

The Best Freedom
July 3, 2016

This week we are celebrating freedom. We have both freedoms to..., and freedoms from. For example we have the freedom to... speak our minds, freedom to assemble, freedom to get an education, freedom to travel, and more.

We also have freedoms from. We have freedom from foreign rulers. We have freedom from others forcing us to practice a particular religion.

This morning I want to share with you what I believe to be the best freedom from that there is. It is a freedom from that anyone can have. If you do not yet have this freedom from yet, you can gain this freedom from before you leave here today.

To introduce this freedom I want you to examine a couple of feelings with me. First, imagine that you are guilty of a terrible crime. You have been arrested and charged. You know that when you go to court you will be found guilty and condemned to the electric chair. How are you feeling as you sit in your jail cell? How do you feel while waiting to be found guilty and condemned? (throw out)

Now let's say you go to court, are found guilty, and sentenced to the electric chair. But after some months awaiting execution the governor of the state pardons you. You are now free, no longer under the sentence of death. And never again can someone charge you with that same crime. Now how do you feel? (throw out)

We're going to come back to those two feelings in just a moment, but let me give you the context of our Bible passage this morning. I want to take you to the book of Romans in the Bible. The writer of this book, Paul, the missionary, has been instructing his readers of two great truths. The first truth is that we are all sinners against God.

We have all failed to give God the attention He deserves as God. We have all failed to take God into account as we make choices about how we will live, who we will be, what we will do with our lives. We say things and do things without any regard for God or what He wants. This is our chief sin.

In addition to this sin, we are guilty of not living out His commands as given to mankind through the Jewish prophet Moses. We call these commands the Law of Moses. And if you disregard those commands, the Law of Moses calls for your death. **The Law of Moses condemns you to death for your failure to keep the Law.** We are all guilty of this and are living under this condemnation.

The other great truth Paul has been writing about is the solution to this problem. Despite our continual failure to live for God, He has sent us someone to save us from the consequences of our sin. God's plan can bring an end to our condemnation. God sent His son Jesus to die in our place, to suffer the consequence for our sins.

Paul felt the feelings of both these truths. Before he became a Christian, he believed Christians to be a dangerous cult group. He believed it to be a false religion. He went around arresting and jailing Christians. He was zealous to uphold the Law of Moses as he understood it. He was even proud of how well he thought he was obeying it.

Then he met Jesus and his feelings of pride quickly changed. He discovered that the Christian faith was true and he, Paul, was working against God. He discovered sin in himself that he had not seen before. So he worked to stop sinning by sheer force of his will... and failed time and time again. He describes this failure in the seventh chapter of Romans. He realized that sin ran deep in his heart and he makes this powerful, emotional declaration...

Romans 7:24 (NIV) What a wretched man I am!

He felt miserable, unhappy, and distressed. Paul knew that the Law of Moses condemned him to death for his sins. He was feeling that condemnation when he wrote those words. His great pride in himself had turned to great sorrow.

Perhaps you have experienced such a sudden change in emotion. Have you ever bought something brand new and expected it to be perfect? You felt great joy, excitement, even pride at owning it. Maybe it was a house, a car, a computer, or something else. And while it was still new you discovered a problem with it, something major. And suddenly your joy turned to sadness. Your pride of ownership turned into sorrow at purchasing it. You were wishing to be rid of it. You went from feelings of great joy and pride to feelings of great disappointment. You felt great disappointment in that new, but flawed thing. Has anyone had such an experience?

This is what Paul was feeling when he wrote those words about himself. And in feeling the condemnation of the Law of Moses, he knew he needed a Savior.

Romans 7:24 (NIV) What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Have you ever felt that way about YOURSELF? Have you ever been so disappointed in yourself, your behavior, your words, and felt the fear of condemnation of God upon your sin? Then you know what Paul was feeling.

But Paul had discovered the answer to his question. Paul learned that Jesus came to rescue him from the consequences of his sin. His great sorrow turned into great joy. And so he writes of that joy in Jesus.

Romans 8:1 (NIV) Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

I believe we should read this sentence with an exclamation mark too. As powerfully miserable were the words of 7:24, these words are powerfully joyful. "there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

This is pardon. God has commuted our sentence. The Law of Moses condemns us for our failure to obey. But we are no longer living under that condemnation. What wonderful words these are. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. I would encourage you to think on this truth, memorize it, recite it daily, affirm your faith in it in your prayers to God, and use it to defend yourself against spiritual attacks.

Everyday I struggle with sin just as Paul writes of himself in 7:24. And at times I feel the weight of those words about ME, "What a wretched man I am!" But Jesus brings me back to the truth of 8:1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This is GOOD news. This is the best news. Freedom from condemnation is the best freedom to be had. It is good news every time I am reminded of it. It is good news every time I need it. It never loses its power to cheer me up.

God wants you to be cheered up with it too.

Romans 8:1 (NIV) Therefore, there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...

Say it with me. Say again, with feeling!

Notice to whom this truth applies. It applies to he or she who is "in Christ Jesus". This means the person who has received Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is not everyone on the planet. This is not a particular ethnic group, or socio-economic group. This is not a particular gender or age. This freedom from condemnation is limited to those who are in Christ Jesus. You have to do something to become in Christ Jesus. You have to accept Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord of your life.

Now there is a question some of you might be thinking in response to this statement in verse one. You might be thinking why there no condemnation.

Romans 8:1-2 (NIV) Therefore, there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

The use of the word "law" in verse two is best understood as "authority". It is not referring to law as a command, a rule, or an ordinance, but rather as an authority. He mentions two that have authority. He writes of the Spirit, which is God, the Holy Spirit. And he writes of sin and death. This second is another way of referring to the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses has authority to define sin and to condemn sinners.

For receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord, the Spirit has freed us from the Law of Moses and the condemnation of that Law for our sin. Again we ask, why, or how does this work? Let's read on.

Romans 8:3 (NIV) For 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.

What is the Law of Moses powerless to do? It is powerless to make us obey. It is powerless to make us righteous with God. The word righteous means declared to have a right relationship with God.

The Law of Moses cannot do this. The Law of Moses can only instruct about what is sin and condemn sinners. It has no power to make us perfect. It has not power to keep us from sinning. It's authority to instruct us about sin was weakened by our own sinful

nature. It was weakened by our flesh. The actual word here in the original language is "flesh". The NIV translation uses the phrase "sinful nature" to try to communicate Paul's description of sin in himself in chapter seven. He saw sin as a power inside him fighting his desire to obey God.

The Law of Moses, intended to guard me from sin, condemns me once I have sinned.

The authority of the Law of Moses was weakened by our flesh, our sinful nature, the desire to live for self instead of for God. The Law of Moses could not make us holy, could not make us perfect, could not make us obedient to God, could not make us righteous with God.

But God determined a different way for us to be righteous with Him.

Romans 8:3 (NIV) For 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.

God sent His Son, perfect, holy, and fully obedient to the Law of Moses. God sent Jesus as the God/man, fully God and fully man to be a sin offering. Jesus came to die in our place, not for any sin of His own, but for all of our sins.

Only Jesus was able to live the Law of Moses perfectly. Jesus was righteous before God. But no one else is. All the rest of us are guilty of sin and living under the condemnation of the Law.

We all need a savior, a rescuer. Jesus is that savior.

Romans 8:4 (NIV) And so he (God) condemned sin in sinful man, 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.

God had Jesus take our sins upon Himself and die on the cross. Then, when we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord, God puts Jesus' righteousness on us. This is the big exchange, and it is unprecedented in human history.

There has been a big exchange in the news this week. If you bought one of the defective cars from Volkswagen, they have agreed to buy it back from you for more than the car is worth. This involves a whole lot of vehicles. This is big. This is unprecedented. But it is tiny in comparison to the exchange that takes place when we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Jesus takes upon Himself all of our sins. And we can receive all of His righteousness. That is why there is now NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Notice also the time related to these truths. The verse says, "now". This gift of a right relationship with God has not always been available. It has only been available since

Jesus died on the cross. That was in the past. So we are living in the "now" of Paul's statement.

This is such wonderful news, "there is NOW... NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

So, ARE you in Christ Jesus? Have you received Jesus as your Savior from the consequences of YOUR sin? Have you turned your life over to Jesus as Lord? The word Lord means boss, owner, master. It is a total commitment of your life to Him. This is no small matter. This is no minor choice. It is total commitment.

There is a sample prayer at the end of the sermon insert in your program. Pray this prayer to Jesus today and mean it and you too will leave, in Christ Jesus.

Now, one more word to you who are already Christians. Remember those two feelings we spoke of earlier. The devil wants you living your day in the fear and sorrow of condemnation. The devil wants you doubting your relationship to God. The devil wants you focused on your sin and fearing that you are still under condemnation. The devil wants you thinking all day, "What a wretched person I am!"

But Jesus wants you to focus on the truth of 8:1. There is NOW, NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Live in the joy of that truth this week.

Maybe you have been slipping lately and letting the devil get the upper hand and living in the wrong feelings. You need to repent of this sin this morning.