

Psalm 32:1-5 (Opening)

- 1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*
- 2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*
- 3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.*
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah*
- 5 I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*

Introduction

I've always loved exploring; wandering around and looking at new places (well, places that are new to me, anyway). I've done it so much that it became a joke when our kids were younger, that whenever I didn't know exactly where we were but wouldn't ask for directions, we weren't lost, we were exploring.

I remember one summer when I was in high school, exploring some areas near where I lived. One place in particular was the old abandoned house that one of my great aunts had lived in.

The house was very old, probably built in the late 1800s or early 1900s. The windows were mostly broken out, and parts of the roof were gone. I remember going into the house, walking very carefully on the floor joists so I didn't fall through the rotten floor boards into whatever was hidden in the basement.

That house had been left to fall apart and the last time I drove by where it had been a few years ago, it was gone. It had been totally consumed by the woods around it, and fallen into its basement.

If that house had been in town or in a city, the city government probably would have put up a sign on the house, warning that it was unusable, and that it would be torn down. Condemned.

When a house is condemned, it's more than just saying the house is unusable. That house is scheduled for demolition. It's more than just unusable, it's hopeless; there's no possible way to fix what's wrong and it's going to be removed and thrown away.

As we're working our way through the book of Romans, we've made it to chapter 8. Paul has been building up to this point, and now we've come to his main point in his letter to the Christians in Rome. I want to focus on Romans chapter eight, verses one through eight, but I'm going to start reading with the previous paragraph, starting in chapter seven, verse 21.

Romans 7:21-8:8

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ 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. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

No condemnation, but atonement (verse 1-4)

I think Paul's been building up to this first verse of chapter eight his entire letter so far. He's been talking about how we aren't bound by the Law of Moses anymore; how we're free from the justice aspect of the law, even though the Law of Moses is still our moral guide, our explanation of how we should behave. He's been hinting at this the whole time, but now the truth comes out: there is no condemnation.

The Greek word translated as condemnation is **κατάκριμα** [*katakrima* /kat·ak·ree·mah/], and it means more than just being convicted of a

crime or some infraction of the law. The word carries with it the punishment aspect as well. This condemnation is justice carried out and punishment inflicted. The judge both convicts and carries out the sentence in one fell swoop.

But there's a catch. There's always a catch, isn't there?

Let's finish the sentence. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If you look at Paul's statement here logically, the converse is not true. Those not in Christ Jesus don't get that benefit. But what does it mean to be "in Christ Jesus"?

First, let's take a look at Galatians chapter 3, verses 23 – 29.

Galatians 3:23-29

²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Paul starts this part of his letter by saying the same thing he's been saying up to now in his letter to the Romans. We were responsible to the Law of Moses, and because of that, we faced the justice that was associated with that law. The penalty for any and all infractions was death. But, Paul says, our faith in Christ has removed the justice aspect of the law. Now, as he says in Romans, we follow the spirit of the Law, and are not bound by the justice of the Law. But Paul's key to being "in Christ Jesus" is in verse 27 of Galatians chapter 3. If you were baptized

or immersed into Christ, you have put on Christ. If you've put on Christ, you are IN Christ.

Jesus himself gives a very powerful description of what it is to be in Him, in John chapter 15, starting in verse 1.

John 15:1-11

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus here says that He is the true vine, and God, His Father, is the vinedresser. We don't use that word very much around here, but a vinedresser is the person responsible for taking care of the vineyard; he does four things in the vineyard and those four things keeps him busy all year long.

The vinedresser is responsible for pruning, pest management, irrigation, and harvest. Jesus pretty much speaks to all of that in this

passage from John. He tells us that if we're not in Him, we can't bear fruit; and if we don't bear fruit, the vinedresser will prune us off from the true vine and we'll be disposed of. That's condemnation.

Let's jump back to our Romans chapter 8 scripture for today. So far, we've talked about the first sentence of that paragraph. But some translations have more to that sentence. Some, like the King James and the New King James add to the end of that sentence "who walk not according to the flesh (but according to the Spirit)". Most ancient manuscripts do not include those words. In fact, those words look like they're lifted from verse four of Romans eight. Most scholars agree that those words actually weaken Paul's argument here, because it puts conditions on God's grace.

Paul continues through verse four of Romans eight by saying we're set free from the laws of sin and death. What does that mean?

That means that we have a permanent atonement and reconciliation with God, if we remain in Christ. We can chose to walk away, prune ourselves from the true vine, if you will. But Jesus says in John 10:27-30:

John 10:27-30

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

But that doesn't take away our ability to choose not to remain in Him, to choose to walk away.

But, assuming we do chose to remain in Him, what is this reconciliation, and where does our redemption come from? The writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains it in Hebrews 10:1-14.

Hebrews 10:1-14

¹ For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

⁵ Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;
⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
⁷ Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’ ”

⁸ When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Remaining in Him is what the writer is talking about as being sanctified. If we remain in Him we are set apart for a purpose.

Spirit vs Flesh (verse 5)

Paul finishes the first paragraph of chapter eight of Romans by talking about the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. He spent time talking about the same thing about two paragraphs ago in the letter, back in Romans 7:13-20. He sums it all up in verse 8 here in chapter 8: "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Paul uses the phrase "in the flesh" as the opposite of being "in Christ Jesus" or living by the spirit.

So, how do we make sure we're staying "in Christ Jesus", and not walking away from God? Paul gives us more information in his letter to the Christians in Galatia.

Galatians 6:6-10

⁶ Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. ⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Paul isn't saying here that we're justified by what we do. He's saying that what we do comes from what is the prominent aspect of our lives. If we're in Christ, we will be able to do good things. Jesus said that back in John chapter 15: we can't bear fruit unless we stay in Christ Jesus. So, Paul tells us here and in Romans chapter 8 that we need to keep trying to do good things, relying on the Spirit to help us do good things. The more we do good things, the easier it will be to keep doing good things, and the more we good fruit we will produce.

Paul explains being “in Christ Jesus” and being “in the flesh” a little differently in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 2:14-16

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Here, Paul speaks of the natural person, that is, the person who is “in the flesh”. That person, since he doesn’t have the spirit of Christ in him, doesn’t understand things from God because it’s not in his nature. It’s like going to a foreign country where no one speaks English. You know that people are talking to you, but you just don’t understand. But Paul says that if we’re in Christ Jesus, then we have the mind of Christ. It’s easier for us to think about things the way that we should, instead of thinking about things the way the flesh wants us to. We become more Christlike.

Conclusion

That house that was falling in; it could have been saved with a lot of work. There are people who have dedicated their lives to preserving old houses, historic or otherwise, because those houses define the character of what the area used to be like. When someone gets done renovating one of those old, broken-down houses, you’d never know by walking through it that it was in such sad condition.

We’re a lot like those houses. Some of us are still in pretty sad condition, spiritually. Some of us are in the process of being rebuilt. Like Paul says in his second letter to Corinth, chapter 5, verses 16-21:

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The whole idea of God's renovation project for us is to make us new. The old was falling in around the foundation, but God has begun rebuilding us, making us a new creation. We still look the same on the outside but everything inside has been replaced; we now have the spirit of Christ in us, and because of that, we can become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 3:4-6 (closing)

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

1 Corinthians 15:45-47 (Bible Study)

⁴⁵ Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

Romans 6:12-14 (Bible Study)

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 7:4-6 (Bible Study)

⁴ Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵ For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶ But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Romans 7:21-23 (Bible Study)

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

James 4:1-10 (Bible Study)

¹ *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* ² *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.* ³ *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* ⁴ *You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* ⁵ *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?* ⁶ *But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."* ⁷ *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* ⁸ *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.* ⁹ *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* ¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*