

The Difference the Cross Makes

Romans 8:1-11

March 31, 2024

[Scripture Reading]

Our theme this weekend has been *the difference the cross makes*. On Friday night we considered the two thieves crucified on either side of Jesus. One blasphemed. The other believed. One died under the curse of his sin forever. The other didn't. His curse fell on Christ. For those who believe, the cross forever changes our status from ...to...

- Condemned → Justified
- Bondage → Freedom
- Cursed → Blessed
- Wrath → Favor
- Satan's Slave → God's Adopted Child
- Guilty → Forgiven
- Hostile → Holy and Blameless
- Alienated → Reconciled
- Orphan → Heir
- Perishing → Saved
- Ashamed → Accepted
- Enemy → Beloved
- Death → Life
- Hell-bound → Heavenward

The cross makes all the difference! It literally changes everything for those who follow Christ. Yet are we living in the fullness of life that was purchased for us at the cross?

Some of you may be thinking, "Ty, 'the difference the cross makes' is a great theme for Good Friday, but on Sunday shouldn't we focus on the difference the resurrection makes? At the risk of oversimplifying the profound reality of the resurrection, let me summarize it this way. The difference the resurrection makes is that it verifies, certifies, and authenticates all that the cross has accomplished. If Christ had not been raised, then all that His death means and all it accomplished would be of no benefit to us. ***The cross is the***

sentence served for our sin. The resurrection is the divine Judge's signature of acquittal (discharge), certifying that the charge has been lifted because the sentence was fully served by Christ.

The essence of the cross is that the holy and just wrath of God for our sin was laid on Christ—and on Him God's judgment and wrath was completely spent—fully exhausted! The essence of the resurrection is that when God, the Judge, saw that sin's sentence and penalty were fully served by Christ, He could no longer hold the guilt of our sin over Jesus. Or we could say it this way: ***The cross is the payment. The resurrection is the proof of purchase.*** Together the cross and resurrection completely change the way God relates to those who trust in Christ. ***The cross says no to condemnation. The resurrection says yes to God's favor. The resurrection is God's affirmation, God's "Amen!" to the cross.***

Here's the encouragement I want to offer you today: ***We can live triumphant, God-pleasing lives by the Spirit's power, because God crucified sin through the death of His Son, so that those who are in Christ are no longer under sin's condemnation.***

This statement summarizes four differences that the cross makes (and the resurrection certifies) according to Rom 8:1-11.

1. ***The cross cancels condemnation*** (Rom 8:1).

Vs. 1: *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Vs. 1 is weighty—it's *the reversal of a sentence*. We might wonder how a death sentence could be reversed? Perhaps it could be reversed if the one charged was retried and proven not guilty. But that's not the case here. Rom 1-3 proves us guilty. Or perhaps the sentence could be revoked if the judge is unjust and lets the guilty go free. But that's not the case here. God is righteous and must judge sin. Rather, what we have in vs. 1 is justice served by someone other than the one charged. That's the gospel. *Christ took our sentence of death.*

A just judge could not reverse a sentence of condemnation without some weighty evidence to substantiate it, hence the word "therefore" in vs. 1.

The preceding 7 chapters of Romans are the legal documentation to substantiate the guilt of our sin and the justice of God (the Judge), in setting down a ruling of “no condemnation” for those who trust in the sufficiency of Christ’s death (8:1).¹

Paul’s argument throughout Romans is that we can be legally cleared of our guilt by becoming one with Christ. As in a marriage, when we are joined to Christ by faith, all debts and assets are joined. Christ takes upon Himself the debt of our sin and with the assets of His righteousness settles the debt by paying, or in this case dying, for us. This is why vs. 1 declares that there is “no condemnation for those who are *in Christ Jesus*.”

Yet the cross is not just about what you lose—condemnation. It’s about what you gain—God’s favor! “No condemnation” is not merely a neutral status. God has no neutral relationships. Every person is either under His wrath or under His favor. As sinners we all begin under God’s wrath. But those who believe in Jesus have been restored to God’s favor. Christian, don’t get stuck thinking that God’s forgiveness only gets you to neutral at best. God’s forgiveness replaces condemnation with His lavish favor.

So what does “no condemnation” mean for those who are in Christ? No condemnation means:

- No future judgment for my sin—it’s already paid!
- No fear of rejection by God—I am eternally reconciled to Him!
- God does not frown on me—He smiles on me!
- God’s forever favor!
- My relationship with God is not based on my performance, but on His grace.

¹ In **Romans 1-3**, Paul’s role is that of a prosecuting attorney, coming from every angle to make a case that all have sinned—Jew, Greek, Barbarian—whoever you are, you are under the condemnation of God’s law as a sinner and deserving of death. But then in **Romans 4-5** Paul argues that sinners can be justified through faith in Christ. That is, because Christ died in our place, we can be spared the judgment of sin if we are united to Christ by faith. As a result, **Romans 6** teaches believers to live as though they are dead to sin and alive to Christ, as though Christ is their only master now that sin is no longer their master. But in **Romans 7**, Paul acknowledges a deep struggle that is present in believers who are one with Christ yet

- I am eternally secure in Christ. When I sin, it affects my intimacy with God, but doesn’t forfeit our relationship.
- Even when my sin requires God’s discipline, He disciplines me in love for my correction, for my good, and for my future blessing.

Friends, this should impact the way we live every day. If we carry around a sense of perpetual guilt and self-condemnation as a Christian, it’s because we have forgotten who we are in Christ. We have forgotten the worth of Christ in us which invokes God’s favor. If God says, “no more condemnation” and we go on believing that we are under His frown, we are disagreeing, even arguing, with God! This means that you need to lead your heart with the truth, rather than being led by your feelings or circumstances.

The best thing for your *joy* is to view yourself as God views you—His beloved, favored, accepted, chosen, redeemed, heir of infinite grace and kindness. God is *for* you, causing even your trials to work for your good.

If you go on living as though you are still under God’s condemnation, you will probably relate to other people with a judgmental, condescending, and critical attitude. But when you walk in God’s grace and favor, you will be much more likely to relate to others on the basis of love and grace.

What a difference the cross makes! It cancels condemnation!

2. ***The cross overthrows sin’s power*** (Rom 8:2).

Paul now gives us the reason for the reversal of our sentence of condemnation. Vs. 2 begins with the word *for*, meaning *because*: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, *because*

not completely free of their sin nature. With this conflict between the old sin nature and the new life of the Spirit, is there any hope for a Christian to live victoriously? The answer in **Romans 8** is a resounding, yes! Since a believer is one with Christ, he is *free of condemnation* because Christ served the full sentence of death for him, and he now has the *ability to not sin* by the Holy Spirit’s power within him.

the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

The word law in verse 2 is not being used in the formal sense to refer to the OT law, but rather to the principle or authority of the Spirit as opposed to the authority or mastery of sin. (i.e. laws of physics/nature)

It’s important for you to understand that sin is not just an act or attitude. Sin is a power. Romans 6:14 speaks of sin as a master (cf. Gen 4:7). But here Paul says that the Holy Spirit has liberated you from the servitude/mastery of sin. Sin no longer has authority over you. And if sin no longer has authority over you, neither does sin’s condemnation which results in death.

Perhaps it would be helpful to walk through the progression step by step of how we move from death to life.

- i. Death is the end result of condemnation. So if you want to get rid of death what do you need to be free of? Condemnation.
- ii. Condemnation is the result of sin. So if you want to get rid of condemnation, what do you need to be free of? Sin.
- iii. Sin is not just an act, but a power. So if you want to be free of sin’s dominion, what do you need? A superior authority to inhabit you, namely the Holy Spirit.
- iv. What does the Spirit give to those under His reign? Life in Christ!

Vs. 2 is good news for every day of your life! Notice the two contrasting phrases: 1) The *law of the Spirit of life*, 2) The *law of sin and death*. When you receive Christ, you receive the Spirit—They are one. So in Christ, you can live under the *Spirit’s* authority which produces *life*. You are free from *sin’s* authority which produces *death*.

Yet we often go back to the old slave-master of sin even though it no longer has legitimate authority over us. You may be *tempted* to sin, you may *want* to sin, but you *don’t have to* sin. It’s like having an old school master living next door. You may be 30 years old and done with high school a decade ago, yet you let that grumpy old school master intimidate you and influence you.

But why? He can’t give you detention or flunk you. He has no authority over you. So, stop giving him power. He may give you threats of condemnation, but they are empty.

The difference the cross makes is that we now have the freedom to no longer obey the old school master of sin. Or as vs. 12 says, we are no longer under obligation/indebted to our sinful flesh. The cross has overthrown your old slave-master of sin with all its threats of condemnation and death. You are now under the Spirit’s reign of grace and truth. What a difference the cross makes!

3. ***The cross condemns sin*** (Rom 8:3).

That is, the cross issues sin’s death sentence. **Through the cross God condemned the sin that once condemned me!**

Vs. 3 – “*For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh...*”

When vs. 3 says that God *condemned sin* in the flesh, we know it has to be more than a mere *pronouncement* of condemnation because the law itself could do that. But vs 3 says God did something the law could not do. So what could the law not do? The law could not stop us from sinning or make us righteous. The law could not defeat the power of sin, the wayward inclination of our sin nature.

Sin is like a cancer that can kill a person (it condemns him). If you don’t want to die, you need to kill the cancer that condemns you. So the question is, what will kill the cancer of sin that condemns you? Will the law do it? No, the law is no more than a radiologist (the person who reads and interprets the MRI or CT scan). Like a radiologist, the law can *show you* the severity of the sin-cancer and maybe even make a pronouncement about it, but the law can’t kill the sin any more than a radiologist can kill the cancer. What vs. 3 is telling us is that God did what the law couldn’t do. He killed the cancer of sin, destroying its deadly dominion over you.

How did God do it? He sent His own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” which means that Jesus was truly human but without sin of his own. On the cross, God put the cancer of our sin on Jesus so that when Jesus died, our sin died with Him. (When the person dies the cancer dies too) When vs. 3 says, “He condemned sin in the flesh,” I take it to mean God condemned our sin in the physical body/death of Jesus.² The point is simply, that God sent Jesus in human flesh so that He could die in our place resulting in the death of sin. Or to keep the medical analogy going, *Christ is to sin, what chemotherapy is to cancer. Christ condemned the sin-cancer that once condemned you!*

Don’t miss the heart of the gospel here in vs. 3. Not only did *Christ* die on our behalf to condemn sin’s condemnation and put death to death; notice it was initiated and motivated by *God Himself*. God did it. He sent His son. The good news is not that Jesus somehow convinced the Father to change His mind about us. No, the Father *sent* His Son out of deep love for us. Yet sometimes we feel as though God is a disgruntled Judge who begrudgingly forgave us on some legality. No! God’s forgiveness is the overflow of His passionate love for you.

What overcomes God’s wrath against your sin is God’s own love for you. You can’t find any other religion in the world with good news like that. Notice the power in the words, “God did!” (“God has done”—ESV). Not only did *God Himself* secure our salvation, it’s *done!* You can stop trying to earn God’s favor. You can stop working for God’s mercy. No more striving for what you can’t achieve. No more performing. No more bargaining with God. Everything necessary for your salvation is already *done*. **The gospel is not, “do!” It is “done!”**

“Ok Ty, if sin’s *power* has been put to death, why do we still struggle with sin so much?” Because we have not yet been rescued from sin’s *presence*. That will become a reality when we get to heaven. Sometimes we let sin have power over us like an abusive father who has been dead for 20 years. His authority is severed, but we still contend with his remaining influence.

² Following the ESV and NASB but disagreeing with the NIV translation of “in sinful man” (the Greek is simply “in the flesh.”)

Or we might think of sin as a besieged city. While the supply line has been cut off, we still see evidence of life in the city of sin, and it’s only a matter of time until sin’s vital signs are flat. But sometimes we look at the besieged city and we throw bread over the wall. We need to stop feeding the sin that is supposed to be dying in our lives (**Rom 6:11-14**). The good news is that we are free to *not* sin because *Christ condemned the sin that once condemned us!* What a difference the cross makes!

4. ***The cross opens the door to a God-pleasing life in the Spirit’s power*** (Rom 8:4-11).

Vs. 4-8 help us see more fully God’s purpose for the cross. So often we think of the cross as our means to heaven—it is, but it’s much more than that. The cross enables us to live God-pleasing lives *now*. Because Jesus died, we have new life and power in the Spirit to live God-pleasing lives!

Let’s begin at the end of vs. 3: “*He condemned sin in the flesh...*” [**vs. 3b -11**]

There’s far more than we can mine in these verses today, but I want to suggest to you that there’s a sense here in which *every day is resurrection day*. We come together and make a big celebration out of Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday—and we should! But we need to take resurrection power into every day. How do we do that? By recognizing that God has done everything necessary for us to live in the Spirit’s power today.

Don’t miss vs. 11—the same Spirit of power who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you! The Holy Spirit inhabits every believer with resurrection power to live a sin-defeating, God-pleasing life! If you are born again, the problem is *never* that you lack power. The problem is that you fail to *yield* to the Spirit’s influence/power.

Through the cross, God canceled sin’s condemnation, He overthrew sin’s power, He condemned the sin that once condemned us (putting it to

death), and He gave us the Spirit's power to live new God-pleasing lives. God did not sacrifice His Son so that we could go on living in our old sinful patterns. He set us free to live God-pleasing lives and it all begins with the renewing of our *minds*.

Vs. 6 says, "the mind set on the flesh is *death* but the mind set on the Spirit is *life and peace*." Do you want life and peace? If so, you need to align your thinking with the Spirit rather than with the flesh.

To set your mind on the flesh is to simply do what comes naturally to you as a sinner; to think what the world thinks and to value what the world values; disregarding God's will.

Even as believers who have the Spirit and Word, we sometimes get pulled back into old patterns of thinking. We begin to listen to the old sound bites of condemnation in our head. We give in to the desires of the flesh we used to live for, rather than preaching the truth to ourselves. We run back to the besieged city to pursue things that don't lead to life and freedom.

But when our minds are set on the *Spirit*, we experience the life and peace that was purchased for us at the cross—free of guilt and condemnation, free to walk in a manner that pleases God, free to live as though sin is dead to us. How do we do it? By renewing our minds with the truth of Scripture and refusing to let go of our new identity and freedom in Christ.

One of the most important life skills for us to master is to consistently think about what we are thinking. Why? So that we can align our thinking with the Spirit and the Word rather than on the natural flesh.

So how do we set our minds on the Spirit?

- a. **Fill your mind with the Word** (Col 3:16; cf. Eph 5:18; Rom 12:2). The Spirit and the Word always go together. The Spirit inspired the Word and He speaks primarily through the Word. *You cannot be a spiritually-minded person until the Word of God dwells richly within you.* You must be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:2).

- b. **Train your mind to seek God's will** (1Cor 4:20; 10:31; Rom 12:2). In every situation ask yourself, "*how can I best please the Lord in this circumstance, conversation, or decision?*" This is how we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in every respect" (Col 1:10).
- c. **Listen to your conscience** (Rom 2:15; 9:1). The conscience is the means by which the Spirit convicts us and realigns us with the law of God that has been written on our hearts.
- d. **Put to death the mindset of the flesh.** You must not tolerate your old patterns of thinking that argue with the cross and deny the resurrection power of the Spirit you've inherited. Fight the mindset of the flesh like rats in your house. Fight the mindset of the flesh like cancer in your body.

When thoughts of condemnation and sinful desires begin to assault you, you need to take them to the death chamber of the cross and crucify them—drive a nail of truth through them. Let me give you a few examples of how we need to replace the mind of the flesh with the mind of the Spirit.

- **"I feel worthless" (Self-condemnation → Beloved).** But *God never said your feelings have the authority to determine your identity.* The truth is that you are an image-bearer of God, redeemed by Christ and your identity is determined by Jesus' worth, not your feelings. You are Christ's beloved.
- **"I'm not much use" (Self-pity → Servant).** But the truth is that God's Spirit is in you, empowering you to serve and love.
- **"I'll never be able to overcome this sinful habit" (Victim → Overcomer).** But the truth is that Christ has already overcome the power of sin through the cross. You have God's Spirit and God's Word to fight sin and overcome.
- **"I just wish I could be happy" (Idolatry → Joyful).** You may not have happy circumstances but because of the cross you can be made holy in any circumstances. The truth is that you were never meant to merely find joy in your circumstances but to have joy in God.
- **"It's just the way I am" (Hopeless → Transformed).** But the truth is that you are a new creation in Christ. Your old self is no longer your

identity. You *can* change as you yield to the Spirit's power to become more like Christ.

- ***"I don't need anyone's help—I can do it myself"* (Self-sufficiency / Pride → God's grace and glory).** But the truth is that any good in me is the result of God's grace, to show forth His glory.

We need to take *the difference the cross makes* into every day by putting to death the mind of the flesh and living in the power of the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. Every day can be resurrection day!

Yet, nothing I have spoken of today is beneficial to you—the cross makes no difference to you—if you are not *in Christ*. If you have not turned to Jesus for rescue from your sin, then...

- You are still under condemnation.
- You are still under sin's dominion.
- Sin still reigns in you—like a deadly cancer.
- You lack the Spirit's power to live a God-pleasing life.

But today that can change. Come to the mercy side of the cross. Like the thief on the cross, abandon any sense of self-sufficiency and cry out to Jesus for mercy. He's already taken upon Himself the full brunt of God's justice and wrath for your sin. Receive Christ with all His authority, power, and grace. And you will discover that the cross of Jesus is nothing less than God's infinite love for you.