

## Easter 2021 – No Condemnation

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**Scripture:** Romans 7:24 – 8:4 (NIV)

<sup>7:24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

<sup>7:25</sup> Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

<sup>8:1</sup> Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

<sup>8:2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

<sup>8:3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,

<sup>8:4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

### **Introduction**

Paul, at the end of chapter 7 is painfully aware of the sin in his life and the consequences of sin. He calls himself wretched, in other words, hopeless, miserable, pathetic, shameful. Paul reaches a crisis and realizes that there is no hope and no help for himself from within himself. He calls out “Who will rescue me?” Paul then thanks God for deliverance through Jesus Christ and contrasts the difference between serving God and serving sin.

Chapter 8 opens with the wonderful statement that there is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. If there is now no condemnation, then something must have happened. If there is now no condemnation, then there must have been a time when there was condemnation. Something changed. Jesus died and rose from the grave to set us free from the power of sin. Hallelujah!

## **Pardoning**

George Wilson was a career criminal who, in the 1830s, was charged with six counts of obstructing and robbing the U.S. mail, including threatening a carrier with bodily harm, and violent assault. In those days, violent assault carried the death penalty. There was also at that time rising public opposition against the death penalty. President Andrew Jackson issued a pardon for Wilson's assault conviction. Wilson could live.

Except for the fact that Wilson refused to accept the pardon.

The district court was not sure how to further handle the complexities of this case and referred the case to the supreme court. The supreme court ruled as follows:

- "A pardon is an act of grace, proceeding from the power entrusted with the execution of the laws, which exempts the individual on whom it is bestowed from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed.
- A pardon is a deed to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance.
- ...the value of a pardon 'must be determined by the receiver...'"

So, for a pardon to be valid, it must come from the lawgiver; it is a gift of grace from the lawgiver. The lawgiver exempts the guilty person from the consequences of his/her wrongdoing. But...if a pardon has value, you accept it, if a pardon has no value, you refuse it and face the consequences.

George Wilson was later executed. I believe that his refusal of the pardon, at the end of the day arguably boiled down to suicide. Why may you ask? Simply because George Wilson chose a death sentence instead of accepting the pardon. No matter how gracious and compassionate a lawgiver is, if someone does not accept his/her pardon, then the law giver's task is to enforce the law.

It left me wondering about the state of many in this world and it got me thinking.

In order to be salvation "to" it must first of all be salvation "from."

## I See Three Groups of People

1. The first are those who intentionally decline God's pardon and effectually – again arguably – commit suicide because they are choosing death over life. These are the people saying, "Thanks, but no thanks, this is not for me."

Often in this group, we hear about all religions being the same and there is nothing special about Christianity – all religions are the same. Some may even tell you that religion is the product of your imagination. Or this life as you see it – is all there is to it. God as the lawgiver, will implement the wages of sin.

This group includes, for example, atheists, some agnostics as well as those who do not convert from other religions to Christianity. In any case, when one places your own knowledge above that of God and His Word, then you become your own God since you have also accepted sole responsibility for the matter of your life and death, both now and after the grave and God is going to respect that decision.

However, we know that the Holy Spirit is at work, as it is written in John 16:8-11, *"When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."*

God's grace is irresistible and at the heart of irresistible grace is the transforming power of the Holy Spirit whereby He takes a man dead in his trespasses and sins and gives him spiritual life so that he can recognize and accept the surpassing value of God's offer of salvation. God's grace in salvation is irresistible because when God sets out to fulfil His sovereign purposes, no person or thing can successfully resist Him.

2. Then some have come to faith, but their lives do not reflect this present reality. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as well your attitude of gratitude should reflect our salvation throughout all of our life.

God's pardon was accepted because it had value. He called out to us in love – His irresistible grace – to which we responded. We confessed faith in Jesus Christ.

This group includes those who have become a bit “cold” for some or other reason. Revelation 2:4-5, in speaking to the Church at Ephesus, Jesus says, *“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first...”*

Can you remember what you did at first? You were alive and active in the body of Christ, filled with a passion for God's work, a desire to love your neighbour. What has happened to your zeal, diligence, fasting, praying, praising, worshipping, spreading the Gospel and excitement of being born again?

For this group, I pray the words of Keith Green's song Oh Lord, You're Beautiful, *“Oh Lord, please light the fire, that once burned bright and clear. Replace the lamp of my first love, that burns with holy fear.”*

3. The last group are those who are actively demonstrating their appreciation for their Divine pardon. They are alive and active in the body of Christ, filled with a passion for God's work, a desire to love your neighbour. Their zeal, diligence, fasting, praying, praising, worshipping, spreading the Gospel and excitement of being born again is obvious.

It is obvious that they are not condemned because they are obviously in Christ Jesus! They do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

In which group do you find yourself?

### **The Apostles Creed (Conclusion)**

Listen carefully as I read out loud the Apostles Creed. Recite it with me if you want to but focus on the wording.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit

and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended to heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic\* church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

1. What, of this confession, would remain if there was no death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?
2. What would become of you if there was no death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?
3. Since Jesus did die and He did rise again, there is no condemnation for you. Does all of your life reflect this reality? I speak of two dimensions:
  - a. For the world to see. Here I speak of evangelism as well the fruit of your salvation as a way of life in Christ Jesus.

- b. For you to see. Christians who live in shame and guilt over past failures are needlessly condemning themselves when they ought to be “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead” (Philippians 3:13).

See what God sees.

Amen.