

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 55:10-13
SECOND LESSON: Romans 8:1-11
July 12, 2020

“No Condemnation!”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

No condemnation. That’s the word. In Greek it literally means “down-judgment.” The verdict will not come down on our heads when we are sentenced. We deserve punishment, but there will be no punishment. Our guilt has been clearly established by the court. We deserve rejection, but there will be no rejection, because the judge loves us and has looked upon us with compassion. The judge has provided the way out. The penalty has been paid, but not by us.

How many people feel condemned by God? Our sense of condemnation has only been made worse by the fire and brimstone preachers whose intentions may have been for the best. They may have only wanted us to fully appreciate how great God’s forgiveness is, but instead their words have become an albatross around our necks. And the opposite approach—those who deny that humanity is guilty of any wrongdoing doesn’t work either—because in our heart of hearts we know better. Last week we spoke about the power of shame, and shame touches each and every one of us.

Once more Paul sets out the dynamic living within each of us of the battle between the flesh and the spirit. We need to be very careful NOT to think he is making a division between our physical bodies and the spiritual world, however. There are a lot of heresies past and present that go in that direction. Our physical bodies are neither good or bad. They just are. We might like them, be frustrated with them, wish they were older or younger or thinner or better coordinated or more muscular. People with curly hair might want straight hair and people with straight hair might want curly hair. When it comes to social justice, we may wish we could change the color of our skin at will. Wouldn’t that be interesting? That would really break down the barriers if we were able to literally walk in each other’s skin! But aside from how we care for our bodies, they just are. Mine keeps getting white hair and wrinkles. It didn’t ask me if it could do that, it just did. The “flesh” that Paul speaks of is a different thing. **The “flesh” is a mindset.**

If the flesh is not our physical bodies, then what does it mean when Paul says that God sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering,”? There is some obvious connection, because without the body a fleshly mindset can’t function. The key is in the word “likeness.” It refers to a resemblance or a copy of something. A painted portrait can strongly resemble the person whose likeness is portrayed, but it is not the same thing as the person. Jesus took on a physical body. He was born and raised. He ate and

drank, slept and worked. He was real in every way. But with regard to the “fleshly” part of us, he only took on the “likeness” of sinful flesh, because he did not sin. He’s the only one who did it right, the only perfect human being. And it is precisely because of that union with us in a physical body that he was able to defeat the flesh. As someone I read this week said, Jesus beat sin on its own turf.

The “flesh” is how we think. It is how we approach life. A fleshly mindset will always be in opposition to God, because it wants its way, not God’s way. A life lived according to the flesh is self-centered. Self-gratification, self-advancement, self-promotion, self-preservation. Everything else takes second place. Truth is cast aside when it is inconvenient. Relationships are entirely one-sided because it’s all about receiving, not giving. A person given over to the flesh can be ruthless, because the ultimate standard of right and wrong is not external and objective. It is whether or not something serves their interests. Paul says that, “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”

But we don’t live governed by the flesh. We live according to the Spirit. The law didn’t work for us, because even though it taught us right from wrong, we still perversely couldn’t do what was right. The law even failed those who thought that they were keeping it best—many of the scribes and Pharisees. While they meticulously measured and weighed in order to tithe with precise accuracy, they were lacking in mercy and compassion, the very things God requires. They observed the forms of religion, and ignored the heart.

In contrast, Paul assures the believers in Rome and us that we are no longer trapped in the realm of the flesh if the Spirit dwells in us. Even though our body is still subject to death and we will physically die before we rise again, the Spirit gives us life, the same life that raised Christ from the dead. But how do we know that the Spirit dwells in us?

What changes in us? As I reflected on this several things came to mind. In my experience one of the most significant changes is the conscience. It’s like the difference between a flashlight and floodlights. Things that never troubled me before I became a Christian, suddenly did. I ended a two-year relationship because I suddenly realized with total clarity that it was wrong. To this very day there are an infinite number of things that bother me, right down to whether or not I shared the last cookie. A few years ago, I remember discovering that the clerk at Kohls had forgotten to ring up four pairs of expensive slacks I had bought for my son for Christmas. I marched right back to the store with them and made her ring them up. She thought I was nuts. But if God is my provider, God does not provide for me through dishonest means. The conscience of a Christian is much tenderer than the conscience of the average non-believer. Right and wrong are no longer variables that can be rationalized away. There are absolute standards, and we will answer to God. Now don’t get me wrong. It’s not that I am perfect. My family can testify that I am not! Christians can go against their conscience and say or do wrong things, but it’s harder and a whole lot less comfortable.

Because the Holy Spirit dwells in me my first response when I am distressed is to turn to God for help. It’s instinctive. It just happens. Even when

there are no words I reach out for God's presence. Because the Holy Spirit dwells in me my first response to joyful news is to praise God. It is just the most natural thing in the world.

The Holy Spirit insists that I be patient with people and treat them like I would want to be treated, even when I don't feel like it. It's kind of like having your mother standing right beside you reminding you to mind your manners.

The Holy Spirit is the one I rely on to prepare every sermon, because I know that every word of mine will fall to the ground but every word from God has life, healing and power. I have to strive to be a vessel and not get in the way.

And I have felt the power of the Holy Spirit working in me and through me when up against spiritual evil. I have spoken and prayed words not my own inspired by the Holy Spirit. I can't defeat Satan. God can.

When Paul says we live by the Spirit he doesn't mean that we are immune from temptation and will never sin again. Just last week he admitted his own struggles—how he doesn't do what he wants and does do what he hates! He obviously knows this is not a simple thing. But spiritual growth is real. God truly can change us into better people. I have seen some amazing transformations in people who come to faith. The Spirit can make all souls beautiful in God's time.

What we need to remember each and every step along the way is that there is NO condemnation. We can mess up and stumble and fall. *There is no condemnation.* We can struggle with anger or hurt or bitterness. *There is no condemnation.* We can even be angry with God, and still, **there is no condemnation.** Jesus came to save us from ourselves. Judgment is over. Sin is paid for. We are living by grace. When we surrender our lives to God, we are putting ourselves into the hands of perfect love. Amen

Isaiah 55:10-13

10 As the rain and the snow
 come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
 without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
 so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
 It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
 and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
12 You will go out in joy
 and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
 will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
 will clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper,

and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the Lord's renown,
for an everlasting sign,
that will endure forever."

Romans 8:1-11

8 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. **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, **4** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **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. **6** 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. **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. **10** But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. **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.