

No Condemnation!

Romans 8:1-4

The law condemns!

You may remember the Rozelle shop fire in Sydney which killed three people (**slide 1**). In 2014, Adeel Khan planned to destroy his shop because the business wasn't going so well and he wanted to get out of his lease and draw upon his insurance policy.

The court found the shop keeper placed up to ten containers of fuel around the store and laid petrol soaked rags between them. Khan was convicted of murdering Chris Noble, and he was convicted of manslaughter for the deaths of Bianka O'Brien and her baby son.

Khan is now behind bars for murder and manslaughter.

The law neither saved Khan from his convictions, nor did the law bring back to life the three people who died. What the law did was dispense justice according to NSW criminal law. The law rightly condemned Khan for his hideous actions. He was convicted and sentenced and now he is in prison.

But the law saved no-one. The law didn't excuse Khan. The law didn't send someone else to jail in Khan's place. The law didn't somehow pay his huge debt and set him free. The law didn't save the innocent victims. We're not playing a computer game. The law doesn't have the power to hit the reset button and undo the crime.

The law says murder is wrong and it condemns the guilty person. Today we come to Romans 8 and consider the law in relation to the cross of Christ.

Now you may wonder why I've felt it necessary to have a series of sermons making the same point over and over again. That Jesus died on the cross in the place of sinners and we've been talking about this for the past few weeks. Again and again we've seen the Scriptures press the

point that substitution is the central reality of the cross—that Jesus satisfied God's anger by dying in our place.

We need to affirm this reality because there are many who don't. We need to affirm this reality because the cross is the fundamental turning point in human history. Even so, there are NT scholars who argue that Christ enduring God's wrath for us is marginal and unimportant. There are people who argue that the cross has no ethical implications for us. They say the cross is behind us. They say that Jesus' death doesn't make any difference in our lives.

But this is not true. There are profound implications for how we should live that flow from a right understanding of the cross. (You can listen to past talks on our website). And if we are to replant this church, we need to ensure that we rebuild around the centrality of the cross and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

We could lay a social foundation and grow into a group of people whose message is “do good things”.

But there are lots of groups in our community who “do good things”.

We could lay a traditional foundation and become a church focused on ritual and lots of religious language and hard wooden pews and stone-like faces.

But people will see us belonging to another century.

We could lay an entertainment foundation and focus on bright lights, loud music and we could preach the joy of material possessions. We could say that God wants us to drive big cars and make lots of money.

But people don't need the church to hear this message. This is the tune the world plays and without ruining a Sunday morning.

We could lay an intellectual foundation and focus on well reasoned, carefully thought out arguments and hope that people are convinced of the truth.

But people are sceptical. Has not science replaced religion? The world confuses faith with superstition. In the public square our well reasoned arguments fall on deaf ears. Our clever minds won't convince people that the gospel is true.

We have spent the last few weeks looking at the cross because the cross is the foundation of the Christian Church. Not good works—not religious tradition—not entertainment and not reason.

God is building his church with the proclamation that Christ died as a substitute for our sins and after three days the Christ who died rose again.

So come with me to Romans 8:1–4.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. 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, 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.

The law gets a good work over in these verses.

“the law of sin and death”;

“what the law was powerless to do”;

“the righteous requirements of the law”.

And Paul says that if we must have a “law”, then it's the “law of the Spirit of life”.

Here's the point of Paul's argument. The law does not transform us, the law does not make us a new people. The law does not save us and produce within us holiness. The sin offering of Jesus on the cross is the basis of our transformation. We did not earn our renewal, it was given to us when Jesus died as our substitute on the cross.

This is the big idea of Romans 8:1–4 and we can split it up into two points:

First, we are not saved by good works. We can't save ourselves by our actions.

Second, it is God who transforms us. Our new life is a gift from God.

Let's spend some time looking at these two points.

First, we are not saved by good works. And “yes”, we do need saving. Paul has argued this in Romans 1 to 3. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is a corruptness within our hearts that leads us away from fellowship with God and our relationships with one another are deeply flawed.

Tuesday night in our home means watching “Highway Patrol” and “RBT”. The stupidity of people is astounding. For some the law is no deterrent. Drinking, unregistered vehicles, unlicensed drivers, speeding, people with drugs in their system. Then Wednesday night is “Kings Cross ER” and “24 Hours in Emergency”.

The foolishness of people and the trauma is a weekly reminder that the human condition is flawed.

Now the law is like an alarm clock. It metaphorically rings when something is wrong. It's ringing all the time through “Highway Patrol”, “RBT”, “Kings Cross ER” and “24 Hours in Emergency”. When Khan murdered someone the law sounded and announced that intentionally taking someone's life is wrong.

The law brings sin to the surface.

The law exposes our wretched hearts.

The law demands justice.

We have our laws and God has his universal laws for all people over all time. Jesus summarises the God's laws in Mark 12.30–31, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself”.

The law that the Apostle Paul refers to in his writings is like an alarm clock. Guess what? The alarm clock is never silent. Do you love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength? Do you love your neighbour as yourself?

The law puts it on the table. The law spells out in detail our rejection of God and our broken relationships with one another. Let's go back to the conviction of Khan. What does the law do?

It provides clarification. It was clear that Khan broke the law. It was clear that an offence was committed.

What does the law do?

It stipulates a penalty. The sentence is yet to be handed down but I expect it will be a few years in jail.

Criminal statutes don't save people. Laws don't operate on the level of the heart. The law doesn't make good people out of bad people. The law condemns offenders and provide a penalty for wrong-doing. In the same way, the law of Moses never saved an Israelite and nor can it save us.

Sin and death result from fallen people's encounter with the law of God.

So in Romans 5 Paul talks about “the law of sin and death” (verse 2). The law nails our sin to the tree and declares we are guilty and deserving of death. The law is powerless to save us (verse 3). The law cries out for justice but offers no solution beyond the condemnation of the guilty party. The law is not unreasonable (verse 4). It is righteous; it demands no more than what is reasonable and fair.

Friends, we cannot buy our way out of trouble. We are convicted criminals and we cannot bribe the judge with anything in our possession. “Nothing in my hands I bring” says the hymn writer.

Imagine if Khan slipped the trial judge \$10,000 and he was set free. What an outrage it would be, and it would be no less an outrage if we slipped God a few ragged works and he allowed us to walk away free.

“I was nice to my sister once”—“You can go free”.

“I raised money for charity”—“You can go free”.

“I haven't murdered anyone”—“You can go free”.

“I didn't swear or drink”—“You can go free”.

A few rags of your good works thrown before the God of the universe will never deflect the penalty due to you. You are condemned by the law of sin and death. Nothing you do will ever earn your pardon. Your actions will never cause the transformation which is Christian conversion.

That's our first point. We are not saved by good works. We can't save ourselves by our actions.

Do you remember our **second point**? It is God who transforms us. Our new life is a gift from God. How does this happen? It can only happen when God's justice is satisfied. When the demands of the law are satisfied. And as we have seen we cannot do this ourselves. It's

not our obedience to the law which gives us life, Paul says in verse 2, its the Spirit of God who gives us life and sets us free.

A couple of weeks ago we spoke about the year of chaos in the Sydney to Hobart yacht race (**slide 2**). Yachts were capsized and people were drowning. It would have been rather silly for a sailor languishing in the huge seas to shout out, “I don't need rescuing. I'm a good swimmer”. “Yea, sure mate, but no-one's that good”.

Outside help was needed and it came in the form of a helicopter. We need rescuing and it comes in the form of God's own Son who became a sin offering for us. Our debt was paid and the Spirit gives us new life and we are set free.

Verses 1 to 4 tell us a few things about God's action in our lives. I'd like to point two of them out to you.

First, it is possible to avoid being condemned to death by the law. Verse 1, “Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”. To be “in Christ Jesus” means to “believe” in him. It means to “trust” him. It means to “rely” upon him. It means to “depend” on him for life.

Our penalty no longer haunts us because Christ has taken it and paid it fully.

Very few of us have a proper sense of what it is to be under the law's condemnation. God made us, but by nature and by choice we spend our lives for ourselves. We have sinned against God, and because God is fair and just and good, he is committed to punish us for our sins. This will mean our final condemnation.

But there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. That's the gospel. That's the good news. That's love—that's grace—that's mercy! From time to time we sing these words:

“No guilt in life, no fear in death, This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man, Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home, Here in the power of Christ I'll stand”.

Through Christ alone, our bondage is broken and we who were spiritually blind are given sight and set free. **This is the second action of God for us.** He breaks the cords of sin and by his Spirit he gives us a new life. We see this in verse 2, “because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death”.

I'm sure most of my non-Christian friends think I'm the one in chains. They think I'm bound by irrational religion and superstitious faith. The ritual of church every Sunday. They cannot understand why anyone would read the Bible—especially Leviticus and the “history of the Israelites” stuff.

They think I need to liberate my thinking and rid myself, amongst other things, of homophobic thoughts. The cross, they say, is utter foolishness. This is the 21st century, after all! They wonder why I live by high ethical standards, such as the 10 commandments and the sermon on the mount. Why don't I just let go and enjoy life?

Dear non-Christian, take an honest look at yourself. Are you so free? Even your conscience judges you. You choose to do wrong even when you know it to be wrong. Do you think freedom is found in sexual immorality, in broken relationships, in fits of anger, in becoming drunk, in hating people, in stealing? You are slave to sin and you are condemned by the law and the punishment is death. Do you fear death?

This is your natural state and the law tells you these things are wrong. But what the law can't do is fix you. We see this in verse 3, “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did” (Romans 8.3). What the law couldn't do, God does.

The cords of sin which are strangling you can be broken. Come to God and ask him for forgiveness. Ask God to accept Jesus as a substitute in your place. And God will forgive you and set you free from the law of sin and death.

His Spirit will unravel you and give you a fresh start. Take the opportunity to begin life again as a forgiven person who is being remade into the image of Christ.

Conclusion. The sin offering of Jesus on the cross is the basis of our transformation. The cross of Christ is the conduit from our old life to the new life. We cannot change ourselves. We are reliant upon the sin offering of Christ which deflects God's anger. We are reliant upon the Spirit to give us life.

And so we are free to live without condemnation. No guilt in life. No fear in death. In Christ alone, we have the victory.