

Dear Friends at FPC Merchantville,

Here is this week's Worship Guide for Sunday July 12<sup>th</sup>. We will be open this Sunday at 10:00am, however, we urge those whose health is compromised, who are in a vulnerable population, who may have been exposed to Cov-id 19, who have symptoms of Cov-id 19, and/or who are concerned about public gatherings, to please stay home. We are all anxious to get back to normal, however, we are concerned for all of our members and will be taking precautions.

We will be following the guide for the next few Sundays until our transitional Pastor, Laura Donovan starts on July 19<sup>th</sup>. If you are coming to church, you must wear a mask, use hand sanitizer upon entering the building, and social distance. Bring your own Bible, as pew Bibles and hymnals will be moved. If you stay at home, suggestions for using this guide would be the following:

Gather Worship Materials –

A Bible – (A study bible may be helpful if you have one)

A Candle

This Worship Guide

Optional Materials –

A Cross or other representations of God's acts of salvation

Flowers, shells, or other objects of nature

Art supplies

If you have children

Children may be permitted to bring a beloved stuffed animal or doll with the explanation that "it's always good to invite a friend to worship"

Decide on the space for your worship.

Prepare Your Heart.

Set up your selected worship space

Worship at 10:00am on Sunday morning as if we were in our church sanctuary

Light your candle as a sign of the Lord's presence

I hope that this guide will help you to feel God's presence in this time of personal worship, and may the Lord continue to bless and keep you.

Please don't forget to mail in your offering, or go online at [www.fpcmerchantville.org](http://www.fpcmerchantville.org)

In Christian Love and Service,

Kim Tomlin

**July 12, 2020**

**Gathering Around the Word**

“The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” John 4:23a

**Prelude:** Light your candle as a sign of the Lord’s presence. Think of your FPC family and sense the others in the congregation, especially those that you usually sit near. Remember that during this time, we are worshipping together.

**Call To Worship**

**This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!**

**Song: Jesus Paid It All** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaZbqDd33Yw>

**Prayer of Confession:**

*(Sin and evil are real, and no one is without sin. Naming the evil robs it of power and frees us from the mistaken belief we should, or can, be sinless. Confession and forgiveness in Jesus Christ set us free from sin and guilt, and allow us to live joyfully dependent upon God’s grace. At the ellipsis (...) add your own confession.)*

Dear Lord, we have sinned, without considering how much you love us. You see our sins more clearly than we can ourselves. Lord, you know when we are indifferent to your Word, the Bible; how often we forget to pray; the times we come unwillingly to worship; and yet we turn to you when we are in trouble. Lord, you know when we are untruthful and when we think evil of others. You see our anger and unfairness to our friends, and those around us. You know how hard it is for us to forgive. We confess how easily we stray to the ways of this world. Forgive us and make us clean, so that we can obey your call to take up your cross and follow you. We pray these things through the Holy Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Declaration of Pardon:**

Hear the good news: This saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might be dead to sin, and alive to all that is good. I declare to you in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

**Prayer for Illumination**

Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, dear Lord our Redeemer. Amen.

**Scripture Readings:**

**Old Testament: Psalm 119:105-112**

**New Testament: Romans 8: 1-11**

## No Condemnation by Ray Pritchard of Keep Believing Ministries

*Romans 8:1*

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

A few days ago I posted a Facebook status update that was actually a quote taken from this sermon:

“For those who are in Christ Jesus, now, today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, but NOW, there is no condemnation.”

That status update turned out to be very popular with a great many people clicking the “Like” button. A pastor friend wrote this comment: “Just what I needed to hear Ray. Thanks!” Someone else added, “So grateful!” I noted that when I first wrote that comment I prefaced it with this sentence:

“This is the best news you ever heard.”

*But it is not always easy to believe.* In early March I was driving late at night from Tupelo to Nashville on my way to the National Religious Broadcasters convention. To keep myself awake, I tuned in to a Christian station somewhere in central Tennessee and listened to several programs. One of them included an interview with Tullian Tchividjian, the Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, in which he discussed the importance of preaching the gospel to yourself every day. He said something like this (I’m paraphrasing from memory) during the interview:

“Often we make the mistake of thinking that the gospel is simply what we believe in order to be saved. We hear it, we believe it, and we are born again. Though we wouldn’t say it this way, we often act like that gospel has no further relevance to us. It gets us ‘in the door,’ so to speak, but it’s not part of our daily life.”

Tullian said we need to preach the gospel to ourselves every day because we forget it every day:

“Or, as Martin Luther so aptly put it in his Lectures on Romans, ‘To progress is always to begin again.’ Real spiritual progress, in other words, requires a daily going backwards” (From **What to Preach to Yourself Every Day**).

The same day I posted that status update I received this note from a friend:

“I have a question about ‘no condemnation.’ How can we feel that there is no condemnation when we are continually told that God tests us? I always feel that I have failed His tests and live under this feeling that I am a constant disappointment to God.”

That’s honest, isn’t it? I think we’ve all felt that way at one time or another. Here is my answer:

Okay, there are three things going on in what you wrote:

1. “I am continually being tested.” True.

2. “I always feel that I have failed his tests.” You may feel that way but it is not true. You have passed many of them, probably more than you think, but it’s natural to think as you do. If we get 7 As and 1 D- on our report card, we’ll focus exclusively on the D- and not on the A’s.

3. “I’m a constant disappointment to God.” Not true. *Can’t be true if Romans 8:1 is true.* What you probably mean is that you are a disappointment to yourself because you haven’t lived up to your own high standards and your life isn’t what you thought it would be at this point.

How to we fit all this together? *First, we have to accept that what God says about us is true.* If he says “Not condemned,” then we are truly not condemned. That means nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Not even our own foolish and repeated mistakes.

*Second, God’s tests are not meant to destroy us but to reveal our weakness so that we will learn to trust him more.* In God’s economy, failure is the back door to success.

*Third, we aren’t the best judges of where we stand spiritually.* On our good days, we’re not as hot as we think we are. On our bad days, we’re not as yucky as we think we are. Better that we should give up trying to rate ourselves and try to be faithful every day.

*Fourth, life is always a mixture of success and failure.* We get a little success to give us hope and a little failure (sometimes a lot!) to teach us humility and to develop our trust in God.

I recommend that you write out Romans 8:1, stick it where you can see it, and repeat it every day. *It's the foundation of all spiritual progress.* It's easy to believe it for someone else, harder to believe it for ourselves so we need the constant reminder that in Christ we are eternally and always "not condemned" by God.

With that as background, let's consider what this verse really means.

## **Two Tremendous Truths**

What do we discover when we move from the last part of Romans 7 to the first part of Romans 8? I would suggest in these verses we discover three great truths about our Christian experience.

### **I. There is a struggle in the Christian life.**

That sentence summarizes Romans 7:14-25. Do you remember what Paul said? He said, "In my mind I want to please God. But there is something in me that makes me want to do the opposite." Over and over again he says, "That which I would do, I do not do. That which I hate, I do." We all understand that, don't we? In the morning we get up and say, "Lord, this is your day and I'm going to be your servant and do your will today." So we set our goal to accomplish a certain number of things that we know will be pleasing to God. Then as we go through the day, we don't do number one, we halfway do number two, we skip number three, we get most of number four, and we don't do number five at all. Then we say, "Lord, with your help, I'm not going to lose my temper." We lose it by 9:00 A.M. "Lord, help me with my critical spirit." At 10:30 A.M. we're slicing and dicing. "Lord, help me not to gossip." By the time we get to 1:30 P.M. we've blown that one too. The very thing we said we were going to do, we don't do. The thing we said we'd never do, we do. Some of us have lived that experience this week.

I want to make a couple of points about that. Number one, Romans 7 is Paul's autobiography of his experience as a Christian believer. I don't agree with those who see Romans 7 as either a defeated or subnormal Christian or as a non-Christian or as a person under conviction. *I believe that Romans 7 is simply one stage, one part of the normal Christian experience.* I do not believe that Romans 7 is the total story of the Christian life. However, I do not believe that we should throw it out and say it has no bearing on us today. Let's be honest. You can be a very great Christian as the Apostle Paul was, and you can at the same time struggle a great deal in your walk with God. Paul is just being honest. He's saying that even though he was an apostle, he felt a struggle between his desire to please God and the pull of his flesh.

Romans 7 describes a struggle which is part of your walk with God. *Thank God, it is not the whole story, but it is one part of the story.* That's why when Paul says in verse 24, "**O wretched man that I am,**" I understand him. He's not just talking about himself. He's talking about me and he's talking about you.

We struggle in many different ways. For instance, we struggle between what we know and what we actually do. We also struggle between our better desires and our lesser desires. We struggle between what we know God wants us to do and what we would rather do if God would just leave us alone. We struggle all the time, torn this way and that way. *That's part of what it means to live in this sin-cursed world.*

Some people don't want to hear that truth. They wish I would say that struggle should not be a part of the Christian life. I can't do that. It wouldn't be true to what I believe the Word of God says. Anyone who tells you that struggle does not belong in the Christian life actually has a non-Biblical view of what it means to live the Christian life. *I think that if Paul struggled, we will struggle too.* If Paul felt he was being pulled this way and that, the same thing will happen to us.

I don't believe that Romans 7 is the full explanation for Paul's dynamic spiritual life. *I'm simply pointing out that the truth of Romans 7 is part and parcel of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.* There is a time to struggle. Sometimes people come to Christ and then they get upset because things don't go well for them. They get upset because they have relationship difficulties, financial difficulties, personal difficulties, emotional difficulties, marital difficulties, problems in different areas in life. They get discouraged, they get disillusioned, they get angry with God and wonder what's wrong with them. Often there's nothing deeply wrong with you if you're going through a period of struggle. It's just "part and parcel" of what it means to live on this earth. So, that's point number one from Romans 7. There is a struggle in the Christian life.

## **II. That struggle is without condemnation.**

**"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** *That verse should be understood as the topic verse for all of Romans 8.* Everything he says—all the way through verse 39—is simply a restatement of "No condemnation" all the way down to the end of the chapter.

It's interesting to read this verse in Greek. When Paul wrote it, he used a different word order. When the New Testament writers wanted to emphasize a particular word, they would put it at the first part of the sentence. That was their way of saying, "This is important. Notice this. Pay attention to it."

In the Greek the first word is not "therefore." The first word is not "there." The first word is not "is." The first word is not "now." The first word in this verse in the Greek is the word "no." The fifth word in our translation is first in the original because Paul wants to emphasize in the strongest possible way that there is no condemnation. That's why he took the word "no" and moved it to the front. There is therefore no condemnation. You might translate it this way: "There is no condemnation—none whatsoever—for the believer in Christ Jesus."

Let me see if I can explain what it doesn't mean. Then I'll try to tell you what I think it does mean. *He is not saying there is therefore now no cause for condemnation.* That wouldn't be true. You fail and I fail. You stumble and I stumble. You fall and I fall. You get off the path and so do I. Sometimes we're just barely making it. Paul is not saying there is no cause for condemnation in us because if God were to look down from heaven and were to judge you moment by moment, he'd find plenty of cause for condemnation in you. So that's not what he's saying.

Is Paul saying, "There is, therefore now, no failure for those who are in Christ Jesus?" No. Is he saying, "There is, therefore now, no struggle for those who are in Christ Jesus?" No. Is he saying, "There is, therefore now, no stumbling for those who are in Christ Jesus?" No.

He is saying there is, therefore now, no condemnation, no punishment, no coming into judgment, no penal servitude for the follower of Jesus Christ.

Do you know what that means? We may stumble, we may fall, we may trip, we may make a thousand mistakes, we may sin and we do, we may get off the path, we may go astray, we may have a thousand problems, but for the believer in Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation because God has said it is so. *You can struggle, but you're not condemned.* You can fall, but you're not condemned. You can trip, but you're not condemned. You can stray off the path, but you are not condemned because God has said he will not condemn those who are in Christ Jesus.

*When Jesus saved you, he didn't say he would take away all your problems.* No, but he did say this. In your problems, there is no condemnation. In your struggles, there is no

condemnation. In your failure, there is no condemnation. In your going astray, there is no condemnation.

What does it mean, then? *First, it means there is no rejection for the believer.* God is not going to reject you just because you struggle. Most of us know the lovely story of the Prodigal Son. He was in his father's house and went off to the far country. There he gave himself to riotous living, spent all his inheritance, and ended up in the pig pen. He hit the very bottom. The son who had it all went from top to bottom. Left his family, squandered his inheritance and is now living with the pigs. Dr. J. Vernon McGee asked, "What is the difference between a pig and a man in a pig pen? The pig just keeps on eating the husks. After a while, the man says 'I will arise and go to my father.'"

Where was the father when the son returned home? Not in the house. He was out on the road coming to meet him. It's a picture of our experience as believers. *There is no rejection for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Even those who wander, even those who stray, even those who have been living for a long time in the far country and are embarrassed because they have squandered the spiritual inheritance of God's kingdom. You are scared to death to turn back because you think God's going to condemn you. Remember, God already knows everything you've done and everything you've dreamed of doing. He loves you anyway. You're still in his family. The moment you say, "I will arise and go to my father," in that very moment he will say, "Kill the fatted calf. Let's have a party. My son who was lost, has been found. He was away, but now he's come home."

So what do we do when we fail? *Sometimes we make the same dumb mistakes over and over again.* What then? We repent, by God's grace our eyes are opened to see what we have done, we change our minds, we stop making excuses, we confess to God and to others, we seek God's help, we ask others to help us, and we ask God to help us as we move forward.

My friend who wrote that note struggles at this very point. *We think, "I'm a failure," and so we conclude that God must hate us.* Our sin separates us from a close walk with God, but it cannot reverse the divine proclamation of "No condemnation." Tullian Tchividjian says it this way:

Christian growth, in other words, does not happen first by behaving better, but believing better—believing in bigger, deeper, brighter ways what Christ has already secured for sinners.

It's hard for us to believe that God really loves us.  
Especially when we take a good look in the mirror.

Most of us have moments when we look at ourselves and say, "There is plenty of condemnation for you, buster!"

*But that is not what God says.*

God says, "No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Are we willing to believe what God has said?

We sometimes sing the **beloved invitation hymn** that goes like this:

Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe,  
Sin had left a crimson stain,  
He washed it white as snow.

Do we believe what we sing?

Do we believe that Jesus really paid it all?

If so, there can be no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon says it quite simply:

"If our debt was paid, it was paid, and there is an end of it; a second payment cannot be demanded."

Is Jesus enough for you?

*Second, there's no punishment.* There's discipline and there's correction, which may be very painful (see Hebrews 12:4-11), but there's no harsh, abusive punishment. Many years ago when our boys were very young, we spent hours teaching them how to play baseball. It is amazing to go watch little kids play ball. You see kids at bat and the ball comes six feet over their head and they're swinging at it. Then a ball comes right down the middle and they just stand there. The coach says "Stay!" and they start running. The coach says "Run!" and they stay put.

I remember one game where the coach told one of the outfielders, "Move up, come on, move up." The kid didn't want to. So the coach moved him up. You could just see the terror on his face. And Babe Ruth is at the plate. He takes this mighty swing and BOOM! there goes the ball. The outfielder is petrified! He can't move and the ball goes right through his legs. The tears well in his eyes and he's trying to blink them back. The coach who moved

him up said, "That's all right! That's OK! Nice try!" What do you mean nice try? He didn't even move a muscle! But at least it didn't hit him in the face. "Nice try. You'll catch it next time!" A shy, half-grin spreads across his face, as if to say, "Yeah, I did pretty good, didn't I?"

That's what God does when we fail. He helps us back up, he tells us where we went wrong, and he puts us back in the game. That's what Paul means when he says there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. *Some Christians go through life with a heavy load of guilt not just because they struggle but because they feel condemned by God.* They feel like God hates them. But he doesn't. His thoughts toward us are thoughts of love. Even when he must discipline us severely, he does it for our own good. Even his chastising is for our ultimate benefit.

I don't know of any truth more important, more satisfying, or more liberating than the great truth that for those who know Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation.

Why? Because Jesus paid it all.

Why? Because your sins are gone.

Why? Because Jesus condemned sin by his death on the cross.

*If he condemned sin by his death on the cross, God will never condemn you.*

The devil condemns us day and night and whispers in our ear, "Condemned! Condemned!" God says, "No condemnation!"

Who are you going to believe? The devil or God?

You'll have to make up your own mind, but I'm going to believe what God has said.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse has a great statement in one of his sermons about the practical effect this truth ought to have in your life:

"A soul that comes to the full realization that he ought to be in hell but that in reality the Lord Jesus took his hell, and that there is therefore, now, now, NOW, no condemnation for him because he is in Christ Jesus, is likely to be quite moved by the truth. If the members of the human race are permitted to yell because their team won a football game, because their candidate won an election, because they have won fifty dollars on a horse race, because their

drilling has produced a gusher, let us shout for joy because we are in Christ Jesus, there is, therefore, no condemnation for us NOW.” (God’s Heirs, p. 4-5) *I can’t think of a better, more encouraging spiritual truth that I could share with you. For those who are in Christ Jesus, now, today, not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, but NOW, there is no condemnation.*

## **Three Things That Remain True in the Midst of Your Struggles**

### **1. You are eternally secure.**

You can never lose your salvation if you are a believer in Jesus Christ because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Here is the great good news of the gospel: *What God demands, he supplies.*

He demands a perfect sacrifice for sin, and he provided that sacrifice in the death of his Son. Listen to me carefully. *If a child of God ever goes to hell, God will be a liar because God has said there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

### **2. You are internally free.**

You’re not bound any more. *God doesn’t have you on a performance standard in order to earn his grace.* His grace is a gift, freely given. Let’s hear Spurgeon one more time on this grand topic:

“You may preach the demands of the law as long as you like, and tell men that they must merit salvation, and you will only make them worse and worse. But go and proclaim the dying love of Jesus; tell them that free grace reigns, and that undeserved mercy saves the sinner through faith in Christ, and that the moment he believes in Jesus there is no condemnation to him, and you shall see miracles accomplished” (From the sermon “In Christ No Condemnation.”)

### **3. You are positionally perfect.**

*When God looks at you, he sees Jesus Christ, and he credits you with all that is said about his Son.* Who is it that is not condemned? Those who are “in” Christ Jesus. When it comes to salvation, there are only two places you can be. You’re either outside of Christ or you’re

in Christ. You are either outside of Jesus Christ and on your own, or you are in Christ and you are saved.

If you are outside of Christ, you are condemned already (John 3:18). If you are in Christ, you are not condemned. If you are outside of Christ, judgment is still in front of you in the future. *But if you are in Christ, your judgment is behind you, in the past.* That's why there can be no condemnation if you're in Christ. You've already been judged. You trusted Christ by his death on the cross took the judgment meant for you.

Where are you right now?

Are you outside of Christ and lost or are you in Christ and safe?

I urge you with all of my heart, with every fiber of my being, if you are not sure, if you do not know where you stand, run to Jesus Christ and embrace the cross. *If you are outside of Christ, come by faith to Jesus.* When you come, you will discover the most liberating truth in the world—that in Christ there is no condemnation.

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Ellipses(...) in prayers indicate a pause for silent prayer.

Satisfy us with your love in the morning, and we will live this day in joy and praise. Mighty God of mercy, we thank you for the resurrection dawn bringing the glory of our risen Lord who makes every day new. Especially we thank you for:

The beauty of your creation....

The new creation in Christ and all gifts of healing and forgiveness...

The sustaining love of family and friends....

The fellowship of faith in your church...

Merciful God of might, renew this weary world, heal the hurts of all your children, and bring about your peace for all in Christ Jesus, the living Lord. Especially we pray for:

Those who govern nations of the world...

The people in countries ravaged by poverty and warfare...

All who work for peace and international harmony...

All who strive to save the earth from destruction...

The church of Jesus Christ in every land...

Those who serve and protect us every day...

The Doctors and Nurses and all medical staff serving us during this pandemic...

Eternal God, your touch makes this world holy. Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendor of creation, and in the beauty of human life. Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us, to share your blessings, and to experience the joy of life in your presence. We ask this through Christ our Lord who taught us to pray by saying:

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

**Benediction: May the Lord bless you, and keep you, and cause His face to shine upon you, now and forever. Have a Blessed Week!**

### **Jesus Paid it All**

**I hear the Savior say, “Thy strength indeed is small! Child of weakness, watch and pray, Find in Me, thine all in all.**

#### **Refrain**

**Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain – He washed it white as snow.**

**Lord, now indeed I find Thy power and Thine alone, can change the leper’s spots and melt the heart of stone. (refrain)**

**For nothing good have I whereby Thy grace to claim – I’ll wash my garments white in the blood of Calvary’s Lamb. (refrain)**

**And when before the throne I stand in him complete, “Jesus died my soul to save” my lips shall still repeat. (refrain)**