

+ Michael Dean Plaster +  
Romans 7:21—8:10; John 3:16-21

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Dear Bev, Crystal, and Stacia; Ken and Adam; Bryson and Branson; and everyone assembled in this place: grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ, and from the Father of all mercies who raised Him from the dead. Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” St. Paul laid out plainly in his roadmap that is chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 of his epistle to the church at Rome why exactly those who are in Christ are now not condemned. Perhaps, he heard or read an early draft of St. John’s Gospel, especially the portion read earlier, or more likely, heard from the other Apostles what it is that Jesus had said (and John would later record): “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned...”

That plain explanation is this: “By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

The Father sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and condemned sin in His flesh. Elsewhere, the Apostle put it this way: “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:6-8) This is a quick synopsis of the incarnation, life, and death of Jesus Christ.

In other words, in order to take on the sin of man, God had to take on the flesh of man, and did so in the person of His Son. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, lived a perfectly obedient life, keeping every law and precept of God, then, as the Law demanded blood for sin, Jesus shed His blood for the sins of all men of all times and of all places, carrying in His flesh the sin and sins of all mankind—past, present, and future. Though He Himself had committed no sin, He took all sin and sins into His holy flesh, and gave His life over to the penalty for all sin, suffering the full wrath of God in the place of all men. Jesus is your Lord and Savior because He stands between you and the wrath of God, sparing you by taking your penalty, having taken your sin and your place in judgment. That’s what it means to say that Christ is the world’s Redeemer, what it means to call Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, which means that Christ is YOUR Redeemer and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of YOU!

So, if Jesus is YOUR Redeemer who took away the sins of YOU, then if you are in Christ Jesus, then there is therefore now no condemnation for YOU. That Jesus was conceived, born, died, and rose again is well and good. In fact, it is the greatest of all miracles with the best of all consequences. Yet, even that is useless for those who are not in Christ; yet for those who are in Christ, no condemnation means forgiveness, life, and salvation. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” God does not desire to condemn the world, and in fact did not send His Son to that end, but as He desires all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), He sent His Son to save the world which could not and cannot save itself, you included...Mike included.

Sin is bondage. It is death, and dead men cannot will themselves alive. Ever since the fall, man has been in bondage to sin, dead because of sin. But if God saves you, He gives you Life, for in His Son, He brought life and immortality to light: “[D]o not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord...who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality

to light through the gospel..." (2 Timothy 1:8-10) Life and immortality—gifts which Mike now possesses, though his body is dead, and for which you and I press forward, only by faith in the Son of God who died and rose again.

For you see, being in Christ comes only through faith—that you believe in Him whom the Father sent as your propitiation, trusting solely in His merits for your redemption and justification. "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." (Ephesians 2:8) That faith is given to you by grace from the mouth of God to you by means; specifically, God saves you, as St. Peter declared, by Baptism. (cf. 1 Peter 3:21) St. Paul also declared,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:3-11)

Being Baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ is to live and die with Him, to be placed in Christ. And if you are in Christ, then there is now no condemnation for you, for you are a new creation; the old has passed away and the new has come. (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17)

This faith is all so very simple, yet so many foolishly reject it. These, as St. Paul declared, live by the flesh and not in the Spirit, for they have not received the gift of the Holy Spirit, as St. Peter preached (cf. Acts 2:38), or rejected Him if they had. Those who walk according to the flesh would, in this setting, grieve without hope. They would have no resurrection to life everlasting to look forward to, no joyful reunion with those who have gone before.

But that is not you, dear saints of God, who loved Mike as a dear brother in Christ. He believed in and confessed Jesus Christ as His Savior, having been baptized into His death and resurrection, and now attained to the consummation of that Baptism. He trusted the Word of God here recorded in St. Paul's letter to the church at Rome: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

And for you who believe and confess the same, there is hope. This is not some simple wishful thinking, but a real expectation that the promises of God will be fulfilled. In this case, it is that on the Last Day, the Father will send the Son once again, not humble and meek like an infant wrapped in swaddling cloths, but as the glorious King of kings and Lord of lords, as the Righteous Judge of all the earth. On that great and dreadful day, Mike will have been raised from the dead, without spot or blemish, without illness and disease, perfect as His God is perfect. And He will hear from the lips of Jesus the King, as a Shepherd to His sheep, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34) He will say the same to you who believe and confess Jesus as the Christ, who will join with Mike and all the saints around the throne of God to sing...

Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!  
Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 7:10, 12)

...because you are forgiven for all of your sins. Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

In the name of Jesus. Amen.