

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, dear friends,

You had been dreading this day. Paramedics were called to your parents' home and mom was taken to the hospital. All kinds of things are running through your head as you get your things together and head up to the emergency room. When you get there, the doctor smiles and says, *"Everything is going to be fine."* Those are the sweetest, most comforting words you could hear from the person you needed to hear them from.

You were more than a little nervous. You'd driven with mom or dad a number of times, but there they were holding out the keys to the car for you to take on your own for the first time. *"I trust you,"* were the words you heard. You almost couldn't believe it—you hardly trusted yourself, but comfort and confidence came from hearing them say those sweet words to you.

You had been wondering if this relationship was going anywhere. A bunch of dates, some fun times and honestly, you had fallen pretty hard. But it didn't seem like he was as serious—at all. How sweet were the words *"I love you"* when you heard it from him the first time?

The sweetest words are those that express good news—news that we need and want to hear. It is a privilege today to relay to you what I think might be the sweetest words ever spoken, written or heard. You heard them once already, but listen again: **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

This morning is a good time to look inside our hearts and see if we truly understand and appreciate the amazing message that

WE ARE NOT CONDEMNED BY GOD!

- 1. WE SHOULD BE, BUT** (v. 5-8)
- 2. BECAUSE OF CHRIST WE'RE NOT** (v. 1-4, 9-11)

The Apostle Paul was a smart guy—gifted and called by God, writer of 13 books of the Bible, perhaps the greatest missionary ever. If you've looked for a favorite Bible passage to call your own, you might very well have chosen something the Holy Spirit had him write. Maybe, like me, you even find that favorite verse in chapter 8 of Romans. Why was Paul so effective in his writing and his ministry? Well, the obvious answer is that the Holy Spirit saved him and inspired him! That's what led to his remarkable work and the connection we draw to him, even though our Christian resume might not look like much compared to him. You see, you can tell by the way Paul wrote that he "got it"—he understood the love of God, the grace of God, the gift of Christ, the treasure of the Spirit.

Before these words before us this morning, Paul explains the struggle he had with his sinful nature. Let me read you a little bit of it: **I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (7:15-25).**

We can relate to that, right?! So the great apostle and I have something in common—neither he nor I can control the sinful nature perfectly! Some people think that it's just awful to admit things like that, that we shouldn't talk about sin—even in church, that it's such a "downer" to have to confess in every worship service that we are by nature sinful and have disobeyed God in our thoughts, words and actions. This is not good for self-esteem!

But how can you know and appreciate the love of God through Jesus Christ if you don't know what kind of hole he pulled you out of?

Maybe you've been to Arizona's big hole in the ground. Even if you haven't, you know about the Grand Canyon. You know that it is long—277 miles long to be exact. And it is wide—18 miles across at the widest point. It is also a mile deep. Imagine being all alone down in the bottom of the canyon in one hundred degree weather with no protection from the sun and two broken legs. What a hopeless situation! You would be staring down certain death unless someone came to rescue you.

You can believe this is true: the hole that our very own sin puts us in is even more threatening than that. The hole of our personal sin is deep. You're in that hole automatically because you are a human being and you contribute every time you break a command and expectation of God's. There's no way to claw out of that hole, no way to climb up out of sin and up to God and his righteousness. You and I deserve to die in

the deep chasm of our sin. The Apostle Paul reflected on his life and he knew it was true for him too. There was no question in his mind that his sinful nature, his sinful thoughts, his sinful actions, his sinful mouth separated him from the one and only holy God. He knew he **SHOULD BE CONDEMNED**. The question is do we truly realize that we should also **BE CONDEMNED**?

You have to be real honest with yourself. You have to be willing to consider your motives for doing things—even good things. The wrong reason in our hearts ruins our good actions. Do we also make excuses for our sins? You kids are real good at this sometimes. Mom or dad asks you why you did something wrong like hit your sister and instead of saying you're sorry and admitting that you were wrong, the first thing out of your mouth is "*She called me a name*" or whatever. When we do that, we are not admitting our sin, we are blaming someone else. And kids, I have to tell you that grown-ups do that same thing.

Adults sometimes stretch the truth on their taxes and say it's okay because the government's taxing is unfair. We disrespect those in authority and say that we wouldn't do that if they were better people or more honest or thought the way we do...or whatever. We are wrong when we sin and blame it on someone else.

What we need to do is see just how bad we must look to God when we go against what he tells us in the Bible. Paul did that. He "got it". And I think we probably do too. I bet we understand very well the truth of what Paul wrote when he said: **Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires...The mind of sinful man is death...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (v.5-8).**

The truth is that because of our sin, **WE SHOULD BE CONDEMNED** by God—every one of us. "Condemned" means declared guilty and given a penalty. Just like when a police officer tells a driver they were wrong to run through a red light and then gives a ticket; just like a parent tells a child they were wrong and puts them in timeout or grounds them; God should tell us we are wrong and then punish us. Obviously, when we're talking about sin and our souls, it is a much bigger deal than a ticket or a timeout! God should send us to hell when we die because we're not good enough to live with him. The thing that amazed the apostle is that even though **WE SHOULD BE CONDEMNED BY GOD, BECAUSE OF CHRIST WE'RE NOT!**

Let me read again what Paul wrote just after telling about his struggle with sin: **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (v. 1-4).**

What sweet words those are to hear—**there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!** And he explains why. Because Jesus took our place. The holy law of God could not save us; it only condemned us because our sinful natures could not meet its demands. So God stepped in. God the Father stepped in and sent his one and only Son to live as a human being—in the likeness of a sinful man, he tells us—but he had no sin. As we focus on during Lent, the perfect Lamb of God—Jesus Christ—became a sin offering. When he went to the cross and died there, his perfect life made up for every person's sins. So just like when Adam sinned with one action, sin trickled down to every person, so Jesus' one action—giving up his perfect life on the cross—affects every person also. It means that the payment for sin has been made. There is full and free forgiveness there for every person. How sweet it is to know that by faith in what Jesus did, **WE ARE NOT CONDEMNED BY GOD!**

Paul even helps us to understand that when God looks at us he sees, not our sin, but the **righteous requirements of the law...fully met in us.** Because we believe in Jesus, God sees us as perfect, as righteous! It's as if we've kept every one of his laws! It's not because we have, but because Jesus did it for us and then traded his perfection for our sin. That is precisely why **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!** It is **BECAUSE OF CHRIST THAT WE'RE NOT CONDEMNED!**

What a relief to also know what Paul included at the end of our text: **You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.**

What good news this is! We do not have to be bullied around by our sinful nature anymore—in fact, God says that if the Holy Spirit lives in you, you belong to Christ and your spirit is alive and you can live freely in love and thanks to God for sending Jesus! You don't have to hit your sister or call your brother names or skip church or hate your boss or keep being greedy or selfish or anything like that!

Don't let your sinful nature push you around, because you are a new creation of God in Christ! Jesus loves you—he showed you that when he lived and died for you and saved you from being condemned to hell for eternity. Our thank you to Jesus is living our faith.

A Grand Canyon helicopter rescue could be very dramatic if you were to be stuck in the bottom of Arizona's biggest hole. But something like that is *nothing* compared to the drama of God sending his only Son to live and die and rise again in order to pull us out of the spiritual hole created by our sins...and rip away control from our sinful nature...and empower us with the Spirit...and promise us eternal life with him when we die! Without Jesus, we would be condemned, but because of him we are not. Once again, the sweetest words you'll ever hear: **there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!** Amen.