

Secured by Christ

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Preacher: Brian King

[0 : 00] Well, this morning we're going to start a new series in Romans chapter 8. And Romans chapter 8 is indeed quite an incredible chapter. And I hope you'll all be excited and strengthened as we work our way through this chapter.

We're going to spend the next six weeks in this. And this morning, we're just going to look at the first four verses. So if you've got your Bibles in front of you, I can encourage you to just open it to Romans chapter 8.

And I'm going to read it out. Let's pray one more time.

Let's pray one more time. Father, as we come to your word now, would you indeed speak to us? Would you refresh us? Would you strengthen us? Would you plant your word deep down into us? And would you lift our eyes again to the Lord Jesus? And would you indeed help us to seek to glorify you in all things?

[1 : 49] We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, some of the most sophisticated things in modern life are surprisingly fragile. Take the iPhone, for instance.

That's a pretty good example of something that is sleek and cutting edge. But in 2018, there was a bug in the system that meant that if you receive a message with a particular character from an Indian language known as Telugu, your phone will basically crash as it wasn't equipped to load the symbol.

You know, just one letter and there goes your phone. Just this week, I also read about a Welsh village whose broadband signal disappeared every morning.

The engineers who investigated were completely mystified, testing connections, replacing cables, until they finally discovered the cause.

An old television. Every morning, one of the villagers would switch on his very old TV, you know, the kind where you can see the antenna and the tubes, and it would cause some kind of electrical interference, which brought down the entire village's Wi-Fi.

[3 : 01] Even the most cutting edge and developed stuff in our modern age can be quite fragile. Similarly, the Christian life can feel quite fragile.

Now, when a child is first delivered and born into this world, we understand that he or she is fragile. But we understand that where there is birth, there will also be growth.

It's a normal part of the process. And that's also true spiritually. Where there is spiritual birth, there will be spiritual growth. And so we expect the child, generally speaking, to develop well, to come of age to a stage where they are strong and secure.

We expect them to become less fragile, so to speak. But for Christians, it often doesn't feel that way, does it? You know, as we trust Jesus and start living for him, in other words, we have been born again, we find that even though we are expected to grow, to become a well-developed, cutting-edge, mature Christian, in reality, we often feel more and more fragile, not less.

We go through a whole range of experiences. We face a whole range of temptations. We give in to a whole range of sins. And sometimes that derails us.

[4 : 28] And so we feel fragile. We don't feel secure. Well, we are uncertain that as God reveals the current state of our lives, that he is smiling at us.

We wonder if he is wearing a frown instead. We are robbed of our assurance. And that, in turn, will rob us of our joy. And when we are robbed of joy, then we find living for Jesus even more difficult. It's a vicious cycle. That's not what God wants for his people, though. He wants us to gain confidence as we stand before him.

He wants us to grow. There's no doubt about that. But he also wants us to know, to know the pleasure that comes with the certainty we are in his hands.

And so he has given us Romans chapter 8. He's given us these precious words because he knows that sin often makes us deaf to the hope of assurance we can have.

[5 : 36] And so Romans 8 offers us security as believers who often feel fragile living for Jesus in this fallen world.

Romans 8 emphasizes what God has done. I think I'm correct in saying that there are no imperatives at all in this chapter. In other words, there are no direct commands or instructions. Romans 8 emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in particular. There are more references to the Spirit in this one chapter than in the rest of Romans.

And Romans 8 will show us that you cannot have the Spirit without Christ. To be led by the Spirit is to be led into the likeness and the glory of Christ.

And so for the next six weeks, we'll just slowly marinate ourselves in this incredible chapter that we might know we can be secure in Christ. And today we'll start off by thinking what actually secures the foundations for the Christian life?

[6 : 45] How can we fragile people remain steadfast in living for Jesus? Why can we go on living for Jesus despite guilt and shame and doubt often knocking on our door?

Romans 8 verse 1 to 4 will give us two reasons. And because the second of these reasons will get picked up on and expended upon in the following week, today I'll spend more time on the first. So first reason, because Christ has secured our status. Christ has secured our status. Verse 1 starts with, therefore.

And a good rule of interpretation is always to ask, what is the therefore there for? Well, it alerts us to the fact that to make complete sense of what comes next, we need to ask what comes before.

And one of the big things that comes out in Romans 1 to 7 is our previous status. From Romans 1 verse 18 to 3 verse 20, God makes it clear that everyone is godless and wicked.

[7 : 58] We know what is true. We know what is right. We know who is the truth with a capital T. But we took the truth, we dug a great big hole, we buried the truth in there, and then we covered it all up, hoping to ignore it.

Romans 1 tells us we suppress the truth. Our lives will not live to God's glory or in gratitude to him. And so God has every reason and every justification to hold us accountable.

Even the Jews, who could easily have pointed to their own status as God's special people, cannot escape this verdict. They have God's law, but their obedience to the law is found lacking.

And so everyone, whether Jew or not, is under the cloud of judgment. In other words, everyone stands condemned before the judgment seat of God.

Romans 5 verse 12 to 21 confirms this by putting it in another way. Our previous status is as those in Adam.

[9 : 12] And chapters 5 to 7 makes it clear what it means to be in Adam. It means we are slaves to sin. It means we are ruled by law.

And that means condemnation. You know, just look at some of these phrases from Romans chapter 5 on the screen. Verse 16. The judgment followed one's sin and brought condemnation.

Down to verse 18. Just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people. Verse 17 helps us understand that this is condemnation unto death.

By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man. So that's the bad news. Our status in Adam is as those condemned to death.

Ever since that day when Adam and Eve chose to walk away from the life-giving presence of God, all of us have been living on death road.

[10 : 18] Why? Because sin now dwells among us. And the very nature of sin is to divide, devour and destroy. Think of how sin immediately divided us the moment it entered the world.

Adam and Eve blamed each other. And then think of how it then devoured as their son Cain murders his brother Abel. And then think of how it progressed to destruction as by Noah's time we're told that the whole earth is filled with violence.

Sin moves us away from God the source of life and moves us towards death. If God breathes life into us well sin does the opposite.

But here's the thing especially to remember we sin because we are sinners. sinners. We sin because we are sinners. That means it is us who divide devour and destroy.

We are not passive victims of some external force called sin. Sin is internal not external to us. And we cannot be Christians if we do not accept this truth.

[11 : 39] And so if God wants to protect the integrity of his will to make sure that it is not corrupted by sinners who divide devour and destroy.

And if he wants to protect the integrity of his character as one who truly cares about goodness and justice well he has to act as the righteous judge and condemn us.

But Romans is all about good news not bad news. The bad news is given so that the good news can truly be seen as good news.

For what we have just been talking about is the previous status of a Christian. But look again at Romans chapter 8 verse 1 and notice that there is that little word now only three letters.

Why is it there? At first glance it seems redundant. You know take out that word now and it feels like it will make no difference to the meaning of the verse.

[12 : 48] But it is important because God is saying all that we have just said that was then this is now. And what is the now?

What is our present status as compared to our previous status? Answer no condemnation.

You see what has happened? Romans 3 verse 20 tells us that no one is righteous. And then in the very next verse verse 21 it begins with the words but now again notice the word now there has been a turning point there is a decisive change.

Think of it like this. For about 30 years the city of Berlin was divided by a wall. It stretched for 27 miles.

It had barbed wires and landmines. It was patrolled 24-7 by soldiers who could shoot to kill. It was a grim symbol of the Cold War representing the divide between a communist and a democratic regime.

[14 : 04] But then on November 9th 1989 everything changed as a series of fast-moving events reached its climax. For the first time the gates opened and the removal of the wall began.

This day is often seen as marking the end of the Cold War. It certainly marked the beginning of a new era for Germany. There has been a historic shift.

Previously the city and the country had been divided but now it's reunited. And so from Romans 3 verse 21 onwards we mark the beginning of a new era.

As God tells us that a righteousness through Christ has been revealed. This is a righteousness that is given through faith as Romans chapter 4 then unpacks.

The gate has opened. God and humankind previously divided has now reunited. There has been a historic shift one which has never been seen before in human history.

[15 : 20] And it's all because Christ has secured our status. Our previous status in Adam was one of condemnation and death.

But our present status in Christ is one of justification and life. Look at 5 verse 18 again on the screen.

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

Under the old era of Adam, we were slaves to sin. But in 6 verse 22, we are now set free from sin and have become slaves of God.

Under the old era of Adam, we were ruled by law. But in 7 verse 6, we are now released from the law so that we may serve in the new way of the spirit.

[16 : 21] This is the now of 8 verse 1. There has been a turning point. The therefore of condemnation in 3 verse 20 has now been transformed into the therefore of no condemnation in 8 verse 1.

And what does it mean to say that there is now no condemnation? It means this. God has every reason to hold us accountable.

But now, God holds nothing, absolutely nothing against you. And he never ever will.

It means that when you behold the face of God, he is smiling at you, not frowning at you. We are not waiting on death row any longer.

We are not in the appeals court, still waiting anxiously in doubt and fear whether or not the verdict has been overturned and the pardon has been granted.

[17 : 30] It is certain there is no condemnation. we can never be more free than at this present moment. This is our status and our status in Christ never changes.

This is very important to remember. You see, many Christians think like this. When things are going well, spiritually speaking, when we are reading our Bibles and prayer comes to us easily, when we

are resisting temptation and living as loving citizens, we are sure that God accepts us. We are certain that He is smiling at us. At that moment, we are certainly not under condemnation. But then we slip up. We fall into sin in some way.

Our desires become distorted in another way. And now we are certain that God is frowning at us. Now we are currently under condemnation.

He has rejected us. And so we think of ourselves as constantly passing from the state of no condemnation to the state of condemnation and then back again like a pendulum, depending on how our day went and how much we confess to God.

[18 : 54] But this is wrong. Our experience of the Christian life may be up and down.

Our appreciation of what Christ has done may grow strong or weak. But our position before God in Christ never changes.

Our status is secure. As the Baptist pastor from an earlier century, F.B. mayor once put it, your own heart may condemn you.

Your memory may summon from the past evidence against you. The great accuser of souls, Satan, may lay against you grievous and well-founded charges.

Your tides of fueling may abd far down the beach. Your faith may become weak and lose its power and grip. Your sense of unworthiness may become increasingly oppressive.

[20 : 04] None of these things can touch your acceptance with God if you are complying with his one or inclusive condition. No condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

For these are all your benefits as long as one thing is true of you. You are in Christ Jesus.

And you are in Christ Jesus when you exercise faith in Jesus Christ. What is faith in Jesus Christ? Well, here is how the Westminster Shorter Catechism on the screen puts it.

Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

And so you must receive him. Otherwise you are still in Adam. Your status hasn't changed. But if you do rest upon Jesus the way you rest your wake upon the chair that you're sitting on at this very moment, you can be 100% confident there is no condemnation.

[21 : 31] Jesus is holding you up. How is this made possible? Verse 3 gives us the answer.

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh? God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

And so he condemned sin in the flesh. It has been secured by Christ. You see the Old Testament law, that's the law being referred to here, had no chance of securing your righteous status.

The law is a good thing. Back in 7 verse 12, we are told this on the screen. So then the law is holy and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.

Now that's no surprise. After all, the law gives us guidance on how we should relate to God and to each other. Jesus himself sum up the law in this way, love God, love your neighbour.

[22 : 41] And you know, law and love are not two words that normally go together, but God's law is one soaked through with love. It is good.

But here's the problem. The law cannot make you righteous. The law cannot inspire obedience in you because the law cannot transform your heart.

It gives you the standards which your heart should live up to, but it cannot give you a new heart.

Indeed, earlier in Romans, we're told that the law only increases our consciousness of sin.

As we become aware of God's standards, we become aware at the same time of how we haven't lived up to them. Indeed, in one sense, the law makes things worse because we can no longer plead ignorance.

It just presents us with more opportunities to disobey him. For the law brings out the rebel in us. It draws out our true nature rather than reform it.

[23 : 57] And so the law is powerless. It can't secure you. But Jesus is different. for God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.

The wording is important. On the one hand, Jesus did not come in sinful flesh because Jesus is sinless.

On the other hand, Jesus did not merely come in the likeness of flesh because Jesus is 100% human. He really came as flesh and blood so to speak.

And so to say he came in the likeness of sinful flesh is to say that Jesus came as a real perfect human being but without the sinful nature.

And that makes him the perfect sin offering. He was fully human so he perfectly represents us. And yet unlike us, he was fully obedient to God.

[25 : 09] He fulfilled in the language of verse 4 the righteous requirements of the law. In other words, God did what we couldn't do.

God did what the law itself couldn't do. God secured our status by sending Jesus to bear the condemnation we deserve. God now so often when I ask Christians what Jesus has done, they are able to say Christ died for our sin.

But when I ask them what that statement means, many struggle. They can make that statement but they cannot explain that statement.

Well let me help you explain it now. To say Christ died for our sin is to say Christ has taken our place. He has become our substitute.

He exchanged places with us. He who had no sin became a sin offering for us. And this exchange lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

[26 : 26] And this exchange captures his very heart of love. Substitutionary sacrifice, you see, is an intrinsic part of love.

Take a simple example. When you have kids, you have to sacrifice some of your freedom and independence which you used to have in a child free environment.

Now, if you choose to preserve your freedom and your independence at all costs, what will happen is that you probably won't be a good parent and your kids will probably grow up damaged.

So it's either them or you. Choose not to sacrifice your own ones and you sacrifice them. But if you love them, you would choose to sacrifice your own time and your own energy and so on for their sake.

Well, as Jesus looks at the cross, he knows it's either us or him. Choose not to sacrifice, we are condemned to die.

[27 : 34] But because he chose to sacrifice himself, we are no longer condemned to die. Our status of no condemnation is secured by a loving substitution.

And so how should this impact our lives today? Well, firstly, it means that whenever we are suffering from status anxiety, we should turn to Christ, not the law.

You see, all of us try to live by some sort of law, even if it isn't the Old Testament law. We all have a moral code, whether it is one that we came up with ourselves or one that we absorbed from our parents or our culture, including church culture.

Perhaps our code is I will always be kind and respectful to everyone, even strangers. Perhaps our code is I will always pay attention to my kids when they are talking.

Perhaps our code is I will be reliable in carrying out my obligations. And we are happy when we live by them. We feel good.

[28 : 55] And slowly but surely we let that become the basis of our righteousness. To calm our anxieties, we let the law secure our status.

But the problem is that we will eventually fall short of them. We will speak unkindly or judgmentally to someone. We get distracted and ignore our kids.

We fail to do something that we said we would do. We know we should have done X or Y but we didn't. We fall short even of our own moral code.

And we feel guilty. We regret it. Do it enough times and we feel condemned. And that's when we suffer status anxiety.

Have I jeopardized my standing before God? And so how do we cope with it? Well, one way is to try to atone for our transgressions ourselves.

[29 : 56] We point to our other moral successes and try to let that cover our failures. That becomes our rather feeble offering. Or we compare ourselves favorably to someone else.

Or else we subtly modify our moral code. So that what we did wasn't so bad after all. Or it wasn't wrong. But none of that is healthy.

For none of that acknowledges that our relationship with God is purely one of grace. Instead it's all based on how we're doing according to law.

Whether we have successfully kept it or we have failed to live up to it. It's taking Christ out of the Christian life. And if Christ is not our sin offering, well, you can be sure that you are not covered.

And that's why our guilt and our shame doesn't go away in those instances. But remember, if we are Christians, we are by definition depending on Christ, not the law.

[31 : 09] Our status is secure. For sure we shouldn't take our fight with sin. Likely we'll see that next week. But God says turning to the law when we do sin is also wrong headed.

Our sin should push us to Jesus, not away from him. It should push us to the one who secures us, not to the things that further condemn us.

He's already become our perfect sin offering. He's taken us off death's role. And that's all we need to know. And secondly, knowing Christ secures our status means that we cannot be disheartened in times of suffering.

Perhaps you're in physical or emotional pain and it's getting worse, not better. And it's easy to begin thinking, maybe God is punishing me for some previous transgression.

That's why I'm in so much pain. I'm under God's condemnation. Perhaps a well-meaning friend even says that to you. But Romans 8 verse 1 will help you see that that is not true.

[32 : 30] If you are in Christ, whatever else it might be, your physical or emotional pain is not an indication of present condemnation.

It is not an indication of God deciding to pay you back. Or perhaps other things in your life are not going well. Perhaps you're single and hoping to meet someone but it never happens.

Perhaps your marriage or your working life is going through a difficult patch. Perhaps ministry just isn't bearing any fruit. And again, the temptation is to wonder if God is bringing up old grudges and so making your life just a little bit more difficult.

And if we believe that even just a little bit, we will get this courage. And so we need to turn to Romans chapter 8 verse 1 again.

There is now no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Jesus. And that's why we can keep living for Jesus.

[33 : 39] Well, we must turn more briefly to our second reason. Secondly, we can keep living for Jesus because the Spirit has liberated us to live.

The Spirit has liberated us to live. You see, the gospel isn't just about a change in status. it's also about the breaking of power.

Just imagine if it was just the former. It would be equivalent to a judge saying to a prisoner, okay, you've got your pardon, all the best, now get out.

And sometimes Christians can think of the gospel in those terms only. God has granted us forgiveness, but after that, he kind of lets us go it alone in the Christian life.

Our status has changed, but nothing else. It's like getting membership at Sarawak Club. You know, the notice board says that we are now members, but we're still the same person as when we were not members.

[34 : 44] And if we think in those terms, well, it's no wonder Christians often fail to grasp just how wondrous the gospel really is.

We would think that the gospel is for unbelievers only. You know, in this kind of thinking, the gospel is like the application form for membership. But once you're a member, you don't really need the application form anymore.

You need something else to fulfill your membership obligations. forgiveness. And so we turn to something else other than Jesus himself to try to live the Christian life.

But the gospel isn't just about forgiveness. Indeed, a glance at the Old Testament shows us that forgiveness has never stood alone.

It is part of a grander design to restore us to relationship with God. Consider these words from Ezekiel appearing on the screen.

[35 : 48] I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Now notice that there just isn't cleansing there is also a new heart. There is not just forgiveness but a renewal of relationship marked by the giving of the spirit.

And this forms the backdrop of the statement that we find in Romans chapter 8 verse 2. through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

In other words there is now no condemnation because in Christ we now have the spirit. Just a few verses earlier in 7 verse 23 we are told that we are a prisoner of the law.

[37 : 05] Put another way we are under the power of sin but now we are liberated from that power and placed under the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is part and parcel of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel doesn't just secure our status to one of no condemnation it also liberates us from the old powers of sin to live for Jesus in the Spirit. Now let me give you an illustration this is how it works. Sin is like the law of gravity. It weighs you down. Jump off a building and it will pull you straight down to the ground.

You're not going to fight it on its own. That's the kind of hole sin has on us. It leads us all the way to death. But now through Christ the Holy Spirit sets us free from this law.

How? Well this time imagine jumping off a building but this time strapped to a hang glider. Now you're able to soar.

[38 : 24] Not because the law of gravity has suddenly disappeared but because there is another law at work. The law of aerodynamics that trumps the law of gravity.

Well, the Holy Spirit is our hang glider. He too is the gift of the gospel. He liberates us to live.

In the words of verse 4, it is true him the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

You see, in Christ, our status of no condemnation has been secured. Yes, that is part of the truth. Christ fulfilled the law for us on our behalf as our perfect sin offering.

But we mustn't stop there. For we are now transferred from being in Adam to being in Christ.

[39 : 27] And in Christ, we can actually begin to do the right thing. We too begin to fulfill the law by walking according to the spirit.

And this we'll see in more detail next week. But for today, here is something to ponder. Have I understood that when I received the gospel, I received not just a change in status, but a liberation from the power of sin?

When I trusted in Jesus, did I know that I now have a hang glider, that I have the power of the Holy Spirit to push back against the power of sin?

When we know this, it makes a difference to how we live for Jesus. For just as we are tempted to turn to the law to secure our status, we are also tempted to turn to the law again to liberate us to live.

We think more law is what is needed to enable us to be patient and kind, to love our enemies, to be bold in service for God, to suffer joyfully for Christ.

[40 : 43] We think of the law maybe like a coach who treats us harshly just so that we can become a better squash player or something like that. But while the law can offer us it cannot give us sanctification.

The law is a sign board, not a hand glider. It points you the right way. It cannot make you sore. The law is good.

It tells you where to go. But the spirit is necessary. He helps you go there. And so we mustn't confuse the two.

And like I said over the next few weeks we'll see what it means to live according to the spirit. But for today we can just say it means this.

It means accepting his influence. It means not resisting when he points us to his obedience and away from gratifying the sinful desires of the flesh.

[41 : 48] It means cooperating with him. And so how can fragile believers remain steadfast in living for Jesus?

By knowing this Christ has secured our status. He says to us I condemn you no more.

And then through the spirit he liberates us to live. He says to us go and sin no more. In other words our Christian life rests simply on the outworking of the gospel.

And if every single day we drink from the well of the gospel we can have the joy and confidence to live all out for Jesus.

Maybe this week why not make it a personal project to at least memorize Romans chapter 8 verse 1 and 2 as a way of hiding his word in your heart.

[43 : 00] Just make sure that you are drinking from the well of the gospel. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come before you rejoicing that we now stand in the grace of God.

We stand under the realm of Christ, under his authority, and that in Christ there is now no condemnation.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are able to do what the law was powerless to do, that you offered yourself as that perfect sin offering, and so condemn sin in the flesh as you hung there on the cross.

Help us to never take that for granted. Help us to see the depth of our sin so that we can see the depth of your love. Thank you for doing that great exchange with us.

And so Father, will you help us to hear your word also, and we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who sets us free from the law or the principle of sin and death.

[44 : 23] And Father, we just pray now that we will keep walking by the Spirit, we display the fruit of the Spirit, that we would want to set our minds on the Spirit and put to death the misdeeds of the body so that we might remain steadfast in living for you.

Please help us do that this week, in the coming months, for the rest of our life. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.