

BELPRES  CHURCH

**Sermon Title: No Condemnation**

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**Scripture:**

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**Romans 8:1-2**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you<sup>in</sup> free from the law of sin and death.

**Transcript:**

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Well, let me start with a question. Do you ever feel judged by other people or unfairly criticized or looked down on or unfairly evaluated, judged by other people? Now, for those of you who answered no to those questions, all three of you, you can listen to this sermon for a friend. But for the rest of us, for the rest of us, the passage I just read about how there's no condemnation in Jesus is really good news.

Amen.

Because we, we feel condemned by people all the time, right? We feel judged. We feel harshly criticized by other people. Sometimes we do it to ourselves, our own conscience will do that. My wife and I know a woman who one day heard her preschool daughter playing with her dolls and the little girl said to the dolls, "Get in the car. I told you to get in the car." The mom was like, "Where did she learn that tone of voice?" So her own conscious kind of condemned her at that point. We feel condemned by our culture that gives us hundreds of messages a day, that unless you look a certain way, get into a certain college, have a certain kind of job, have a certain kind of friend group, well then you're really kind of a loser, right?

We live in a very judgemental culture. I mean, just look at how we jump all over someone. If they say one wrong thing politically on social media, the rage and the scorn that gets heaped on that person. We live in a very judgmental culture. And in an angry blaming and shaming culture, such as ours, we all need a non accusing place to stand.

For the next couple weeks, we're going to be doing a sermon series on Romans chapter 8, a whole sermon series on one chapter. I remember in graduate school, one of my atheist professors said that he thought the greatest work of literature ever in history is Romans 8, even though he was an atheist. It is filled with God's promises. It starts by saying there is no condemnation because of Jesus. It ends saying that there is no separation from God. And in the middle, it says that there is no defeat because of God. It is just such good news. I feel better every time I read it.

And today, we're just going to walk through the first two verses of Romans 8 about freedom from condemnation. And this is so crucial because when we get that sense of freedom from condemnation and being judged all the time, many good things happen. It frees us from shame. It helps us sin less. It makes us less defensive. It frees us from anxiety, because we're not trying to

prove ourselves to people all the time to avoid their condemnation. Also, it makes us less condemning of others and less judgemental. And I'll explain all of that in a bit.

Okay? Let's start. Therefore... Okay, let's stop. We're got to stop already. Therefore, important word. It means that whatever follows is based on what came before, which is Roman 7 where the apostle Paul who wrote this says this, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do." Anyone relate? Anyone? Anyone? I mean, that's like so me, right? Paul goes on. "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Check. Describes me. "For I do not do the good I want to do. But the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing." There's just a lot of do happening here, right?

Right.

See, we know. I mean, Paul is reading our mail. He is reading our... He's got our number. Because we know deep down inside, we know we screw up. We sin sin. That word means to miss God's intended best, which we do all the time. And our way of responding to that is often denial. "I'm a good person. I'm a good person." I mean, people say that all the time, but I don't think we actually believe it because almost always we're saying it defensively. Like when I'm doing marriage counseling, couples in crisis, both parties, it's inevitable. They'll both look at me and they'll say, "But I'm a good person. But I'm a good person." Well, one of you isn't a good person. Otherwise, your marriage would be awesome. And frankly, talking to you, both seem to be a bit of a problem to me."

If someone catches us lying, we lie to cover it up instead of just saying, "Oh, you're right. I lied." But we don't. We cover it up. "No, I'm a good person. I'm a good person." If someone even hints that maybe we have some biases around race or education or age, we get really upset and defensive and say, "I'm a good person. I don't do that. I'm a good person." Our defensiveness shows, our terror of being thought of as not a good person because deep down inside we know we're not. Because see, the question is, good compared to who? I mean, yes, I'm a good person and at least I'm not Hitler sort of a way. But good compared to God? Yeah, not so much. Good enough to get into heaven on my own? Yeah, not so much. Right? Because as I've said before, even the "little sins" would screw up heaven.

If God lets repentant, untransformed gossips into his heaven, it's not heaven anymore. Even that little sin screws up heaven, because folks are talking about you behind your back. That's not heaven. And religious people, religious people are often the ones who think that they're really good people all the time. I mean, religious people can be the worst offenders. "I'm really good." Because sometimes they don't do the banner sins, the headline sins, adultery, stealing, that sort of thing. "We don't drink. We don't chew. We don't go with girls who do" kinds of people. But

this is like, this side got that. And then back there, there's like the wave. There was this little ripple of "Ha-ha, ha-ha."

Religious people are always like, "We're so good." But they often inside, not so much, right? Yeah, the external stuff, the external sins, maybe aren't there, but inside they're judgemental of other people often for trivial reasons like how they dress or something like that. They're indifferent to the poor or they have biases that they won't admit. They look down on folks who sin differently than they sin. They're good in the worst sense of the word to quote Mark Twain. And so we deny our sin. We cover up our sin.

We deflect our sin by pointing to someone else's sin. "Don't look at me, look at him. Oh my gosh," right? For people who say that we know we're good people, we sure get really prickly when someone suggests that we're not. Because we know deep inside I do what I don't want to do. And the thing I want to do, that I do not do.

And so Paul concludes, "What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God who delivers me through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus died to pay the price for my sins that I know needs to be paid. And because of that, the slate has been wiped clean. Therefore, therefore, therefore, there is now... Or therefore there is, next word, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

When does God view you as not condemned? That was audience participation. Now. Right now, as you sit there, right now, he views you as not condemned. Not sometime down the road. Not when you get your act together. Not when you get out of that cycle of doing what you don't want to do and not doing the thing that you do want to do and all the do do that comes from all that do doing. No, no. Right now.

Yes.

Right now as you sit there, therefore, there is now, next word, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Not less condemnation. Not just a little bit, tiny little bit of condemnation left over. It's like when I was a kid and I'd ask my mom for something and she'd say no, and I'd start to argue with her. And she would say to me, "No means..."

No.

No. Right? None. Zero. Nada. Zilch. Big fat goose egg of condemnation. There is, church say it with me, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

And here's what that means. Here's what that means. It means we do not get free, a feeling of condemned by denying our sin and pretending that we're good people. That's how we try to handle it, but that's not how we get free of it because it just makes us defensive and we know we're not. It's only by admitting our sin to God that we are get free of a sense of condemnation. It's the opposite of what we think, right? We try to, "No, I'm a good person." It's actually, you get free of condemnation by going the other direction. "I'm not a good person, but because of Jesus, I am free. The slate has been washed clean." Because when we admit it to God, here's what God says. "I died to pay the price for those sins. I have forgotten them. I have washed your record clean. You are not condemned in my sight."

Hallelujah.

The only way we get free is not by pretending we don't have issues, it's by admitting that we do. And in a world where we are constantly judged and condemned, there is one place where there is no condemnation, and that is in the presence of Jesus. If you feel condemned, you are not in the presence of Jesus. In Jesus presence, there is no condemnation, okay?

Now, now important clarification. Important clarification so pay attention. There is a difference between being condemned and convinced. Jesus doesn't condemn us, but he does convince us of our sin. He will show us our sin. He will make us aware of our sin. But the crucial question is, why does Jesus make us aware of our sin? So again, this will be audience participation, okay? Jesus convinces us of our sin, A, to condemn and judge us and make us feel bad, or B, to assure us of his forgiveness and to help us move beyond our sin that hurts us and others so we become the people. He created us to be. Super hard question. I know it's like advanced physics. Super tough. But you're really smart people. Is it A? Or is it B?

B.

B. When he makes us aware of our sin or we admit our sin, he doesn't condemn us. Instead, he says something like this. When we admit our sin, he says something like this. "I love you. I believe in you. I forgive you. I even like you. I have a better way than your way. Would you like to try it? If so, I will help." If you hear anything else from Jesus, it was not Jesus. It'll sound like that. And often, part of that better way, Jesus leads us to, is sometimes we have to ask forgiveness and make restitution.

When we've hurt people, there is accountability, because Christians are notorious for this, right? I mean, Christians are hurting people left, right, and center. Just hurting people all over the place and going, "But I'm forgiven. I'm forgiven." Oh, far out, right? There's this body, a pile of bodies behind you. No, that's called cheap grace. There is accountability.

If we hurt someone, we're accountable. We need to make restitution. We need to repair the damage. But that is not the same thing as being condemned by God. That's a different thing. It's not the same thing as being condemned. And sometimes we have to say to someone we love that they're heading in a bad direction. We have to call that out a little bit in love, but it should never have a tone of condemnation. It should sound more like Jesus. Because in Jesus, there is no condemnation.

Okay. Oh my goodness. We've only done three words so far. So y'all just settle down for a long winter's nap. You ain't never getting into lunch, okay? This series' a preachathon. I'm going to pick up the pace. Don't worry. Some of you are like, "Huh?" I'm going to pick up the pace. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for, next phrase, those who are in Christ Jesus. See, this is not just like a blanket statement. It's only through Jesus that we can experience this no condemnation because only Jesus died to pay the price for our sins that we know needs to be paid, or there's no justice. And this is deep in us. This longing for justice is deep in us. If a criminal gets away with their crime and no penalty is paid, we hate that because it's not justice. And this goes down to the smallest little things in life. This need for justice, it's the most trivial things.

As I've shared with you before, I'm waiting at a stoplight. I'm three cars back. The dude in front's not paying attention and the light turns green. He doesn't go and he doesn't go. And then suddenly he realizes that its green. He races through. The light turns red and I'm stuck behind the light. And I'm like, "Put that person in jail," right? Where are the cops when you need them? Because even in the smallest things, we have this sense that there needs to be justice. So God became one of us. And Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for everyone's sin so that sin is condemned, but not the sinner.

It's what Jesus says to the woman caught in adultery. "Neither do I condemn you. Go in sin no more." Notice the order. He does not say, "If you go in sin no more, I will not condemn you." He says, "Now that you know I don't condemn you, let that empower you, let that motivate you to leave your life of sin." All right? That's verse 1, which brings us to verse 2, which will just sort of take all at once.

Verse 2 goes on and it says, "Through Christ Jesus, the law of the spirit who gives life, next word, has sets you free from the law of sin and death." Has set you free. Not someday will set you free. Not in heaven will set you free. Has, past tense, already, a done deal, set you free from the law of sin and death. The message version puts it this way, "We have been freed from a lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death." So at one time, sin was our boss. Sin told us to jump, we asked how high. And sin was a brutal tyrant of a boss. But now we have a new boss. Jesus is our boss.

So let me ask this. If you leave one job for another job, but your old boss keeps calling you on the phone and telling you what to do and giving you orders, what do you say to your old boss? [inaudible 00:14:20].

Exactly. Things I can't repeat in church, right? So the next time you feel condemned, that is the old boss, the law of sin and death, your old tyrannical boss. You tell that old boss what he can do with his lies. Sin has been deposed. The tyrant has been overthrown. There is a new king on the throne. You serve a different master. You salute a different Lord, who's a son sets free, is free indeed. You're a child of God. That's who you are.

Amen.

And then the holy spirit, over time, gradually helps us become like Jesus, which we'll talk about in future sermons. That's Romans 8:1-2. So practically, practically, how do we feel experienced this no condemnation thing, because we feel condemned all the time because we live in a judgemental culture? So how do we experience this no condemnation from God? Well first, let the truth of scripture overrule your feelings of condemnation. The best way to counter a lie is with the truth. So when you feel condemned, remind yourself of the truth that because of Jesus, in God's presence, there is no condemnation. Counter the lie with the truth.

Hallelujah.

Second, get in Jesus presence where there is no condemnation. Prayer, scripture, worship, music. Music helps me to connect to Jesus in so many ways. And then listen for those thoughts that maybe aren't your thoughts that come from him. My experience is, when I can get in the presence of Jesus and focus on him, all that sense of being condemned, judged, it just sort of melts away. Third, pray. Jesus, help me to truly believe this good news. We need the supernatural power of the holy spirit to sink this truth deep in our hearts because the natural world around us is always judging us.

And then fourth, if you've never done it, make Jesus the leader of your life and the forgiver of your sins. Here in the room or online, all you have to do is just say, "Jesus, I need you. Come into my life as my leader and my forgiver. And in a minute, there'll be some time for you to pray that prayer. And if you never prayed it, I hope you do. I hope you pray it. Because when we get God's truth, that we are free from condemnation because of Jesus, when we get that not just in our heads but in our hearts, it does a lot of good things. As I said earlier, it frees us from shame, right?

Shame is different than being convinced of our sin. Convinced of our sin, that leads to lie. Shame is toxic. It makes us feel dirty. It makes us feel unworthy. When we experience the freedom from condemnation because of Jesus, it washes that shame away, which then helps us sin less. Because a lot of sin is driven by shame, lying to cover up stuff. Greed sometimes is shame. "I feel bad, so I want to make a lot of money so people like me." Judging others so that we look better by comparison. All of that is driven by shame. Addictions are often ways of trying to handle shame and anesthetize the pain. But if we really get that in Jesus there is no condemnation, it frees us from some of those sins.

Third, it makes us less defensive. If you are secure in the fact that God does not condemn you, you don't freak out when someone accuses you of something. If you're secure in the fact that you are not condemned before God, when you get accused of something, here's what you do, you go to God and you say, "Is that true? God? Is that true? Am I judgemental? Have I hurt others? Do I wound with my words? Do I have biases? Show me. Show me." You're not afraid to pray that prayer because you know that there will be no condemnation from God. Of all people, Christians should be known for our willingness to admit our sins. Of all people, our reputation, people should be saying all over the place, "Man, the thing I like about those Christians, man, when they screw up, man, they admit it. I love that about those Christians." Is that what people are saying about Christians? Absolutely not. Of all people, we should be willing to admit our flaws because we know we will not be condemned.

Hallelujah.

Fourth, it frees us from anxiety, always trying to prove ourselves worthy with our grades or our money or whatever. Free us from that anxiety. We do that because we're trying to win approval and avoid condemnation. But if you know that in Jesus you're not condemned, it frees you from that. And then fifth, it makes us less condemning of others. Because see, when we don't truly believe that because of Jesus we are free from condemnation, then we have to justify ourselves, find reasons why we're good enough to go to heaven based on our own goodness, not on what Jesus has done.



And so to do that, we have to create others who are inferior to us to make ourselves feel better. Often, it's people who think different, vote different, look different, sin different than we sin. It's the, "Well, I may do X, but at least I'm not like so and so who does Y" syndrome.

That's why we see so much virtue signaling on social media. "Look at me. Look at me. I believe all the right things. I do all the right things. I say all the right things. I vote all the right ways, not like those bad conservatives. Not like those bad liberals." People who know that they are not condemned have no need to virtue signal. They're secure in themselves. And we judge other people less because we know how much we've been forgiven for this.

Hallelujah.

This week someone asked me why I'm a Christian, which is a great question. Why I became a Christian, a great question. And I said, "Well, because growing up, I received a lot of messages from peers and some from parents that I wasn't smart enough, I wasn't good looking enough, I wasn't athletic enough. I was just not enough. I was just bad all the way around. And my way of responding to that sense of judgment and condemnation was to get mad at everybody, which wrecked a lot of relationships. I put so many holes in my parents' walls through fits of rage when I was in high school. And then I spent half of high school stoned just to feel like I fit in, win the approval of some group, in my case, the stoners. Even though I didn't like to be stoned, I did it anyway to get some approval and avoid that sense of being condemned.

After high school, I moved in with my girlfriend, which broke my parents' heart. That relationship blew up after only a couple months, because I was so relationally inept. All of that was my unhealthy way of trying to deal with that sense of being condemned and judged by others. But then some coworkers told me about Jesus and that message of a God who loved me enough to die in a cross, to deal with all my garbage which I know I have, and that through him, I am not condemned. The first time I experienced that, it was so compelling, it was so beautiful, I could do no other but give my life to him. And then he helped me rebuild my life, repair the damage I had done to others. I became less angry over time because of the freedom from condemnation that I found in Jesus. No, I'm not perfect. I'm not perfect, but there's been a lot of progress.

Hallelujah.

Now, your story's going to be different than my story. But we all have our stuff. It all kind of bugs us. And the way to get free of feeling bad about that stuff, guilty about that stuff, condemned about that stuff is to get in the presence of Jesus in whom there is no condemnation. I'll close with this.

One time when I was visiting my parents before they died, they were watching this TV show called Baggage, which I don't think exists anymore. It's kind of like The Bachelor only with a twist. By the way, I want it clearly understood they were watching the show, not me. So don't condemn me. Don't judge me. The way the show went, there'd be three contestants who were trying to get matched to a prospective romantic partner. But each contestant had a suitcase and inside was their emotional and relational baggage. Bad habits, failures, mistakes, ways that they had hurt other people, sins if you will. And when they were revealed, the prospective romantic partner would have to decide whether or not they could handle that kind of baggage.

And if not, they would say to the contestant, "I'm sorry, I just can't handle your baggage." So you got rejected on national TV because of your baggage. Okay. It is the emotional equivalent of gladiator games in the Roman empire, right? Like, "Here, let me emotionally eviscerate you in front of millions." But that is so our world, isn't it? That is so our lives. Folks saying to us in one way or another, "I'm sorry, I just can't handle your baggage." Church, hear me loud and hear me clear. Jesus is not afraid of your baggage. Jesus is not repulsed by your baggage. Jesus can handle your baggage and he can set you free from it. He can even use your baggage for good. Therefore, there is now, right now as you sit there, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And that is very good news indeed. Amen?

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

So right now, as the band comes forward, we're going to spend a few minutes. They're going to sing a song and invite you to sing with them. Or you can use this time just to reflect and pray. If you've never made Jesus your leader or your forgiver in the room or online, you could use this time to ask Jesus to be your leader and forgiver.

And if you do that, please tell someone, a friend or on the chat online, or someone here with a name tag so we can help you take next steps. It also makes it seem more real when you tell someone. But for all of us in these next few minutes as we sing this song, bring your baggage to Jesus. Spend a little bit of time in his presence and hear him say to you, "I die to take care of that stuff. It is forgotten. It is erased. I do not condemn you. I love you. I believe in you. I am for you. Now, let's go do cool things together."

Jesus, thank you so much. Thank you that you died the death I deserved so I could live the life you came to give me. And Lord, thank you that in your presence there is no condemnation. And so in these next few minutes, Jesus, we bring all our stuff to you. All the ways we've been judged, all the ways we've been hurt, all the ways we've been condemned, Lord we bring it to you.

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And we look at you, because in your presence there's freedom. In your presence, there is life. In your presence, there is no guilt and there is no shame because you have set us free. Thank you. In your name, Lord. Amen.

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## **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

### **Opening Question:**

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

### **Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:**

- What do we learn about God (e.g. traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

### **Sermon Reflection Questions - Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:**

- What are the voices that make you feel judged/condemned?
- Have you ever felt the freedom from condemnation that comes from Jesus? If so, how did that affect you? If not, are there ways we could help you experience that freedom?

### **Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

### **Closing Group Prayer:**

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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