

Romans #46 – The Law & The Christian (6)

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Romans - GIW

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Bible Text: Romans 8:1

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Congregation, it is my privilege today to speak to you on one of the greatest texts in the Bible. There is no doubt about that and I don't know any Bible commentator or preacher who hasn't agreed because this is truly a tremendous statement, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." But it is, nevertheless, a text concerning which there is quite a difference of opinion, not about the text itself but about its connection with what goes before it.

Now, whenever you find that word "therefore" in the Bible, you are looking at a word that is very important because it establishes a connection. It is a word used to draw a logical conclusion from something that has gone before, and right there is where the disagreement comes because there are some who say it just cannot possibly follow the material we have been looking at in chapter 7. That's supposed to be too gloomy where the apostle says, "O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death? How," they say, "could he possibly go on from that and draw this conclusion, there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus?" And so no less a preacher than Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is very insistent that this text has nothing to do with the immediately preceding chapters but really goes back to chapter 5 and takes up again what has been stated there in the first verse, "Therefore," he says in chapter 5, verse 1, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God." And he is saying that all that goes in between is a kind of diversion and now he returns, as it were, to the argument prior to chapter 5. But there are other scholars of great renown who take exactly the opposite view because they say there is no analogy to this in the Bible, no other place in the Bible that you can find that word "therefore" used with no reference at all to a lot of the material immediately preceding it, and grammatically speaking, that is a very strong argument indeed, as you can discover by your own study of the way in which this word is used.

Now, I point this out because it just shows you again that when it comes to studying the Bible, the experts disagree and there is no escape from the old Protestant and Reformed doctrine of the priesthood of believers. Every one of us in the last analysis has to study the Bible for himself and has to wrestle with these problems and has to come to his own conclusion and I give you mine after having studied this very carefully. Now, my view is that there is some truth in both of these viewpoints but that neither one of them can possibly be correct on its own. I maintain that whenever the apostle uses this word

"therefore," he indeed sums up not just a part but the whole of what has gone before it, and I believe here that he is doing exactly this in a most remarkable way in this one brief but tremendous statement because there are two central things, it seems to me, in all the material preceding this statement. One of them is what I would call the objective reality of the atonement of Christ and our justification through his blood. That's one of them. And the other one is the subjective aspect which is the renewal of the whole man after the image of God through union with the Lord Jesus. And you don't have salvation if you don't have both of these and that's exactly what he is saying in this text, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

Now, let me remind you of what we have seen thus far in the epistle. Think back to the very first few chapters of this great letter. What was the apostle teaching us? Well, he was teaching us that both Jews and Gentiles are exceedingly guilty before God. Now, that first chapter of the book of Romans is one of the most amazing indictments that ever was penned of the sinfulness of pagan society. They didn't like to have God in their knowledge. They turned away from him. Their foolish heart became dark. God gave them up to reprobate minds and then came the flood of immorality including homosexuality and all the rest of it. Then he goes on and shows us that the Jews, far from being any better, were in some respects even worse than the Gentiles because they had the truth of God and they did the same things that they condemned in the Gentiles. So the point of the first part of the letter is to show us that objectively as man stands before God he is exceedingly guilty, and guilty in the terms of the Bible means liable for the wrath and punishment of God. Now, the Jew thought that he had a way of escape because he had the law. He prided himself on the fact that he knew all about the holy commandments of God which made a searing indictment of the Gentiles, but the fact of the matter is as Paul goes on to show, the only thing that the law does for the Jew is to make him even less excusable. "So by the works of the law," he says, "there will no flesh be justified in the sight of God."

So the whole point of that first section is to show us that objectively in terms of our relationship to Almighty God, we are in desperate need of justification in Christ. How can this guilty sinner ever be just and righteous with God? Well, the answer is there is only one possible way and that is through the objective provision of the Gospel of Christ. Now, what do I mean by the objective provision? Well, I mean something that has nothing to do with what goes on inside of you, in a certain sense. Your salvation in the first place is something that took place outside of you and a long time ago. Your salvation depends totally and completely in the first place on the finished work of Christ in historical time and space when he endured the wrath of God in your place on the accursed tree, and that is the only way that you can ever deal with the problem of your guilt in the sight of a holy God.

Now, that's what the first part of this letter is all about and that's why it comes then to the great and wonderful affirmation of justification by faith, and you remember that Paul the apostle says that's the only method God ever did have and he goes back to Abraham and says, "Well, how was Abraham able to solve this problem?" He said, "He was justified by faith. And how was David, that great sinner David, how was he able to get this thing

fixed up between him and God? Well," he says, "it was justification by faith," and he quotes the 32nd Psalm there in chapter 4 of the book of Romans, and so through this tremendous review of biblical data, he says, "Well, there you are. The very thing that you read back there in Genesis 15, Abraham believed God and he counted it to him for righteousness, that's for all men and in all time the only solution there is to the problem of our objective guilt before God. You see, you are a sinner and you have violated God's commandments and there is objective to you in the great account book of God, a debt that must be paid and the only way that you can ever take care of that is through the atonement of Christ."

Now that's the first section of this letter and what does Paul say when he reaches that first plateau in his argument? Well, he says this, "Therefore." In other words, "if you have taken in all I have been telling you in the first four chapters, now chapter 5, verse 1, therefore having been justified by faith," not works, faith, "we have peace with God." Peace means that you and God are no longer in hostility the one to the other, and the reason is because of the objective provision in the atonement of Christ. But right away the apostle goes on to something else that is equally vital. He doesn't just stop as some people do with the doctrine of justification. Not at all. "All right," he says, "now you have this great idea and concept and realization of the free gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ, what shall we do? Shall we go out then and live in sin some more that grace may abound? Shall we go right on living in sin so that we can have even more of this free and unmerited gift of the grace of God?" And what does he say? "Oh no," he says, "God forbid!" So in the next section of this great letter, what does he do? He shows us that it's not enough to have the remedy of our objective guilt before God. No, we must also have the remedy of our inward corruption, in other words, something has to be done not only about the guilt but also the power of sin, and that is a very great power.

So we have to be changed on the inside in our nature just as we have to be changed on the outside in our standing. You might think, "Oh well, it's all fixed up. I have this subjective remedy. Christ paid for my sin on the cross." Well, that's not all you have to have. Far from it, but you have to also be transformed on the inside by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. And how does the apostle show us this? Well, he shows us this by the great analogy there in chapter 5 between Adam and Jesus, and if you know the story of Adam, you'll know that when Adam sinned, you sinned; and when he fell, you fell; and when he became guilty, you became guilty, but you didn't just become guilty. Oh no, that would be bad enough but you also became corrupted. Your nature was defiled and vitiated. That's what we mean in the Reformed faith when we talk about total depravity. We mean that every aspect of the whole man has been contaminated by sin so that he is never able after that to think even one thought that isn't contaminated to some degree by the pollution of sin. So, you see, it is our union with Adam both objectively as he represented us, and subjectively as we participate in his nature, which explains where we are to start with. "Well, exactly so," says the apostle, it is with Jesus Christ. You not only have to have Jesus Christ as your substitute to deal with the problem of the guilt of sin, but you also have to have union with Christ so that he can deal with the corruption and pollution of sin so that there is, to quote an old poem, the double cure of the guilt and the power of sin.

So he goes on to say, "Well now, you see, if you are in Christ, this is what happens. You are buried with him in baptism and you are raised up again to live in newness of life. If you have union with Christ, you really do participate with him just as surely as you participated with Adam, and then the Holy Spirit of God works in you in such a way that sin no longer has dominion. It's not the almighty power in your heart and life. No sir, the Holy Spirit is, and the proof of that is this great conflict which is going on in your life."

That's what we came to in chapter 7, we came to this great conflict that is going on in the Christian. You see, Paul is perfectly logical and there is a perfect sequence of things in this letter to the Romans, and it's not a kind of parenthesis where he's getting off the track in chapter 7. Far from it. Chapter 7 rightly understood is the proof of everything that has gone before. If you really have Christ as your sin-bearing substitute and Christ is dwelling in you by his Spirit, then you're going to have this tremendous struggle going on in your heart and you're going to say exactly what Paul said, "I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is my flesh, my old nature, but by the grace of God I can also say I delight in the law of God after the inward man. So there is a war in me, a war between me, the new man renewed in Christ, and my members. There is a war going on in me and, O wretched man that I am, who is going to deliver me finally in complete and total victory from this bitter conflict?" You see, that's perfectly in sequence and it means that the man who really has union with Christ not only has this conflict going on, but can never really be at peace with himself so long as there is indwelling sin.

But how are you going to overcome the power of indwelling sin, you Christians? Do you have that war going on in you? Do you do the things you don't want to? You don't do the things you'd like to? Do you have that war going on in you? Well, how are you ever going to get the victory? How are you ever going to come to the place of inward peace comparable to that objective peace that you have with God? Well, the answer is quite obvious, isn't it? You're going to only get it in Jesus. It's not accidental that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians he said that Jesus Christ was not only our righteousness but also our sanctification. You'll never get sanctification except in Jesus Christ. If you think you can get it on your own, you are badly mistaken. Real sanctification is being driven back again and again to cry out to the wonderful Savior Jesus, "O Lord, help!" It's not just the first day you become Christian but every day all the way to the great day of victory.

So you can see that there is a perfect sequence when he says, "All right then, therefore, you've gotten a hold of both of these things, the objective and the subjective, therefore there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Now what the apostle is saying, in effect, is you cannot separate these two. The tragedy is that people have tried to do it. There were people in the apostolic church who tried to do it. James talks about them. They said, "I've got faith," but they didn't have anything else, so he said, "You haven't got faith, your faith is dead, just as dead as a corpse is without a soul." So your faith is dead if you just talk about Christ dying on the cross for you and you don't talk about you dying on the cross with Christ. You don't have nothing, as we say. Nothing because you cannot have the first part of that text if you don't have the second. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. You have to have union with Jesus.

Just as wrong are the mystics who ignore Jesus today and talk about the Spirit and things like that. They want to be filled with God. It's just the old mysticism again. You bypass Jesus and you don't worry about that and you just are swallowed up in God. Well, that's not true either. You cannot have union with God and with Jesus Christ apart from the atonement and justification. These two things go together and you can never separate them.

So my argument is that this text is in the truest sense a great and wonderful summation of everything the apostle has been saying all the way through this letter, and if that is true, it is one of the most important statements in the Bible, and if that is true, it seems to me that we should just pause for a moment and try to understand it. Do you know what the Bible means by "condemnation," congregation? Do you know in the Greek language they have different words for "condemnation," sometimes the original language is richer than our own. We use the same English word for what we might call the everyday condemnation, "I condemn this man. You condemn that person," right up to the very heights when we speak of the great condemnation of God, but that's not the way it is in the Greek New Testament. This is a compound word. They take the ordinary word for "condemn" and then they add to it this Greek prefix which means "complete; total; final," and that's what it's talking about. There is no horrible, total, final and complete condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

Everywhere that you find this word in the New Testament is talking about that kind of condemnation, like the angels that fell in sin and they are under God's condemnation, reserved under chains of darkness to that last great day. And we read about the great day when all nations of men will be assembled before the judgment seat of Christ and some will go away to condemnation. That's what we're talking about here. There is no damnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. There is not going to be executed upon them this horrible wrath and judgment of God.

Now, the wonderful thing is that this is a fact already even before the confrontation comes. You know that's going to come and we're all going to be there, but what Paul is saying in our text is already now we are safe as far as that day is concerned. We don't have to have one single sleepless night worrying about that terrible day which is coming. No, now already there is no condemnation. To me, that's one of the most wonderful things in the Bible, that I can know already today if I get up in the morning and start my daily work that I can already know that whatever happens, even if the end of the world comes today, no condemnation for me. Is there anything to compare with that when we know what kind of a day that will be when there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, that I can know today that I'm already safe? Oh, I deserve it all right, I know that, but that doesn't matter. There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. That right there is the urgency of it too because the Bible says if you are not in Christ, the wrath of God abides over you. You're like the man in the ancient mythology who walks under the hanging sword hanging by a thread. You never know when that thread will break and that sword will come tearing down upon you. If you're not in Christ, if you don't have union with Christ, that is your condition.

So it's possible for you to know all about the doctrine of justification and that's a real danger, you know, in a catechized congregation, you know all about what Christ did for sinners, you know what he did on the cross of Calvary, you know he paid for our sins, and in an abstract way you can talk about all of these things that Christ has done to objectively take care of the problem of our guilt, and you might forget the other part which is, "Sure, that's right." Never soft pedal that but remember that you don't have anything to do with it unless you are in union with Jesus.

So let me ask you today: are you in union with Jesus? Have you, even if you're a strong young man ready for the race of life, have you fallen upon your knees and cried out at the horrible pit to the Savior to save you? Have you said, "O Lord Jesus, be merciful to me"? The weakest of men and the greatest of sinners who does that will be safe. They'll be all right. It will be a very great sinner and a very weak man in the struggle against the sins of the flesh but if they cry out to Jesus not just once but constantly all the way through life just the way Paul is doing here at the end of chapter 7, he'll be safe. But the strongest of men and you may be very strong, self-assured, confident, the strongest of men who trust in themselves and only have this objective idea of the atonement, they will not stand in the judgment because they will stand there alone, and in order to stand there, you have to be in Jesus.

Now, it's my impression as the pastor of this congregation that there are still in our midst some in this category and I preach a sermon like this because I don't want you to stay there. I want you to come under the glorious terms of Romans 8:1 so that you can say, "Thanks be to God, there is therefore now no condemnation for me because I too am in Christ Jesus." Take a good look at the state of your heart, what is it? If that isn't enough, take a good look at the day of judgment. Can you really sit here and think about that great and awesome day and do nothing? Take a look at your heart, take a look at the awesome day of judgment which is coming and then take a look at our text. Wouldn't you like to be under the shadow of that great Rock that we find in this text? Well then, make haste. Flee from the wrath which is to come. Find refuge in Jesus and you too will then be safe in Jesus. Amen.

Let us pray.

We thank you, Christ Jesus our Lord, that you offer your grace and salvation to all who hear your word. But Lord, our hearts are hard and our ears so often deaf, by your Spirit then, be pleased today to open ears and soften hearts and bring resisting sinners to capitulate to your grace and come into union with Jesus that they too may share your great salvation. This we ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.