

There is therefore now no condemnation.

Romans 8:1-10

A Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

In Romans 8:1-10 we have the whole of the Christian faith. It's at least two-thirds of the Christian faith, or the heart of the Christian faith. The first verse 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." To put it in our language: "There is therefore no death sentence for those who are in Christ Jesus." Or: Death is dead. That's the whole ball game.

It goes on in the next three verses (Romans 8:2-4):

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

When Paul uses the word "flesh," he does not mean the meat on your bones, he means that which is in opposition to the Spirit. "Flesh" is that power of evil, of wickedness battling within us, of the flesh against the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. The battle goes back and forth. And this battle has been won.

Romans 8:3: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh. . . ."

2 Cor 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In other words, he took our sin and death and we take his holiness and life forever. The best deal ever.

You may have thought Paul only said that in this one place in 2 Corinthians, but what he says here is the same thing as in Romans 8:3: "Sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh in order that we might be given his holiness."

That is that great message of Matthew 20:28: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" – is the same thing. It means we are slaves, and he buys us and frees us.

This is the message of the explanation to the Second Article of the Creed in Luther's Small Catechism:

“. . . [H]e has redeemed me, a lost and condemned sinner, delivered me and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with his holy and precious blood . . . in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity.”

That's another way of stating the same thing as Romans 8:1 and 2 Cor 5:21.

Then there are the next six verses of Romans 8. What they say in effect is:

“I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.”

That of course is the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism.

You may have thought Luther invented that one Wednesday afternoon before Confirmation. Romans 8:5-10 says exactly the same things in different words. All that Luther was doing was paraphrasing 8:1 and this section with that great conclusion: There is therefore no more death sentence for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You may say: We've heard that all before. Same-old, same-old. What else is new? Why do we have this thing about church when there are so many important things to do?! To us it's really like pablum, a soft bland cereal, good for babies. Pablum means boring and tasteless. Who wants that? It's not interesting at all. It's just for babies.

But this message: “There is therefore now no more death for those who are in Christ Jesus” – is explosive. It's explosive to the extent that it scares us. What it says is that there are no preconditions. There are no post conditions. No prerequisites.

No post requirements. It's been done. For those who are in Christ Jesus the last judgment is over and therefore also sin and the devil.

It's really scary. What? It looks like chaos! How do we live? What happens is that we go back two ways. We go back to the law: Yes, but you have to live a certain way and in order to do that we have new laws and they are requirements. We're not free from them. Forgetting the whole message that we are free and certain in him. We get caught in the trap of thinking there are good works which we can identify. That's not the case.

Good works are hidden. We keep thinking: "No they're not." And we forget that the greatest problem is spiritual pride. The only virtue, if you want to talk about good works, is humility. The most important thing about humility is that the person who has it doesn't know it. Because if you know it, you're no longer humble. That means salvation is not by the law, not by good works.

We worry and think: "Otherwise it's just chaos."

The opposite trap is to say: Yes, we are free from the law and we can live without the law. It's called license. We can do whatever we like because, after all, God will pick up the pieces. A 10 year wants to drive a car. Go ahead. Do whatever. That's what people think the freedom of the Gospel means. License. Lawlessness. Do what you like. It's that kind of pablum.

The Apostle Paul has thought about all of this and in Romans 3:8, 6:1 and 6:15, he speaks to this. Romans 6:1: "What shall we say then? Are we going to continue in sin that grace may abound?" Rom 6:15: "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Then he uses a Greek term that is the closest thing to swearing, without actually swearing. He says in effect: "You don't get it. Wake up. Grow up."

In 1 Cor 3:1-3 he says in effect: "Don't continue as babes eating pablum. Grow up so you can eat solid food."

The author of Hebrews does exactly the same in 5:11-13:

"About this we have much to say which is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need some one to teach you again the first principles of God's word. You need milk, not solid food; for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of

righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.”

In other words, this text says: “Grow up. We’re in a very different situation.”

And it means three things that help us sort it out.

First, using 1 Cor 6:19-20: “You are not your own; you were bought with a price.” This is the same as it says in Matt 20:27-28 and indirectly in Romans 8:2-4. We have been bought with a price. We belong to him.

Second, because we belong to him, we are headed for his other kingdom where sin and death are no more. Hebrews 13:14: “For here we have no lasting city....”

Third, because we have bought with a price and are his, we have freedom and certainty now; he changes everything.

How does that lead to how we live? Paul writes in 2 Cor 5:16: “We no longer look at each other according to the old point of view but we look at each other according to the cross (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11). Each one of us who is baptized is someone marked with the sign of the cross forever. Each one of us is one for whom Christ died and that changes how we live and how we look at each other.

It’s all over. It’s all new in him. Amen