DESIRE to keep His commands, seeking to please, magnify, and glorify Him. As love for God grows, love of self shrinks. As love for God's glory grows, hatred of sin grows. AS love of God grows, desire to see others find their joy in Christ flows.

But how do we do that? There is a fundamental difference between what Paul described at the end of chapter 7 and here in chapter 8, and it is the ability that believers have to **walk according to the Spirit rather than the flesh**. The Holy Spirit **indwells** every believer (Rom. 8:9), and the issue after that is how much control and influence does the Spirit have in us. There are promises given pertaining to the indwelling work of the Spirit, which every believer should seek to align with each day:

- **Walk by the Spirit** --- *you will not gratify the desires of the flesh* (Gal. 5:16)
- **Desires of the Spirit and Flesh are at odds and obvious** (Gal. 5:17)
- **Being led by the Spirit means we are not under the law** (Gal. 5:18)
- **The Works of the Flesh are obvious** ---- *sexual immorality, sensuality, idolatry, impurity, anger, jealousy, envy, etc.* --- these are NOT produced when we walk in the Spirit but are tell-tale signs of when we are fleshly
- **Walking by the Spirit PRODUCES real and observable fruit** – *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Gal. 5:22-23)
- **Living by the Spirit means keeping constantly in step with the Spirit** (Gal. 5:25), meaning we can get out of step with the Spirit.

This is all describing a **pattern** of life directed by the Holy Spirit, which is a demonstration of the His transforming work. This is the same battle that Paul described in 7, but we are armed with an indwelling Spirit who points us to Christ, convicts us of sin, and who illuminates God's Word for us. The flesh is there and our enemy is both deceptive and duplicitous, but we have the knowledge of NO CONDEMNATION, not a truth that frees us up to sin more, but a reality that frees us to LIVE righteously.

So the questions this morning: **are you walking in the flesh or Spirit? Are you in Christ or outside? Is the pattern of your life consistent with who you say you are? Can you answer the question, "Who am I?"**

This is why we need to preach the gospel to ourselves each day. This is not a new concept nor one any of us came up with, but it is the needed reality in a life with sin present. We need to remember that we are IN Christ, that we have been redeemed, that we have the Spirit, that we do not have to sin, that there is NO condemnation, NO separation between us and Christ, and that we can **walk each day in the Spirit and have the fruit of the Spirit produced in us. This is what it means to say we are a "CHRISTIAN", a child of God, a member of God's family.**