

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 12, 2016**

NO CONDEMNATION

Romans 8:1-4

In recent weeks, in our study of Romans, I have shared with you not only Paul's marriage analogy (Romans 7:1-6), but also a golf analogy and, last Sunday, a fishing analogy. This morning it is "the headache analogy."

Most of you know that I know a thing or two about headaches. I have lived with chronic, daily headaches for years. I'm happy to say that since undergoing nerve decompression surgery two years ago, the intensity of my headaches has decreased significantly. I still have headaches on a daily basis, but they are not nearly as brutal as they were for years. I am most grateful to the Lord for His mercies to me.

But this is not about me or my headaches. It is about a Chinese man named Li Fuyan who endured severe headaches for four years. He tried all kinds of treatments to ease his throbbing headaches, but nothing proved to be effective ... until an X-ray finally revealed the culprit. It turns out that a rusty, four-inch knife blade had been lodged in his skull for four years, and no one – Fuyan included – knew it was there. He had been stabbed with a knife during a robbery four years earlier, and the blade had broken off inside his head, behind the right side of his jaw, without his realizing it. Can you imagine? No wonder he suffered from such stabbing pain.

It should be intuitively obvious that we are not supposed to live with knives or other foreign objects buried in our bodies that have no business being there. The same is true of our souls. If we could take an X-ray of your soul, what would we find there? Would the X-ray show regret, or embarrassment, or guilt, or shame over some failure in your past, some habit you couldn't (or can't) break, some temptation you couldn't resist, or some situation in which your courage or character was found lacking? You see, like persistent physical pain, a chronic sense of guilt or shame over sin can have a painful, paralyzing, debilitating effect on your life. (Adapted from Max Lucado, *Grace*, 94)

But this is not how it was meant to be. Sin in us is the culprit – sin that produces guilt and shame. It is a culprit we are unequipped and unable to overcome in our own strength. Does this mean we are doomed to a life of misery, stuck forever in the guilt and shame we cannot seem to shake? Thank God, the answer is no. Regardless of what you may have done, or the skeletons hiding in your closet, or the temptations and sins that nip at your heels or attack where the enemy knows you are weakest, the message of the gospel is that there is One who has and does overcome the power of sin and guilt and shame in your life and mine.

Here at the beginning of Romans 8, Paul begins to lay out for us the revolutionary, transformational implications of the gospel of God's grace to us in Christ. The first and primary implication can be summed up in two words: *No condemnation*. Though we are guilty as hell and deserving of hell, every last one of us, we are not condemned.

Paul begins Romans 8 with the word “therefore,” which always points back to something that precedes it. In its immediate context, the “therefore” refers back to Paul’s expression of thanks to God in 7:25 for the victory over sin and guilt that is ours “through Jesus Christ our Lord.” In the larger context, it connects what Paul is about to say with his explanation of the gospel of salvation for justification by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone that he set forth beginning at 3:21.

“Therefore,” he says – meaning, *on account of* what God has done for us, *because of* what God Himself has done for us in the redeeming, reconciling, saving work of His Son, who has won for us the victory over sin and guilt – “there is now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). *No. Condemnation. None. Zero.* Our guilt and shame before God have been removed. We are no longer held hostage to sin and guilt. They no longer have the power to incapacitate us like a knife blade lodged in the skull. We are forgiven. We are set free from “the law of sin and death” (8:2) – that is, from the demoralizing duty of keeping God’s law with all its demands in order to be declared righteous in God’s sight. The law is demoralizing because it is impossible to fulfill. You can’t do it, no matter how hard you try. The problem is not with the law. There is nothing wrong with it. The problem is us. The problem is our fallen human nature, what Paul refers to as “the flesh” (8:3).

But what we could not do and what the law itself could not do (because of our weakness and inability to live up to it), God Himself did by sending His Son into the world to sacrifice His life as a sin offering for us (8:3). What Paul says in verse 3 is echoed in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where the apostle says: “God made Him who had no sin” – Jesus – “to be sin (or, to be a sin offering) for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The result? “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” – for those who trust not in themselves, nor in anyone or anything else, but in Jesus, and only in the person and work of Jesus for their salvation. Which, I trust, includes you. *No condemnation.*

The result? We are set free from being held captive by sin and guilt and shame. There is a new “law” that goes into effect in our lives. Paul calls it “the law of the Spirit of life” – by which he means the gospel that the Holy Spirit graciously applies to our lives, liberating us from the unbearable weight of our sin and guilt and shame. *Free at last.*

Does this mean that we no longer sin? No, it doesn’t. We still sin. We still fail. We still miss the mark of complete obedience to God. We still make mistakes. We still go astray. We still do things we shouldn’t do. We still neglect or fail to do things we ought to do. But “there is now no condemnation.” Why? Because Jesus took our condemnation upon Himself.

In Jesus’ offering of Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, we see both the perfect justice of God and His magnificent grace. The guilty verdict against our sin was pronounced and the death sentence carried out against Jesus, who took our place and suffered the punishment we rightly deserve. He did for us what only He could do. In His death for us, the penalty for sin required by the justice of God was satisfied. And we have received mercy and grace unending. For God *did not* and *does not* and *will not* treat us as our sins deserve (Psalm 103:10). The same is true for all who trust in Him.

No condemnation. Sadly, too many of us live under a cloud of condemnation that doesn't even exist. Too many of us allow Satan to blackmail us and rob us of the freedom for which Christ has set us free (Galatians 5:1). Too many of us continue to condemn ourselves even though God has long ago forgiven us. Is this true in your life?

There is an old story about a little boy who killed his grandmother's pet duck. This happened back in the day when kids actually played outdoors. He didn't mean to do it. He accidentally hit the duck with a stone from his sling-shot. The boy didn't think anybody saw his deed, so he quickly buried the duck in the backyard and didn't tell anyone about it.

He soon discovered, however, that his sister had seen it all. She now had the leverage of his secret, and she put it to use. Whenever it was the sister's turn to wash the dishes or take out the trash or any other household chore, she would whisper in her brother's ear: "Remember the duck." And then her little brother would do whatever his sister was supposed to do.

When he had finally had enough of it, he went to his grandmother with fear and trepidation, and told her what he had done. To his great surprise, his grandmother didn't get angry with him. Instead, she gave him a hug and said: "I was standing at the kitchen sink and saw the whole thing. I forgave you then. I was just wondering how long it would take for you to get tired of your sister's blackmail and come to me." (Steve Brown, *Three Free Sins*, 110)

Satan tries to blackmail us with his constant accusations and reminders of things we have done. He whispers: "Remember this. Remember that. Remember when you did this. Remember when you said that." But God has a different view of us. Because of Jesus – because of His willing acceptance of the punishment for our sins in His suffering and death on the cross – there is not now, now will there ever be, any condemnation for anyone who truly trusts in Christ for salvation.

Which means that there is now no condemnation for *you*, if your trust and hope are in Christ. It means that *you* are forgiven. It doesn't matter what you've done or how many times you've done it. You are forgiven. The blood of Jesus covers all your sin. His blood cleanses you from every sin. Jesus paid the debt for your sins. For *your* sins. There is nothing you can do to contribute or add to the saving work of Jesus for you. The only thing you can contribute to your salvation is your sin. That's all. The only thing you can contribute to it is your need. And your helplessness to do anything to save yourself. Jesus did it all. Jesus paid it all. All to Him we owe.

Verse 3 makes it clear that the purpose of Christ's incarnation was the atonement. The reason Jesus took on our flesh and blood, the reason He was born, was to die for us as a sacrifice for our sin.

But there is more to God's plan for us than just the forgiveness of our sins. There is more to it than our justification. There is more to it than saving us from an eternity in hell (as if that weren't enough). God's plan includes both our justification and our sanctification, both our salvation and our holiness. Paul alludes to this in verses 3 and 4 where he says that Jesus bore

in His body – in His person – the condemnation for our sin, “in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us” (8:4).

How in the world is this possible? It is possible only through the agency and transformational work of God the Holy Spirit whom God the Father gives to everyone who believes and trusts in God the Son for salvation and life. We obviously cannot do it ourselves. If we think we can, if we think it depends on us or our effort, we have not understood the gospel. It depends on the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and mine.

Do you see the Trinitarian nature of God’s saving and sanctifying work in us? God the Father sent God the Son into the world to save us. And He sends God the Holy Spirit into our hearts to sanctify us and make us holy – which is a long-term project.

We had the pleasure of welcoming four new members into the Faith Church family this morning. In the presence of our church family, they responded affirmatively to the five membership questions, one of which was this:

Do you now promise and resolve, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?

As I always try to point out, the question is not: Will you try really, really hard to do the best you can to live your life as a followers of Christ?

No. That’s not it. The question acknowledges and affirms our dependence, our “humble reliance” upon the Holy Spirit and His gracious work in our lives. By its very nature, the Christian life is a supernatural life. It takes supernatural power to live a supernatural life. You can’t do it on your own. Neither can I. It requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in us. By living “according to the Spirit” and not “according to the sinful nature,” Paul says, we produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), which pleases God.

But it happens only “in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit.” So, let the Holy Spirit do His work in you. Accept and celebrate the truth that, if you are “in Christ” – if you are trusting in Christ alone for your salvation, as He is offered in the gospel – there is now no condemnation for you. Jesus has taken care of it. Like Li Fuyan, when that rusty four-inch knife was removed from his head, you have been set free from the weight and pain of sin and guilt and shame you were never meant to carry.

This is the gospel in its revolutionary, transforming power. Believe it, live it, and let it transform your life.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.