

No Condemnation in a COVID-19 World (part 2) Romans 8:18-39

Introduction

Oprah Winfrey once said that, “There’s no greater gift than to honor your life’s calling. It’s why you were born and how you become most truly alive.” Now, just so you all know, I do not believe that Oprah is the greatest source for spiritual advice, but her statement about purpose reminded me of a group of men who met for breakfast and, during their time together, the topic of retirement came up. A man in the group who went by the name Pete, shared his excitement about the prospect of retirement and preceded to tell his friends about a conversation he and his wife had earlier that morning: “My wife asked, ‘What are you going to do when you retire?’ I told her, ‘I’m going to sit on the couch and watch TV all day every day.’”

One of the men at the table, wisely responded: “If you do that, you’ll be dead in a year.” Pete, who looked at the man wide-eyed and surprised, asked why. The man answered: “If the lack of purpose in your life doesn’t kill you first, your wife will.” The late Chicago Philanthropist John Shedd said, “A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.” We were not made for the harbor of retirement, but the voyage of a mission rooted in the glory of God for the good of the world.

Last week told you a story about a guy who viewed the Christian’s faith in the same way he treated his saving’s account in this present life: So long as he made more deposits than withdrawals, he would be in good shape. The reality is that Jesus didn’t die for our sins so that we can make more deposits than withdrawals from our heavenly bank account. Jesus died so that we can live our lives in light of our present reality. What is our present reality? Our present reality is that although we cannot make deposits or withdrawals from what Jesus already purchased, we are living off the unending benefits that Jesus purchased for us. What are the benefits we ought to be living our lives in light of? **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

How do I know that there is no condemnation for the Christian in a COVID-19 World? Paul gives us at least six reasons in Romans 8. The first three we looked at last week are:

1. You are not condemned because Jesus was (vv. 2-8)
2. You are not condemned because you are in Christ (vv. 9-11)
3. You are not condemned because you are an heir with Christ (vv. 12-17)

These first three reasons and the final three that I am about to share with you are six manifestos that will free you up to live a life of purpose in light of your present reality.

You are Not Condemned Because Death is Not Your Inheritance (vv. 18-25)

Paul begins, “**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**” If you are reading the NIV, Romans 8:18 is translated a little differently. The difference is in how the Greek word “*eis*” is translated. Here are the four ways *eis* can be translated: “for, in, to, or into.” The ESV uses “to” while the NIV uses the word “in”: “**I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed *in* us.**” So, which is it? Is the glory to be revealed going to be revealed *to* us or *in* us? It is both.

The glory, of which Paul is speaking, is something we will experience personally as well as something we will inherit. Therefore, Paul is able to say that the worst that we may experience on this side of eternity cannot be compared to the glory that is coming. In other words, for the Christian, the worst of our suffering cannot compete with the life we will inherit. In 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Paul makes the same point: “**For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.**”

So what is the glory that makes all suffering dim in comparison? It is the removal of suffering, death, and sin which keeps us from enjoying God fully. The glory that will be revealed *to* us and *in* us is the resurrection of our bodies which is part of the promise of the gospel. The resurrection that you will experience if you are a Christian will be three things: It will be immediate and not evolutionary (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18), it will be physical and not metaphorical (see 1 John 3:2; Dan. 12:1-3), and it will be eternal and not temporary (see Matt. 25:31-46).

So, when we experience the glory promised in Romans 8:18-25, what will we be like? According to 1 Corinthians 15:50-57, the body we will have will be our body, it will be a perfect body, and it will be an immortal body. In this world, people with the “perfect” body tend to be celebrated even though their soul may be ugly. People with a beautiful soul with an ugly body may be ignored. But the glory we are promised is one where the redeemed will have both a beautiful soul as well as a beautiful body. All of creation is groaning according to Romans 8:22 because even creation knows that something is not right with the world and once God fixes what is not right with us, he is going to do the same with the rest of creation.

This glory we are promised and creation is longing for is the completion of our redemption. What this means is that your salvation is only partially complete right now. The Holy Spirit not only serves as God’s seal upon your life as a guarantee that there is no condemnation for you, but the Holy Spirit also serves as God’s down payment that better days are coming. So when Paul wrote, “**For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies**” (v. 23), what he means is that our adoption will not be complete experientially until our resurrection is complete. This is the hope, according to verse 24, that is included in the promise of the gospel and the reason why Romans 8:1 is not conditioned on your performance as a Christian, but on everything that Jesus has already accomplished. The fourth reason for why there is no condemnation for the Christian is because life, not death, is our inheritance.

You are Not Condemned Because God is for Your Good (vv. 26-30)

If verses 18-25 were not enough to prove the validity of Romans 8:1, Paul continues: “**Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.**” In the same way that our hope in the glory that is coming helps us see suffering in its proper context, the Holy Spirit, who not only serves as God’s seal and down payment that better days are coming, he also is with us to help us. Do not miss the importance of the world groaning in this chapter. These verses are not speaking of some heavenly language or the gift of tongues (of which I still believe exists today); these verses are speaking of something much more profound.

Notice the critical role that the Holy Spirit has in your life. We know that God is for our good because of the role that the Holy Spirit has in the life of the Christian. In verses 9-11, we are told that the Holy Spirit dwells in us. In verses 14-17, we are told that the Holy Spirit leads us. In verse 23, we are told that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee that our adoption is coming. And, in verses 26-27, we are told that he is with us in our groaning.

To understand what and how the Holy Spirit groans on our behalf, you must pay attention to the context of Romans 8. What is the context? The context is that even in the midst of my suffering and the groaning of my soul and of creation for a better day, the Holy Spirit is sustaining me, helping me, and interceding for me with groans on my behalf. In other words, the kind of help we receive from the Holy Spirit is not that of a therapist, but the kind where he rolls up his sleeves to help us in our weakness. The groaning of the Holy Spirit is more than longing for the glory to be revealed to us and in us, it is a groaning that helps us and moves us closer to that Day as He intercedes for us on our behalf.

How do we know that the Holy Spirit is helping us in our weakness? We know because of verses 28-30. What do we know of those who love God up to this point? We know that those who love God, love him because Jesus became their condemnation (vv. 2-8). We know that those who love God, love him because they are in Christ (vv. 9-11). We know that those who love God, love him because they are now heirs with Jesus (vv. 12-17). We know that those who love God, love him because the Holy Spirit is sealing them, indwelling them, and helping them. But why? Because God loves them.

God is for your good, not because of anything you did, but because of everything he has already done. Those who love God are those who have been called by God. Do you really want to know why there is no condemnation for you Christian? It is the same reason why the gospel now makes sense to you and why you are now able to love God in way that you were unable to love him before you believed in Jesus as your savior. God is for your good because he foreknew you. God foreknew you because he predestined you long before you were even a thought in your mother’s mind. Because God predestined you, he called you. As a result of him calling you, you believed in Jesus and therefore he justified you. Because God justified you, he will one day glorify you. What is the point of verses 28-30? You had nothing to do with the salvation of our soul except that you heard the good news that Jesus lived the life you could never live and died the death you deserved, and you believed it because God was already at work in you so that when the time was right, you would believe the greatest news in the universe.

If God did Romans 8:29-30 on your behalf, you can have confidence that you are not condemned because God is absolutely for your good.

You are Not Condemned Because You are Loved with an Everlasting Love (vv. 31-39)

So, what do you say to Romans 18-30? What do you say to those who want the worst for you? What do you say to the devil when he accuses you? What can you say to COVID-19, suffering, or even death? Here is what you can say: **“If God is for us, who can be against us”** (v. 31)? Here is what you can say: **“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things”** (v. 32)? Here is what you say: **“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies”** (v. 33)?

What do you say to those who would tell you that your sins are too great or that you are too far gone for the grace and love of God to touch and transform you? You tell them: “I am the product of amazing grace and the unfailing love of God. Jesus took my place and bore my cross. Jesus laid down his life for the forgiveness of my sins. You shout from the rooftops: **“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for me”** (v. 34). You tell your accusers and you preach this to your own fickle heart: **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

Because you are loved with an everlasting love, you can sing to your heart:

Who brings our chaos back into order
Who makes the orphan a son and daughter
The King of Glory the King above all kings

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
And worthy is the King who conquered the grave.

Because you are loved with an everlasting love, you can get up in the devil’s face, you can look at the grave, and you can remind your wandering heart this good news:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35–39, ESV)

How is it that there is no condemnation for you who are in Christ? You are not condemned because Jesus was (vv. 2-8), you are not condemned because you are in Christ (vv. 9-11), you are not condemned because you are an heir with Christ (vv. 12-17), you are not condemned because death is not your inheritance (vv. 18-25), you are not condemned because God is for your good (vv. 26-30), and you are not condemned because you are loved with an everlasting love (vv. 31-39). That is why there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. When you live in light of your present reality as a follower of Christ, you will not want to rest in the comfort of your metaphorical couch.