

# No Condemnation

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One of the most beautiful thoughts in Scripture appears in Romans 8:1. To the Christian who understands the word, this is the kind of idea that fills our hearts with such joy that we want to sing about it forever. However, to many in America today, even those who profess to be followers of Christ, this idea would only be confusing. Churches all across the country teach that God is a loving God who wants us to be happy, and that we are fine the way we are. To people who have heard that sort of teaching for years, the idea that God would condemn them for anything is jarring.

However, if we don't understand that, it is fair to say that we don't understand the Bible at all. God's word isn't about how to be happy on earth and cope with earthly problems. Instead, it's about our biggest problem of all and God's solution to that problem. It's about sin and salvation through Jesus. Only as we understand that and what it means for us will we find the joy that God wants us to find. Let's look, then, at what it means that we have no condemnation in Christ.

## Sin

The first part of this study, and by far the least pleasant, must be the study of sin. We're not going to explore what sin is or warn against specific instances of sin. Instead, we're going to look at what sin, any sin, does to us. The Scripture first tells us that sin **BLINDS** us. Read with me from 1 John 2:11. In other words, when we sin, it warps our understanding of sin and righteousness, so that we have trouble telling the two apart. This distortion of our thinking is subtle, but it is deadly. Let me give you an illustration of how it works in our dealings with one another. Let's say that I've gotten in a spirited discussion with Brian over whether it is lawful for Christians to have Christmas trees in their homes, and in the course of this discussion, the devil successfully tempts me to become angry at Brian. Once that ungodly anger has taken root in my heart, it's going to twist the way I see everything that Brian does. If I get mad enough at him, he can quite literally do no right in my eyes. If he brings the subject up again, I will take that to mean that he's a contentious bully, even if he had no intention of bullying me. If he doesn't bring up the topic again, and seems to be looking to avoid it, I will take that to mean that he's a slimy coward who is probably talking about me behind my back, even if he's actually doing no such thing. No matter what he does, my anger will find a way to accuse him. What's more, when I'm finding fault with everything he does, I'm sincere in that, because my sin has blinded me to the truth.

Second, sin **CORRUPTS** us. Peter mentions this corruption in 2 Peter 1:4. When the Scripture tells us that sin is corrupting, it isn't just talking about the guilt it incurs in the eyes of God, although it certainly does do that. Instead, sin corrupts us by corrupting our hearts, by making us less like Jesus and more like the devil. It's human nature to get used to the things we experience, and if what we experience is evil, we get used to evil. The Christian man who is an adulterer probably has a really tough time with guilt the first time he cheats on his wife, but every time he cheats after that first wrenching experience, it's a little easier, and a little easier, until finally he finds that his conscience doesn't trouble him at all over the act of adultery. He's had time to develop all kinds of elaborate justifications about how the fact that he's betraying his marriage vows is actually his wife's fault and not his, and he may even begin to believe the lie that God doesn't have a problem with his evil because God loves him and wants him to be happy. That sounds ridiculous, but I know Christians who have made that claim about their adultery. The more we sin, the more it rots our souls from the inside out, until finally we become someone we wouldn't even have recognized beforehand. Sin corrupts.

Because sin is so corrupting, it also inevitably **SEPARATES** us from God. Paul points to this in Ephesians 2:12. Here, he describes the Gentile Ephesians before they became Christians as being without God in the world. That, friends, is one of those innocuous little phrases in Scripture that gets more and more monstrous the more we think about it. What would it be like to go through life without God? We can't trust in His love and His protection, we can't look with hope to the future that He has prepared for us, and we have every reason to believe that our life is going to be a series of disasters ended by tragedy. The godless life is a miserable life. However, friends, when we pursue a course of sin, the godless life is what we are choosing for ourselves. When we allow sin to corrupt our souls, we become someone God can't stand to be around. God is no more able to tolerate our sin than we are able to drink a bucket of raw sewage. His nature doesn't give Him any choice in the matter. When sin becomes part of our life, it ensures that God isn't a part of our life.

Once sin has gotten us away from God, it uses the opportunity to **ENSLAVE** us. Let's look together at Romans 6:16. Slavery is an ugly word in modern America, and it should be. When one man enslaves another, he reduces a being created in the image of God to a species of two-legged cattle. What we must recognize about sin is that it does the same thing. The more we give ourselves over to sin, the more it robs us of our dignity and humanity, the more it dominates us, and the more it makes us miserable for its purposes, not our own. This is most obvious with the so-called addictive sins, drug abuse, alcoholism, and the like. Proverbs 23 contains a lengthy warning against the dangers of drinking, and it ends with the drunkard saying, "When shall I awake? I must have another drink." I used to think that was metaphorical, until I had a conversation with our brother Dennis about his experience with alcoholism. He told me that when he was in the grip of that sin, that literally, his very first thought upon waking up was where he could find more alcohol, and the answer

was usually, “In the bottle under the pillow that I left there the night before.” He didn’t enjoy living that way, but his sin had so enslaved him that he couldn’t imagine living any other way. This becomes all the more frightening when we realize that every sin is addictive, and that every sin will bring us that low if we give it the chance. It’s more socially acceptable to put in 14-hour days at the office every day than to destroy ourselves with alcohol, but the truth about people like that is revealed by the fact that we call them “workaholics”. We might get nicer stuff if we are enslaved by Demon Greed than Demon Alcohol, but our lives will be just as miserable. Sin never blesses those whom it rules over.

Finally, of course, sin **KILLS**. Paul gives an example of this in Romans 7:11. This death sentence isn’t carried out immediately, but it is no less sure for all that. While we live on this earth, God gives us chance after chance to leave behind the twisted, pitiable existence of the sinner, to become something better and more beautiful. Sadly, most people reject every one of those chances, leaving God no choice but to reject them. God isn’t going to start bringing unrepentant sinners into heaven any more than one of the ladies here is going to start a cockroach farm in her kitchen. In both cases, they’re too repugnant to belong. That leaves only one other option. If the sinner isn’t fit for heaven, he must be condemned to the eternal death of hell, there to forever mourn the final and most disastrous consequence of sin.

## Jesus

Clearly, then, sin is a disaster in our lives, a disaster that we are powerless to escape on our own. Thankfully, God sent Jesus to rescue us. He can reverse every one of the spiritual consequences of sin, so that we can be pleasing to God again. We’re going to reflect on this miraculous transformation before we partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Where sin on the one hand blinds us, Jesus on the other **GIVES SIGHT**. He tells us so in John 9:39. This spiritual insight is certainly something we can gain from the word. No other book has the power to enlighten like the Bible does. However, the Bible only truly begins to transform us when we put it into practice. Just as the experience of sin changes us, so too does the experience of righteousness. When we make that choice to try to understand somebody instead of shouting back an angry rebuttal, that makes us a different person. When we decide to be loving and patient with a brother instead of harsh and judgmental, it changes the way we will behave next time. When the right decision becomes the pattern of our conduct, we begin to share the mind of Christ. I know Christians like that, Christians who never seem to say anything unwise, who never let somebody else get under their skin, who aren’t worried about the immediate concerns that stress me out. Usually, people like this have made the consistent choice to be godly for decades. Their walk with God has changed the way they see everything, and they’re the better for it.

Second, where sin corrupts, Jesus **PURIFIES**. This is clear from Paul’s description in Titus 2:14. As was true of our discussion earlier, this passage isn’t talking only about some spiritual abstraction that we never truly experience. Instead, when Jesus purifies us, He cleanses not only our souls but also our lives. Here too, the choices that we make change who we are, except that this time the change is good. As the second line of “Yield Not to Temptation” says, “each victory will help you some other to win.” The first time we step outside of our comfort zone, whether it be to reach out to a straying brother, or invite a friend to worship services, or refuse a sin we habitually engage in, that first time is hard. Change is always hard. However, with the Lord’s help, we can persevere in that change until what was once unthinkable becomes habitual. Jesus may well carry out His work in this area in many ways, but it is perhaps most obvious when we study the word. I’ve often thought that the Bible in many ways is less like a book and more like a computer program. It only comes alive once its commands are executed, and once we devote ourselves to living according to its precepts, we find different things in the word than we did before. We become more like Christ.

Similarly, even though sin separates us from God, Jesus **UNITES** us with Him. This is clear from Ephesians 2:18. We’ve already explored how toxic God finds sin. When we give ourselves over to evil, He cannot stand to be in our presence. What makes the situation worse is that we lack the capacity to purify ourselves. Our best efforts would be like Zoë trying to clean herself up when she’s covered in mud. They would only make the situation worse. Jesus, however, has the capacity that we lack. When He washes us clean, He necessarily also removes the barrier that stands between us and God, so that God can become part of our lives once again. That is an amazing thing! We’ve already seen how hopeless the godless life is. Through Jesus, though, that aching void in our lives can be filled, and we can experience what it means to go through life as a child of God. This is a priceless gift, and it is only one of the gifts that Jesus gives.

Fourth, even though sin has enslaved us, Jesus **MAKES US FREE**. He promises this in John 8:36. To most people in the world, this would seem like a ridiculous thing for Jesus to say. After all, they think that being a Christian means that we can’t do this, and we can’t do this, and we can’t do this, so that all of the fun parts of life are off-limits. Sadly, people who think this way have it exactly backwards. We see echoes of the truth even in the words of those who advocate a life of sin. When Lady Gaga declares that she was “born this way”, isn’t she saying that her nature is such that she has no choice but to engage in behavior the Bible forbids? Isn’t she declaring that she is a slave of sin? Similarly, when the Bible tells us, “Thou shalt not”, do the things that it warns against ever end well? The truth is that nobody can build a satisfying life on sin, and getting upset that the Bible keeps us from those things is like being upset at the guardrail on the side of the road that keeps us from going over the cliff. Sure, technically I suppose that it’s a loss of freedom, but

is that the freedom that we actually want? Instead, the freedom that we find in Christ is freedom indeed. Because He redeems us from the tyranny of sin, we are released to live life the way that God intended. We enjoy the worthwhile parts of human experience and are spared from the worthless ones. This freedom is only possible through Jesus.

Finally, and most significantly, although sin kills us, Jesus **GIVES LIFE**. Let's read together from John 10:10. Notice the similar language to what we looked at a moment ago in John 8. There, Jesus promised freedom indeed. Here, offers life that is abundant. Jesus is not miserly with His blessings. Instead, it is His will that His brethren should enjoy them in fullest measure. In this case, the blessing is literally immeasurable. No greater difference can be imagined than the difference between an eternity of death, spent apart from the presence of God, and an eternity of life, spent in joy around His throne. And yet, that difference isn't caused by our own attainments. It is caused by Jesus. Because Jesus has redeemed us, He has made us people whom God will allow in His presence, not just here on earth, but in heaven. Not all the money in the world could purchase eternal life, but Jesus offers it to us freely because of His love for us.

This gives us a great deal to consider as we prepare to partake of the Lord's Supper. It's not hyperbole to say that we owe Jesus everything. It's the sober truth. We would be lost and miserable without Him, but with Him, we can savor every spiritual blessing. Apart from Christ, all of us were wretched creatures, fully deserving of God's condemnation, but in Christ, there is no one who can condemn us. Let's think about the greatness of this blessing as we partake.

## The Life of Freedom

As we have seen, Christ has led us from a life of slavery to a life of freedom. Because as Christians we are citizens of the kingdom in which there is no condemnation, there are several things that should be true of our attitude. First of all, we should be **TRUSTING**. Jesus tells us why we should trust Him in John 10:27-28. Even though the devil could easily defeat us, he cannot defeat Jesus, and as Christians, we must rely on Jesus and not on ourselves. This seems obvious, but in reality it is a struggle for many of us. Several of the most devoted Christians I know live lives that are wracked with guilt and fear. They constantly measure themselves against the standard of the word, constantly see how lacking they are, and because they fail to keep the commandments perfectly, they fear for their salvation. Friends, not only is that a miserable way to live, it also isn't trusting Jesus. Certainly, we should regard sin as evil and seek to remove it from our lives, but our salvation does not depend on how successfully we do so! No matter how earnestly we might desire it, none of us will ever perfect ourselves. None of us will ever rise above the need for Jesus' grace. Thankfully, Jesus has promised to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We need to do our best and trust Him to do the rest.

Similarly, our life in Christ should be a **JOYFUL** life. Paul speaks of this in Romans 5:2. Once we have established that life-giving relationship with Jesus, we have everything that matters. The problems of this life pale in comparison to the joy of having Jesus, simply because this life itself pales in comparison to eternity. If that's right with our life, then our life can't be very wrong. That's the truth, but one of the devil's favorite strategies is to delude and deceive us about our reasons for rejoicing. He wants us to forget how wonderful our Savior is. He wants to wave a whole bunch of little problems around under our noses until we forget that they are little problems and start focusing on them. He may even fool us into believing that by forsaking sin, we're really missing out. We often fall prey to these various attacks, but that doesn't mean that the situation has changed. When we lose touch with the joy that is our birthright as Christians, we need to listen to the devil less and listen to God more. We need to immerse ourselves in the word so that we can regain our spiritual perspective, so that we remember the truth instead of the devil's deceptions.

Third, the life of freedom is supposed to be a **PEACEFUL** life. Paul rather famously explains this in Philippians 4:6-7. Even though we know we should not be anxious, all too often, we become anxious anyway. We get to worrying about some future disaster that may never happen. We start fretting about some person in our lives who is giving us grief in some way. All that worrying is utterly pointless. Nobody ever solved a problem by worrying, and many of the things that we worry about are beyond our control even if we did try to solve them. In circumstances like that, we must learn to cast our care upon the Lord. Every time we feel that worry creeping up on us, we need to pray about it, and pray until the worry goes away, because only God has the power to intervene and the wisdom to know what is best. It is true. God may never take care of our problem. That loved one who is falling away from the Lord may never repent and return. However, God is always going to take care of us. His grace is always going to be sufficient, and with His help, we are always going to make it. For the Christian, things are always going to work out, and in that knowledge, we can find peace.

It is likewise true that the existence of the Christian should be a **HOPEFUL** existence. Peter discusses this hope in 1 Peter 1:3. As always, it's important to remember here that the Biblical concept of hope is different from the concept we use in everyday conversation. I might hope that Mizzou will win the national championship in football this year, but I'm not about to start making hotel reservations in Miami! That's not the same thing as Biblical hope. Instead, Biblical hope is when we expect God to fulfill His promises to us and arrange our lives in accordance with that expectation. If we believe that it is possible for us to inherit eternal life after we die, that belief ought to change the way we live. We will associate with different people, we will spend our money and our time in different ways, and we will devote our energies to different things than if we believed that our last breath was the end of us. As Christians, we should make those

differences evident in our lives, and we should spend significant time meditating on the joys of heaven. For everybody else, this life is all there is. For us, it isn't, and the hope that we have in Jesus should be evident to all.

Finally, the life of freedom is a **LOVING** existence. Once again, Peter has something to say about this, in 1 Peter 1:22-23. For the unbeliever, happiness is truly a limited-time offer. All that is important to them is their precious self and the few short years they have with that precious self on this earth. After that, they have nothing to look forward to. Because they have no hope, they are almost compelled to be selfish. They can't let an insult slide, because they will never get back what that insult has cost them. They can't sacrifice themselves for someone else, because once they make that sacrifice, it's gone forever. All they can do is jealously defend themselves until finally the darkness comes for them.

However, the freedom that we have in Christ is freedom to be loving. We encounter the same temptations to selfishness that the world around us does, but our greater understanding allows us to rise above them. We can love even our enemies, we can calmly endure insult and humiliation, because those things fundamentally cannot matter to us. Even if some man kills me, all he's done is send me to heaven ahead of schedule. He can't touch me because my life is hidden in Christ. Because of this, I am free to love even those who hate me, because their hatred cannot matter.