

ROM 7:24 – 8:1, 31-39, “NO CONDEMNATION IN CHRIST”

We’re in the middle of a study of John’s Gospel, just getting to ch. 8, so naturally we’re looking at Rom. 7 & 8 this morning!

Let me explain the reason for this short excursion...

The beginning of John 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery, is probably not original to John’s Gospel.

It appears there in most Bibles with something like this disclaimer: “The Earliest Manuscripts Do Not Include This Passage.”

That is to say, the Apostle John’s original Gospel prob. didn’t include this, so we prob. shouldn’t consider it to be Scripture.

We’re not certain, but it was prob. part of the oral tradition about Jesus... and it sounds very much like an episode from his life and ministry, meaning it could very well be true and historical... but John didn’t write it as part of his Gospel, it was added later.

Now, I realize that might be quite a disturbing thought for you... you might wonder: if something in our leather-bound Bibles doesn’t actually belong there, does that undermine our confidence in the Scriptures?

Can I trust the Bible when I don’t know where all its parts come from? How can we say what is reliable and what isn’t, which parts belong and which parts don’t? If we admit that the Scriptures have been altered from their orig. state, on what basis can we have confidence in the Bible?

Let me just *briefly* answer questions like these...

There are only a couple places like this in the Bible—John 8 & Mark 16—that are of any substantial length that prob. don’t belong there.

There are a *lot* of minor variations in ancient manuscripts—a letter here or a word there—but nothing that really changes the fundamental meaning of the Scriptures.

We just don’t have access to the original manuscripts—but we do have *many, many* ancient copies and fragments, & there is such a high degree of confidence about the original texts that, honestly, there’s no reason to worry about the reliability of the clear message of the Bible.

Biblical textual scholars have done a very good job answering questions & concerns about specific variations in the manuscripts.

If you have questions about that whole idea, or about the reliability of any passage in particular, come talk to me.

But this morning, since this passage is probably a record of a true event, but probably *not* apostolic Scripture, we’re going to go to a passage that shares its main theme—Rom. 7 & 8—and just use this story in Jn 8 as illustrative material, rather than preaching it as Scripture itself.

It *is* a beautiful picture of the extreme forgiveness Jesus extends to sinners, & thankfully that’s a theme repeated often and clearly throughout the Bible!

•• [Pray, Read Text] ••

“Wretched man that I am!”

Psychologists and self-help gurus will tell you that it’s unhealthy for people to feel this way about themselves.

They think we should all have more positive self-talk in order to have clear consciences and feel better about ourselves.

But the Apostle Paul has come to a place where he lives with a near-intolerable tension.

He can hardly live with himself, *because he sins*, because he is internally divided at some deep level, & *he can’t fix it...* (very important to get this!)

He wants to live with God and for God, but can’t do that as well as he’d like, & finds himself doing just the opposite, all too frequently.

He loves God... *and* he hates God. He loves God in his spirit & with his mind... but he still has this nagging sin/flesh that stands opposed to God.

& it really bothers him. He is disgusted at himself and tormented in himself.

I find that to be a real tension in the lives of believers, & the more mature Christians are, the most honest they are w/ themselves, the more they feel the pain of this tension, & would say with Paul, “Wretched person that I am!”

It really is normal to be frightened by our own capacities for sin, to distrust our own hearts and minds, to be weighed down by guilt, & to worry about what continuing sin means for the state of our souls.

If you're familiar w/ thoughts and feelings along those lines,
I want to assure you, *that's normal*,
& in a sense, as you grow as a believer,
it's normal for you to feel worse and worse about that tension in your life.

You're never going to stop sinning in this life,
& the more you grow in your rel. w/ God
& your understanding of what it really *means* that you continue to sin,
the worse you're going to feel about that.

You'll shout louder, with Paul, "Wretched person that I am!"

The solution isn't just to stop feeling bad about what you can't change...
it isn't about just getting a clean conscience.

(Prob. not primarily in your head—a *relational* problem...)

You need to know that God loves you, forgives you, & accepts you,
in spite of the continuing reality of sin in your life.

You need more than just relief from an internal sense of guilt—
you need the assurance that your rel. w/ God has been established
in such a way that, even though you continue to deserve his condemnation,
he does not condemn you for your sin, & he never will.

You need a relational solution b/c sin is a relational problem.

You and I violate our relationship with God all the time,
and a guilty conscience doesn't really describe the problem with that.

The real consequence of our relational sin against God
is that we deserve his condemnation, we deserve his rejection,
we deserve to hear him pronounce the death sentence upon us,
we deserve for him to withdraw his love from us.

But the Gospel says, because of Jesus Christ,
we can know that God has decided, he has acted, and he has declared
that there *is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*,
he will never withdraw his love from you.

God knows you better than you know yourself,
he knows the capacities of your sinful heart,
he knows the self-deception, he knows the self-justification,
he knows the ways you avoid him,
& he still sent his own, beloved Son to die for your salvation.

His impulse is to *forgive* you, to provide for your reconciliation,
to condemn your sin without destroying you
by condemning it once and for all in the cross of Jesus Christ.

His forgiveness of our sin cost the life of his Son,
& he was willing to do it—it was his idea from the beginning—
even though we weren't even *asking* for that forgiveness.

His forgiveness absolutely accounts for your sinfulness,
every inclination of your heart, every warped thought in your mind,
every action, every word that has been opposed to him, relationally,
& he says, if you trust in Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation for you.

Some of us struggle to believe that
because we really feel the severity of our own sins.

Just imagine this woman the religious leaders caught in the act of adultery.

They caught her in the act of cheating on her husband.

That's the kind of exposure of our sin
that causes people either to want to commit suicide, to escape the shame,
or to harden up & shut down all our spiritual sensitivities just to survive.

& they dragged her in front of Jesus, the holy man,
the one truly righteous & good man who ever walked the earth,
in order to tear her down (really, in order to trap Jesus, b/c they hate him).

She's not just expecting painful humiliation,
she's expecting *death by stoning*,
b/c that's actually what *God* decreed is the proper punishment for her sin.

That's how serious her sin is,
& really, that's how serious any single one of our sins are.

Death awaits those who sin—and that's everybody.

But Jesus didn't condemn her.

In fact, the purpose of his coming into the world
was to take her condemnation upon himself,
to pay the just penalty for her sin acc. to God's decree,
to receive in her place God's rejection & death sentence—
this woman.

Maybe you're really struggling to believe it,
maybe you're so disgusted by your own sin, tormented in yourself over it,
but our passage this morning is even clearer & more profound.

Jesus does not condemn you. In Christ, God does not condemn you,
even though, like Paul, you are a *Christian* who *knows God*
yet continues to sin every day of your life.

[Stott] Sometimes our own heart condemns us. It certainly tries to. And so do
our critics, our detractors, our enemies, yes, and all the demons of hell. But
their condemnations will all fail. Why? Because of Christ Jesus.

It doesn't matter where the accusations come from or how true they are,
you will never hear God condemn you, & that's what matters most.

You can throw out Paul's challenge to the whole universe:
"Who stands against me? Who accuses me? Who condemns me?"
with absolute confidence that the answer will never be "God."

& if God doesn't condemn you, but forgives & accepts you *always*,
then it really just doesn't matter who brings what charge against you.

You should believe this, & you should train yourself to remember this:
you can have assurance that God does not condemn you
because of Jesus Christ, and *only* because of Jesus Christ.

It isn't because you're really likable & God just thinks you're so cute,
it isn't because you promise to try harder,
it isn't because your good deeds outweigh your bad ones—
that's all so ridiculous it isn't even funny, it's just insane.

You can *know* God doesn't condemn you *only* because of Christ.

It's because God sent him into the world for this very purpose,
to bear the condemnation you deserve at the cross,
to *justify* you, to restore you to right relationship through his sacr.,
& because, out of love, Jesus was willing to go there & do it.

&, as Paul writes, more than the fact that Christ *died* to forgive you,
he was raised from the dead by God.

The resurrection is the clear declaration of God
that he is *satisfied* with his Son's sacrifice,
that he really *has* condemned sin w/o condemning *you*,
that the basis for our justification was acceptable in his sight.

& even more so, Jesus not only died and was raised,
but he is at the right hand of God, interceding for us.

His presence in heaven *as our representative*
gives us the assurance that, not only does God *not* condemn us,
but God *fully receives us*, we belong with him, & that can never change—
even though you're a wretched person that can't stop sinning.

What we really need to know is that we have a rel. w/ God that lasts
in spite of our not deserving it at all.

& the Apostle sums up this great chapter with the full assurance
that absolutely nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ.

Nothing. Ever. Not even your sin, even though you deserve condemnation.

You could never deserve condemnation enough
to change God's mind about it.

There is no condemnation for you in Christ,
there is only a divine love that rests on you and will never change.

You have divine warrant, biblical permission, & my strongest encouragement
to remember that always, because it will always be true.

Celebrate it. Proclaim it. Share it with others.

Amen.