

Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 30, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Romans 8:1-10 (NIV 84)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2) because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 3) 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, 4) 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.

5) 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. 6) The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7) the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8) Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. 9) **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. 10) But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.**

Dear Friends in Christ

What is the meaning or message of Lent? Why is the crucifixion of Jesus important to me? There are a number of answers that could be given to those questions. And although the questions merit more than a simple answer I'd like to suggest some simple answers to those questions this morning. The answers are drawn from the Epistle lesson for this morning.

What is the meaning or message of Lent? Here's one answer.

There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ.

Why is the crucifixion of Jesus important to me? Let me rephrase that question? What does the crucifixion of Jesus mean for you? It means that you have been set free from the law by Christ and that you are no longer controlled by the sinful nature.

Those thoughts:

- Theme:** There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ
1. You have been set free from the law by Christ
 2. You are no longer controlled by the sinful nature

will guide us as we consider our text for this morning.

As a part of his discussion of the purpose of God's law in his letter to the Romans Paul pointed out that law condemns us. He also related his struggles with the law.

(Romans 7:15) I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

(Romans 7:19) 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.

(Romans 7:24) What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

It's pretty easy for us to identify with those words isn't it? Who of us hasn't struggled with our sinful human natures? Who of us hasn't felt enslaved by sin? Who of us hasn't felt the burden of the law weighing heavily on our shoulders?

That's why the opening words of our text sound so sweet to our ears. **There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** We certainly don't deserve to hear such wonderful news after confessing that we keep on doing the evil we don't want to do. But Paul understands our frustration and turns our attention away from the Law toward God's grace. And when he does that he reminds us of the meaning of Lent – Lent means that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. How can that be we ask? Paul has anticipated the question. **Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.** Paul then goes on to explain. **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, 4) 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.**

Paul was well aware of the fact that those who are in Christ would be able to relate to the struggles he had voiced in the previous chapter. Here he seeks to offer us personal comfort. And so I'm going to use the first person to describe the comfort that he offers to each of us. What I am confessing about myself applies not just to me but also to you.

When I'm feeling the weight and burden of my struggles with sin Paul doesn't point me to Mount Sinai to read the two stone tablets of the law again. He doesn't have to – the law has driven me to my knees in confession. I am crushed in my sin. I am "wretched" as was Paul. I am ready to give up and die. If I turn to the law at this point, I will only become suicidal, for it is an "impossibility" for the law to save me. Not that there is anything wrong with the law. It is holy and righteous because it comes from a holy and righteous God. But it cannot save me. In this regard, it has been "weakened, "rendered inefficient," all because I am a sinner. On this side of the grave, I can never measure up to its absolute-perfectionist standards. I fall short. Therefore I am doomed.

Or am I? O sinner hear what Paul says: **"For what the law was powerless to do, God (did) by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. And as a sin offering, God judged the sin in his flesh."** With these words Paul takes me into the heavenly tribunal that convened on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to comfort me. He takes me to Calvary. He gently lifts my chin and raises my eyes. "See those three crosses. Look at the center one! What do you see there? See Jesus condemned in his flesh! Do you know why?" I shake my head numbly. "Please tell me," I groan. **"God judged Jesus in your place. God judged 'the sin,' your sin in Jesus' flesh!** Your God, in an act that combines both holy justice and free grace, decided to punish all the sins of all time of all people in one place. God did this when he sent Jesus 'as a sin offering.'"

"Do you understand what happened at Calvary? God sat in his heavenly throne-room and declared Jesus guilty for your sins and mine. God sentenced Jesus to the verdict of suffering, death, and separation from God that sins, all sins, your sins deserve!

There can't be any condemnation left for a believer in Jesus! Why? The trial for mankind's sin is over. The sentence has been handed down. Jesus received my "guilty verdict," so that God could pronounce a "not guilty" verdict over me!

God has made Jesus to be my substitute in punishment, and God has made Jesus my own by Spirit-worked faith. Therefore when God now looks at me, a believer, He always sees me surrounded by the Savior Jesus Christ and his perfection.

You have been set free from the Law. It no longer condemns you. You are no longer controlled by the sinful nature. Without Christ and his perfection we would be enslaved to sin – our every inclination would be evil. Paul describes that desperate situation as he contrasts it with the new life and freedoms we have in Christ.

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. 6) The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7) the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8) Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

What a haunting description! How easy it is for me to see myself in Paul's words. How easy it is for me to forget who I am and what I am! How often hasn't my mind been set on my selfish desires and interests instead of God's interests and desires! How rebellious I've been! Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. They have nothing to offer him. Oh how I wish my mind were set on what the Spirit desires. I long for my mind to be controlled by the Spirit and to enjoy life and peace in place of death. But oh how I struggle in this regard. Just about the time Satan is ready to pounce on me and drag me down to the depths of despair Paul's next words shock me back to reality – reminding me that I belong to Christ.

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.

Can it be true? How I wish it were true that the Spirit of God lives in me! How I wish I were controlled by the Spirit rather than by the sinful nature! Indeed Paul's words are true. The Christian is no longer controlled by the sinful nature. Do we need evidence to support Paul's declaration? Our words are the evidence. The struggles with sin that we have spoken about, the confession of our rebellion, the acknowledgement of our selfishness and desire to be controlled by the Spirit of God are evidence of the new life that God has given to us in Christ. Such struggles and confessions are not the thoughts of a mind which is hostile to God. They are the words of someone who has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit with the desire to be free from the control of sin.

Oh, to be sure my sinful nature still rears his ugly head all too often but right along with him I see my new man struggling and desiring to do what is good. There is the desire to do what is right but so often I fail. The sinful nature is not in control. Its control over us has been broken by Christ.

Christ and his victory that's what gives us encouragement, that's what gives us hope, that's what gives us peace, that's what motivates us in our struggle. That's the life we enjoy as Paul says: **But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.**

To be sure Paul's question: (Romans 7:24) What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Still rings in our ears. But so does Paul's declaration:

There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ

1. You have been set free from the law by Christ
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While we are living in this life we will be filled with groans as we wait for our complete rescue from this body of death. Paul identifies with us yet again. (Romans 8:23) **Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**

Oh joyous day – the day when our bodies will be set free from sin and its effects. Oh joyous day when our bodies will enjoy the glorious life of heaven! Until then we rejoice that our spirit is alive because of righteousness – righteousness not of our own making or doing but Christ’s righteousness. This is the righteousness that God has declared is ours. Jesus purchased it for us. And the Holy Spirit working in our hearts through his word and sacrament has made it ours. The Lord’s forgiveness, love and grace has made us alive! We are no longer controlled by the sinful nature – we have been set free to serve our Savior God by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

What wonderful freedom’s we enjoy because of Christ’s crucifixion. Those freedoms are the message of Lent – a message which assures us

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A message which ultimately compels us to love him who first love us and to serve him! Amen.

(Thanks to WELS pastor Glenn Schwanke for many of the “1st Person illustrations” which were used in this sermon.)