

Text: Romans 8:1-10

8 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive 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 through his Spirit, who lives in you. – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, we confess that we deserve to be punished for our evil deeds. But we ask you graciously to cleanse us from all sin and to comfort us with your salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Sermon Text:

Guilt! It's a nasty little word in our vocabulary and it's a safe bet that everyone in the room has dealt with it. Maybe it takes you back to a time in your youth and you were just waiting for Mom or Dad to find out what you had done. You wanted to avoid that conversation more than anything else in the world, but you knew it was coming. Perhaps recently or in the past you made a mistake at work that was just inevitable someone was going to notice and you'd have to answer for it. And then, once someone uncovers your mistake then you have to live with the fact that whatever discipline comes down on you because of that, it is your fault and if you had just not done that one thing, you could have avoided all of the bad from that situation that is now in your life.

Paul certainly knew guilt. In fact, he's just wrestled with it as he contemplates the law in last chapter. After contemplating sin before a holy God he blurts out, ²¹ *So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.* ²² *For in my inner being I delight in God's law;* ²³ *but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of*

my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴ *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death (Romans 7:21-24)?*

Paul says it this way in our lesson today, ⁵ *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* ⁶ *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;* ⁷ *the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* ⁸ *Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*

Want proof? When guilt grabs hold of our heart, what is the first reaction? Can I cover it up? Is there something I can do that will keep me out of trouble? Honestly in that brief moment we probably stop caring about right and wrong. Can I lie? Can I hide this error, this mistake, this sin? If I can't, well obviously the punishment is too harsh! My little mistake should be overlooked, even though I know I wouldn't want to overlook it if the sin had been perpetrated against me, then I would want justice, swift justice.

In our evil, we may even say all the right things in an attempt to save our own skins. It's a trick Israel tried in the Old Testament Lesson. But it's not true sorrow over sin, but one more lie. I'm not sorry. I'm just trying to save my own skin. I wonder how much of this was going through the heads of the Sons of Zebedee as they tried to seize those seats of glory in the gospel lesson. Over all of it are those haunting words of our Epistle Lesson, *The mind of sinful man is death ... It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.*

So then, how can Paul speak with the assurance of our lesson today? Sinner that he is, he blurts out words of pure gospel promise, *There is now no condemnation!* The Spirit doesn't leave the answer up for grabs. *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,* ² *because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.* ³ *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,* ⁴ *in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*

You have been set free from guilt and shame and here is the kicker. It's not because you have never done wrong. It's not even because in your all surpassing wisdom you have been able to perfectly cover up your sin with the perfect formula of lies and logical leaps. It's because of Jesus Christ. God sent His Son in perfect love for fallen human beings, for you and for me.

That's the point of Christmas! God sent His Son to take on our flesh and our existence, to do what we never could. He keeps God's law for you! Guilt can't touch Him! That's Paul's point here! The law did its worst to Christ so that it has nothing left for you! On the cross, the focal point of the season of Lent, Jesus becomes sin for sinful man that He might be condemned for you! He is the perfect sin offering, the perfect sacrifice, as He told His disciples He would be in our Gospel lesson. Now when guilt over sin plagues on conscience and demands payment for our evil actions, we can point to Christ. His blood, His righteousness means your freedom.

There is a perfect opposite for the feeling of guilt. I don't think it is purity though and even if it was I know we couldn't claim it. Instead, I believe it is love. You see love never asks how can I cover this up? It doesn't ask, "what do I have to do?" Instead, love desires to do for the one who has shown love to it.

Paul says it this way in our lesson, ⁹ *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ,*

he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive 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 through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Real and lasting love can only come from one source, the Spirit! That's why Paul spends so much time contrasting the sinful flesh of fallen man and the Spirit who gives life to God's people. Paul will tell Galatians, ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law* (Galatians 5:22-23). When we fix our eyes on Jesus, the Spirit goes to work in the gospel that He personified. As He does so, love begins to overflow in the hearts and minds of God's people.

Martin Luther, as he fought the fight of the Lutheran reformation, was accused of allowing the heart of the Christian to go unfettered. The regular accusation leveled against the gospel was that people would no longer live lives for Christ. His response was always the same. We have not freed people to sin. Instead, in Christ we have finally freed them to live the way God has always wanted them too.

The point is simple. If we focus on the love of our heavenly Father who sent His Son, if we focus on the love of Jesus who lived and died and rose for us and for our sin, if we focus on the love of the Holy Spirit who continues to grant his gracious gifts in the hearts and minds of those who have made saints in the blood of that perfect sacrifice, we will not be able to help ourselves. We will overflow with love in the lives of the people around us. The Gospel makes God's people holy. Holy before God because of the work of Jesus and holy in this world because we live in love on account of that same work.

This is the life of a Christian, a life lived for Christ and belonging to Him. No more a burden than when you lovingly do the various things you do for your family and friends, which in fact is a proof of the love of Christ and the Spirit at work in you.

Fellow members of God's holy kingdom, Satan can no longer control you because the law can no longer condemn you. **THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS! THAT'S A TRUTH FOCUSED ENTIRELY ON CHRIST. IT'S A TRUTH WHICH FOCUSES MY ENTIRE LIFE ON HIM.** Amen.