**NO CONDEMNATION: LIFE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SPIRIT  
Romans 8:1–17**

**“*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.*” (1–2)**

In today’s passage, Paul declares that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, explaining why this is the case despite our sin, to whom this legal pardon applies, and how we can continually experience such freedom; this pardon applies to those who are in Christ Jesus, who live according to the Spirit. Paul describes what it means to live according to the Spirit, teaching about the mind governed by the Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit, and our obligation to the Spirit. The passage concludes with the result of life in accordance with the Spirit, which is adoption as children of God. May the Holy Spirit guide us as we learn what it means to live in accordance with him and how we can do so.

1. **No Condemnation (vs. 1–4)**

Romans 8 has been called the greatest chapter of the Bible. Martin Luther said, “If the Bible were a ring then Romans would be the gem that enhanced that ring… [and] Romans 8 would be the brilliant splendor that emanated from that ring”. It’s easy to see why, given its triumphal beginning of no condemnation and its wonderful conclusion of no separation and its glorious subject matter dealing with new life in Christ Jesus led by the Spirit as children of God the Father. Paul starts off with a victorious declaration of pardon. Look at verse 1: “***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus***”. This verdict, “no condemnation,” is especially meaningful in the context of Romans, wherein Paul has argued strongly that we deserve condemnation. “*There is no one righteous, not even one… All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God… The wages of sin is death…*” (3:11, 3:23, 6:23). Paul even confessed at the end of the chapter 7 that he is in his “*sinful nature a slave to the law of sin*” (7:25).

Let’s think about the significance of this pronouncement of “no condemnation”. Imagine yourself in the position of a guilty criminal, rightfully charged with treason. The evidence clearly shows your guilt; the jury is unanimous in their decision: you deserve the death penalty for your capital crime. There is one more hearing, when the judge will pronounce the final sentence. Imagine the despair you would feel, standing before the judge in anticipation of the death sentence followed unavoidably by the execution demanded by law. However, before the judge brings down the gavel of judgment, a messenger brings a letter, setting it before him on the judge’s bench. It is a letter of executive pardon, straight from the president. Instead of pronouncing your condemnation, the judge declares, “There is no condemnation; you are free.”

Imagine the tears of joy, the new lease on life, the freedom, the new beginning. This is not just a thought exercise; this is our spiritual reality. The law condemns our rebellious treason against God as deserving of death. But God declared us not guilty because of his compassionate grace. This amazing pardon from sin, the status of freedom from condemnation, we receive through faith in Jesus. When we believe in Christ as the Son of God, who died for our sins and rose again, we are washed by his blood, and our sins are fully paid for. So now instead of eternal death and punishment, we have eternal life.

Paul expands on how we can have such freedom in verse 2. Let’s read verses 1–2 together: “***Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.***” Here, Paul is using the word “law” not to refer to specific laws given in Scripture, but as a ruling principle—like the law of gravity. Just as massive objects incline downward, so the law of sin and death in our fallen bodies inclines us toward sin and consequently guilt, condemnation, and death. However, like the law of aerodynamics sets an airplane free from the law of gravity, the law of the Spirit has set us free from the law of sin and death so that we don’t have to go the way of what ruled us by nature.

Paul says that we have been set free “through Christ Jesus”. Paul explains further how this happened in verse 3: “***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***”. What is that the law was powerless to do, which God did? The law was powerless to save sinners or to produce righteousness in us. The reason isn’t that the law was lacking, for God’s law is perfect. It is we humans who are lacking, for we could not keep the law; our fallen flesh weakened the law from producing the righteousness it models.

So God did what the law could not, sending Jesus Christ in the likeness of sinful flesh—true human flesh yet without sin—to become a sin offering, a sacrifice to take away sin. When Jesus died on the cross, he took upon himself the guilt of all our sins, accepting the punishment for them. So the wrath of God poured down upon Jesus, condemning our sin in his flesh—all our sin, past, present, and future. In the court system, it is unlawful to punish someone twice for the same crime, which is known as “double jeopardy”. In the same way, our sins cannot be punished twice; if Jesus was condemned for our sins, then we can never be. That is why there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The law’s requirements of righteousness extend beyond the negative prohibitions against sin to positive commands of righteous living. Verse 4 tells us that God’s saving work through Jesus’ sacrifice is “***in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us***”. There are several scriptural ways to interpret this. The first is that Christ’s obedience to death, even death on the cross, satisfied the righteous requirement of the law that our sin be punished with eternal condemnation. Second, Jesus’ righteousness is credited to our account, which Paul describes in Romans 5:19: “*through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*” Christ’s perfect law-keeping life of obedience to God is counted as our righteousness by faith. Third, “***in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit***”, the law’s requirement of righteousness can be truly be fulfilled when we “no longer [let] the flesh hold sway but [yield] to the directing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.[[1]](#footnote-1)”

“**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**”. The greatest result of this proclamation is our eternal life in the kingdom of God, the glorious hope that every believer looks forward to. Still, on as we live on earth, the devil, who is called the accuser, tries to condemn us when we sin, saying, “A real Christian would never do what you just did. You’ll never be holy, so stop trying.” However, since Christ already bore the punishment for our sins, we can cling to this verse by faith to refute Satan’s attacks. God’s grace is abundant, so we can always come before him by depending on what Jesus did for us. Based on my status in Christ as not condemned, as I struggle to obey the law, even when I fail I need not despair. God’s acceptance of me is not based on what I do, but on what Christ already did. So I am free to obey out of love as loved independently from my performance.

At the same time that we receive justification through believing in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who empowers our new life in Christ. Let’s look at what it means to live according to the Spirit and how we can continually taste this freedom from condemnation and grow in Jesus’ likeness in our actual lives.

1. **Living According to the Spirit (vs. 5–13)**

In this next section, Paul describes three aspects of our new Christian life in accordance with the Spirit of God, contrasting Spirit living with flesh living. The three aspects are what our minds are set on, whether the Spirit lives in us, and to whom we have an obligation.

First: Governed not by the flesh but by the Spirit. In verses 5–8, Paul focuses on mindset, classifying people into two groups. Look at verse 5: “***Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.***” All people fall into one of these two groups. To have our minds set on something means to focus on it, think about it, obsess over it, or make it our life direction. Our lives will reflect what our minds are set on, so what we set our minds on is crucially important.

“***Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires.***” What does the flesh desire? Physical pleasure, material possessions, human approval, worldly success, entertainment, comfort, money, fame, power, etc. The flesh desires physical things, the things this world values and chases after. Those who set their minds on these things are living according to the flesh. So then, what does the Spirit desire? Ultimately, the glory of Christ. The Spirit also desires the means to that end, such as our sanctification—growing in the image of Christ—and saved souls. “What the Spirit desires” is more literally “the things of the Spirit” and could be also rendered, “spiritual things”. Paul uses this same phrase in 1 Corinthians 2:14, rendered “the things that come from the Spirit”, in reference to the word of God preached by the apostles.

Paul teaches the result of these two mindsets in verses 6–8: “***The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.***” What we set our minds on governs our minds and places us in the realm thereof. When what the flesh desires dominates our thinking, the result is death, whereas, when spiritual things control our thoughts, the result is life and peace. The life and death Paul is speaking of here is evidently more than physical life, since all our bodies will die; he’s speaking of spiritual life and death.

What dominates our minds is what we feed. I remember in high school trying to read the Bible but being unable to focus on it because my mind kept drifting to the video games I wanted to play afterward. Since games dominated my free time, they also governed my mind. I was spiritually numb and had no personal relationship with God. As Christians, we can set our minds on the things of the Spirit by exposing ourselves to the word of God, responding to God’s word with prayer and reflection, depending on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Memorizing Scripture can be a very helpful way to feed spiritual thoughts which the Spirit can use to govern our minds.

Second: Indwelt by the Spirit. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Look at verse 9: “***You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.***” Paul calls the Holy Spirit “the Spirit of Christ”, and the Holy Spirit living in us is how Christ is truly with us always, even to the end of the age, as he promised right before ascending to heaven (Mt 28:20). We are never alone; Jesus is with us. Even though we still sin, his Spirit gives us life because of Christ’s righteousness which is also in us (10).

Look at verse 11: “***And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.***” The same divine power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in us to give life to our mortal bodies, and the Spirit in us is proof that this will happen. So what does it mean that God will give life to our mortal bodies? Again, this can’t be physical life, since our mortal bodies already have physical life. We can consider this in three ways: this life is God giving us a mind governed by the Spirit, which Paul said is life in verse 6. Also, this life is a personal relationship with God and his Son, which is how Jesus defines eternal life in John 17:3. This life refers finally to the future glorification of our bodies in the resurrection at the last day, when the mortal is clothed with immortality (1Co 15:54). We need not fear death when the Author of life truly dwells within us.

Third: Obligated to the Spirit. Now that we have received such incalculable grace—the gift of not only God’s Son but also his Spirit—are we free to live as we wish? Look at verse 12: “***Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.***” In light of the costly ransom by which Christ redeemed us, we are God’s debtors. We are not our own; we were bought at a price (1Co 6:20–21). We have an obligation, and if it is not to the flesh, then to whom? Based on the repeated contrasts in this chapter between the flesh and the Spirit, it is obvious that we are obligated to live according to the Spirit.

It is common in our culture today to say of some fleshly indulgence, “You owe it to yourself.” As in, “You owe yourself a massage,” or, “You owe yourself that extra brownie.” I fall into this erroneous pattern of thinking from time to time. However, the truth is that we owe the flesh nothing. Look at verse 13a: “***For if you live according to the flesh, you will die***”. This isn’t a threat toward true believers, but a warning for those who think they are believers yet seek to gratify the desires of the flesh. Still, even true believers, to the extent that they live according to the flesh, will experience the power of death in their daily life. For example, King David gave in to the lusts of his flesh, and that fleshly act of adultery resulted in death—spiritual death of separation from God as well as the physical death of three of his sons, and many Israelites. But then David repented, crying out that the Holy Spirit might not leave him, and then he experienced the “no condemnation” of those who trust in God and are washed as white as snow.

Verse 13 says, “***For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live***”. There is a life-or-death struggle between us and our sin. Only one will survive. As the Puritan author John Owens put it, “Be killing your sin or it will be killing you.” This struggle against personal sin is a sign of spiritual vitality, which we should expect to engage in daily.

So how do we “put to death the misdeeds of the body”? There are unspiritual ways to overcome bad habits, such as through willpower, self-help books, or even hypnosis. However, these things, even when they work, cannot overcome the root of sin, which is a heart directed away from God. Moreover, they do not glorify God, since the flesh gets the credit. Paul’s answer here as to how is “by the Spirit”. What then is the difference between killing the misdeeds of the flesh by the Spirit versus by the flesh? There is a vast difference.

The way to put to death the misdeeds of the flesh by the Spirit has to do with having our minds set on the things of the Spirit (5), and especially on the word of God. In Ephesians 6:17, Paul exhorts believers to take up “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” We can kill the misdeeds of the flesh with the sword of the Spirit. The way to wield the word against our sin is through hearing and believing, for this is how God’s power and Spirit come into our lives (Gal 3:5). Through holding on to God’s promises in Scripture by faith and with prayer, reminding God of his promises to us, we can overcome the misdeeds of the flesh by the Spirit.

For example, if I am worried about my grades or job security and am tempted to skip church or Bible study in order to work more, then I can remind myself of Matthew 6:33: “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*” God will provide for those who prioritize seeking and obeying him. If I should envy others or desire some pleasure that God forbids, then I can fight that temptation with Psalm 84:11b: “*no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.*” God isn’t holding out on me by giving me restrictions, but wanting to give me the very best. If I am tempted by self-pity, laxness in prayer, or complaining, then I can preach to myself 1Thessalonians 5:16–18: “*Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*” These are just the smallest sampling of verses we can utilize in the struggle for holiness. If there is some particular sin you are struggling against that these don’t address, by all means ask your Bible teacher or another mature Christian for some Scripture to use to combat the misdeeds of your flesh by the Spirit.

Perhaps the most powerful strategy in our struggle against sin is to fix our eyes on Christ, as Hebrews 12:1–2 exhorts. When our mind’s focus and life purpose are directed toward Jesus, then we can cast off the sins and entanglements of the flesh as hindrances. As we come to Jesus’ cross asking for the Spirit’s help, and repent of our mind governed by the flesh, the blood of Christ purifies us, and the Holy Spirit enables us to crucify our sinful desires and renew our mind and heart. When we follow Jesus’ way of life by serving God’s mission, we don’t have time for fleshly misdeeds. Jesus endured the horror and shame of crucifixion and the full wrath of God against our sin because of the joy that awaited him in heaven. He offers to share that joy with us (Mt 25:21). So considering what Jesus endured can strengthen us to persevere through the far lesser trials we face and to struggle tirelessly against sin by the power of his Spirit.

1. **Children of God (vs. 14–17)**

Having described the life according to the Spirit in contrast to the life according to the flesh, Paul next describes the wonderful new status of those whom the Spirit leads. Look at verse 14: “***For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.***” When we put our faith in Jesus, we are born again of the Spirit, adopted as God’s children. Not only are we born of God, but our newly created spiritual selves grow in the image of our heavenly Father. Unbelievers cannot call God their Father, but we who have received Christ have been given this right (Jn 1:12).

There are many benefits we receive as God’s children. Verse 15a says, “***The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.***” As we serve God now under the new covenant of grace, we no longer fear condemnation or fear that we aren’t doing enough to satisfy God. Slaves fear their master, but children love their father, obeying not for fear they’ll be disowned, but out of a trusting love relationship.

Verse 15b gives another benefit: “***And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’***” Here is the benefit of intimate relationship with our heavenly Father. “Abba” is an Aramaic word used by children in informal contexts to address their father. It conveys intimacy, love, and trust. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus cried out to God, praying, “Abba, Father!” (Mk 14:36). Because of the Spirit of Christ in us, we too can cry out to God, “Abba, Daddy, Papa!” in intimate prayer, trusting that we are heard and loved.

There is yet another benefit in verse 16: “***The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.***” We have assurance of our status as God’s children—and hence our salvation and God’s love for us—by the testimony of God’s Spirit and ours.

The final benefit Paul lists here is our heirship, our right of inheritance. Look at verse 17: “***Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.***” God has prepared a glorious inheritance for his children; indeed, we will share in the glorious inheritance of Christ himself, the kingdom prepared for us since the creation of the world (Mt 25:34). The sufferings we face in the service of Christ are not cause for dismay, but rather assurance of our heavenly inheritance in Christ.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus despite our sin because of his sacrifice on the cross. Since we who believed in Jesus received his Spirit, we are obligated by his generous grace to walk according to the Spirit, fixing our mind on what the Spirit desires and putting to death the misdeeds of our bodies by the Spirit and his sword. Now that we are accepted by God as his beloved children and assured thereof by his Holy Spirit, let us live a life worthy of our blessed status, a life in accordance with the Spirit.

1. NIV Study Bible note on Romans 8:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)