

Sermon Draft

Text: Romans 8:1–11

Sermon: “In Christ”

If you are a condemned person, you are officially declared “guilty” of your actions and your sentence awaits. Throughout history, many criminals were not only condemned and declared guilty but were also put to death for their misdeeds. They were hung, shot, gassed, electrocuted, injected, and more. However, the death penalty has over time been increasingly debated. One reason some have argued against the practice is that some people, after being put to death, were found actually to be innocent, or at least not worthy of such extreme punishment.

Well, more than talking about the government bearing the sword in Romans, Paul talks about the guilt of man according to his sin. He says that no one is found innocent. In fact, just before our Epistle lesson, in Romans 7, he makes clear that even with our best intentions, we can not be free from sin.

He writes, ***“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. . . . Wretched man that I am!”*** (7:15, 18, 24). Paul makes it clear. We are not a lot different before God than those on death row are before man. We are guilty! All of us! Every one! There is no way for us to work our way out of sin.

But the beauty and joy of this letter is in what comes next. Paul asks, ***“How am I going to get myself out of this prison? What do I do? ‘Who will deliver me from this body of death?’ [7:24].”*** The answer lies in a Savior from the outside, a Rescuer. Jesus is that Savior; he was sent to bail us out. At the very end of chapter 7, we read Paul rejoicing in this fact, saying, ***“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*** (7:25). And not only that! Because of this rescue, Paul begins chapter 8 with the following statement: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”***

That's right. In Jesus, we are not guilty. In Jesus, we are taken off of death row. In Jesus, we can be at peace, for in Jesus, there is no condemnation.

Why? Because Jesus Christ came to be our substitute and because we now live by the Spirit.

The purpose of Jesus' coming to earth was to live as our substitute under the Law. In a very real way, Jesus came to take our sentence onto himself. He came to do our jail time, to receive the guilty verdict and pay for our sins with his own life. When Paul says there is no condemnation for those who are "*in Christ*," he is referring to Jesus' role as our ransom for sin and our union with him in Holy Baptism. As our ransom, Jesus was the payment offered to God for our sin. Peter says it this way: "*You were ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Pet 1:18–19).

Not only did Jesus become our sin-bearer, but in Romans chapter 6, Paul makes clear that Jesus' substitutionary work on our behalf leads to Baptism, which unites us to Christ.

In 6:3–5, we read, ***“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”***

This language helps us understand the ***“in Christ”*** language of verse 1 of our text. How is there no condemnation for us? By having union with Christ. As our substitute, Jesus died in order to win for us forgiveness of sins. Additionally, as our substitute, through Baptism, he clothes us with himself and grants us the gift and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus has not only taken our punishment upon himself, but he has also remade us and joined us to himself as a fruit of his substitutionary work applied through Baptism and faith. Paul says in verse 2 of our text, ***“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”***

Because of Christ, we are not condemned; we are free. Because of Christ, we are not alone, but the Holy Spirit dwells in us richly.

During Lent, we recall more thoughtfully that Jesus took our place on death row. He opened our jail cell, let us out, and, most amazingly, entered himself. While we rejoice in Jesus for taking our place, we also rejoice in something else. Not only did he serve us as substitute, he gave us the Holy Spirit as gift and blessing. The Holy Spirit helps us to suppress the flesh and to live beyond the moment as children of God and heirs of heaven. That's the second reason there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus—because we now live by the Spirit.

Unique to the Book of Romans and the entire Scriptures is chapter 8 and its distinction between “life by the Spirit” and “life by the flesh.” Apart from Christ, we are darkness. Our lives are motivated by fleshly desires, and as such we have no hope of heaven. However, with forgiveness won by Christ and his life offered in our place as substitute, the Holy Spirit is now given to make us holy and to give new direction to our lives.

Paul writes of this in verses 3–4: ***“God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”***

As those who have escaped condemnation, we find that our state of being, our perspective in life, and our manner of life have all been changed. Paul speaks of this change throughout the rest of Romans chapter 8, the final verses of our text and the verses following, as ***“living by the Spirit.”***

When we live by the Spirit, we live with confidence in our resurrection. Paul says in verses 10–11, ***“But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”*** In union with the Holy Spirit, we cannot be condemned.

When the Father sees us in union with the Holy Spirit, he sees Christ in us, a child of God.

When we live by the Spirit, we live with the confidence that we have been made “*children of God.*” Jesus teaches us to pray “*Our Father*” for a reason. He wants us to know and believe that he came to earth not just to be our Savior, but also our Brother. Paul teaches in verse 15 that the Holy Spirit leads us to cry out to God in a childlike way, saying, “*Abba! Father!*”

We can call out to our heavenly Father in confidence. Having this relationship, though our flesh continues to assault us with temptation, we ought to remind ourselves over and over again that we indeed are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. This is why Luther encourages Christians to wake up in the morning, make the sign of the holy cross, and say, “*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*” He says this so that we might remember who we are, or better yet, whose we are. That we might recall our Baptism into Christ and that the Holy Spirit has brought us into the family of God.

And when we live by the Spirit, we look forward to the future glory of heaven. In verse 18, Paul shares a familiar and comforting message: ***“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”***

Life by the Spirit looks forward to heaven. The earth with its lusts, pleasures, temptations, sickness, vanity, and general brokenness due to sin is not our final destination. Paul makes clear that the earth is groaning and laboring like a woman experiencing birth pangs and that things here are just wrong.

By the Spirit, we can understand the present circumstance and patiently await our final goal and future hope. How important this is to know! Because heaven has been made secure by Christ our Redeemer, we can truly say that ***“for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”*** (8:28).

Finally, when we live by the Spirit, we realize that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Quite possibly the most comforting portion of chapter 8 is Paul’s listing of all the things that cannot separate us from the love of Christ when we live by the Holy Spirit.

Paul writes, *“Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (8:35, 37–39).

Truly **“life by the Spirit”** is a different life from living *“life by the flesh.”* It is a life lived free from fear, a life with rich identity, a life of confidence in the future, and a life certain of God’s love. These are not themes that typically exist for people living on death row!

When Paul said, *“There is therefore now no condemnation,”* he meant it and much, much more! As we meditate on the words of Scripture this Fifth Sunday in Lent and soon into Holy Week, let us consider what it means that Jesus was willingly condemned in order to set us free. Not only did he gladly take our punishment upon himself, he graciously gave us the Holy Spirit and made us victors forever in his name. Amen