



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**  
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**FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT**

**April 2, 2017**

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**“No Condemnation”**

*(Romans 8:1)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect of the Day:** Almighty God, by Your great goodness mercifully look upon Your people that we may be governed and preserved evermore in body and soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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Do you have someone in your life who condemns you? Do you have someone who always seems to be judging you, criticizing your performance? Hopefully it's not your spouse, or even worse, a parent. Maybe it's a coworker, or manager, or someone who serves on a committee with you. And you just get the sense you'll never be able to please this person. Long ago, they've made up their minds about you, and you'll never measure up. Maybe they don't verbalize their criticism of you **all** the time, but they do it often enough that you can guess what they're thinking and when they're thinking it. You can do fifty things well and they'll say nothing. Do one thing poorly in their eyes and they'll castigate you and malign your reputation.

You have someone in mind, someone in your life who condemns you? Do you live in someone's condemnation?

Then please listen to Romans 8: 1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." You don't live in a state of condemnation. You live in a state of grace. You live in Christ.

Others can say what they want, believe what they want about you, (and there may be some truth in what they say and believe), but the One whose judgment of you really matters . . . he does not condemn you. In fact, he loves you, forgives you and declares you righteous. He approves of you! That's the point of our text in Romans 8.

In my opinion, Romans 8 is one of the most wonderful chapters in all Scripture. It's loaded. And yet, I haven't preached on it much mostly because I don't want to wreck it. It feels like taking a Bach chorale and thinking, "I'm going to make my own arrangement of this." Romans 8 is loaded, and has such memorable verses such as,

- “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”
- Or this: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”
- And the summit of this chapter isn’t reached until the last verse: “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons” [you know how it goes: nothing] “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So the chapter begins and ends with this glorious confession of Christ and the state of grace in which we live.

Let’s go back to that first verse. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” That’s quite a statement. Think about that. Don’t just let those words disappear into the ether. Ponder them. Receive the Good News of them! Let your heart rejoice in them.

“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This one word, condemnation, pretty much tells the whole story of our salvation. Remember how Adam and Eve rebelled against God? There are consequences, severe consequences. He disciplines them because he loves them, but he does not condemn them. He reserves that unrestrained wrath for the serpent. “Cursed art thou! You shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:14). So the devil is condemned. And mankind is certainly disciplined, but we are also promised a Savior.

Usually God doesn’t have to lift a finger to punish us. Sin is its own punishment, its own condemnation. Steal from your work place, lose your job. Drink too much, become an alcoholic. Be mean and merciless with your spouse, and live in a miserable marriage. Grow a love of money and you’ll be a malcontent, because you’ll never have enough of it. God doesn’t have to punish us. Sin is its own

punishment.

However, God is not content to leave his creation in the state of such brokenness. So what does he do? He chooses not to condemn us, to wipe us out and start over again. He chooses to save and redeem us, however costly the price.

Trouble is, many people don't know God as gracious and merciful in nature. They think of God as always sitting on his judgment seat, looking down and frowning, always judging, always criticizing, always disapproving, and getting ready for the final condemnation. They think of him this way because they've never really heard or received by faith the good news of a Savior in Jesus Christ, or because the Gospel of Jesus is overwhelmed and suffocated by overbearing Law.

Philip Yancey, in his book "What's So Amazing About Grace?" writes, "I attended a Bible college. I realized that in four years I learned almost nothing about grace. . . I had experienced as much ungrace on the campus of a Bible college as I had anywhere else in life" (p. 14). I learned about the sins of "smoking and drinking . . . Movies ranked just below these vices . . . Rock music was likewise regarded as an abomination, quite possibly demonic in origin." There were all kinds of laws about wearing makeup and jewelry and skirt length for girls and hair length for boys (p. 30). He heard a lot of Law, but precious little Gospel.

Tragically, many churches have turned even the sacraments into Law. They think of Baptism as promises we make to God rather than the other way around. And the Lord's Supper is thought of as a sort of ritual in which we do the work of remembering his agony and death, rather than God giving us his very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. So there's a lot of Law . . . but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is reduced to a barnacle on the side of the ship. There's a shortage of grace within many churches. The result: even many who identify themselves as Christians feel like they are living in a state of God's disapproval and disappointment.

Friends, Jesus did not come to condemn us. That's

not what he's about. John 3:17. "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." God's not interested in condemning sinners. Sin is its own condemnation. But for those in Christ, for those who believe and are baptized, there is now no condemnation.

Remember that time when the Scribes and Pharisees dragged a woman before Jesus? They had caught her in adultery, and were testing Jesus to see if he would uphold the law of Moses which said adulterers should be stoned. Jesus stooped down and with his finger wrote some things in the dust. We can only guess what. They continued to press him to condemn this woman until he stood up straight and looked at them and said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." One by one they left, until it was only Jesus standing there with the woman. He asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go now and leave your life of sin" (Jn. 8:1ff). Jesus isn't interested in condemning sinners. He wants to save them.

Ironically, that desire for the salvation of sinners is part of what got him condemned. The Pharisees and other religious authorities made up their minds about him early on. And nothing he did, however impressive, would change their minds. Even after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, what do they do next? They plot all the more to kill Jesus. They say, "If we let him go on like this everyone will believe in him" (Jn. 11:48).

Can you imagine? He stirs up his power and grace and gives life back to a dead man. He turns Mary and Martha's grief into dancing. Who can be offended by that? But this act of grace only made the Pharisees hate him all the more. As far as they were concerned Jesus could do nothing right.

Friends, if that's how some were with Jesus, you can be sure some have made up their minds about you and you'll never be able to please them. I would encourage you not to worry about them. I would encourage you not to waste

much time or energy thinking about them. Your purpose in life is not to please them. Your purpose in life is to fulfill your vocations (as parent, friend, worker, citizen, Christian), fulfill your vocations as best you can in service of your neighbor and to the glory of God, all the while remembering that in Christ there is now no condemnation.

And remember this: your purpose in life is never ever be that one who condemns another. That's never your job. There should be no one out there who thinks of you forever disapproving of them. If there is, you have to do something to change that. Constantly accusing, constantly disapproving . . . that's the devils work, not yours as one belonging to Christ. The name Satan even means "The Accuser." You don't want to take on his role. Colossians 3, "Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unit" (vv. 12-14).

The Pharisees condemned Jesus first with words, but those words ultimately turn into nails and a hammer. Jesus certainly heard and felt their condemnation, but more importantly he also experienced God's condemnation for us. Because he was condemned for our sin, there is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ. If there's no condemnation for us, it must mean he forgives us abundantly. If there's no condemnation, it must mean he gives us his own righteousness and innocence. If there's no condemnation, it must mean he loves us. Ps. 34 "The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him" (v. 22).

Later on in this great chapter of Romans 8, Paul comes back to the condemnation theme. It serves as book ends to the chapter. Verse 1, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Verse 33, "Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who

justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died --- more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Paul answers his own question with some of the most powerful and memorable words in all Scripture. “I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

There will always be those who will criticize your every move. But don't you worry about them. You don't really need their approval, because you have something much greater. You have God's forgiveness and righteousness, his innocence and blessedness. You are his baptized child. You live in his grace and you live in his love, and *nothing*, and *no one* can separate you from his love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen!

