

London Justice House of Prayer - Donna Taylor

January 26, 2025

Romans 8:1-4

I. No Condemnation

To help us understand what Paul is teaching here in these first four verses, we need to know three rules Paul follows in his writings. Whether it's a verse, a paragraph, a chapter or a whole letter it's this:

- 1) Take care to discover the main overall thrust.
- 2) Pay close attention to Paul's connecting words.
- 3) Think into the first-century perspective.

As we apply these three rules to what Paul has written in Romans 8, we are going to begin with the first four verses.

1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

In the first four verses of the chapter, our present topic, we find that the affirmation of verse 1, 'no condemnation,' is picked up in verse 4. There is no condemnation... because the law's intention, which was to give life, as Paul states in Romans 7:10, is fulfilled through the Spirit. We also find this same point in verses 9-11. The spirit gives the life which the law could not.

The spirit fulfills the law's life-giving intention and therefore there is no condemnation. How has that come about? It is through the work of the Messiah, Jesus, and the spirit. There is no condemnation for those 'in Messiah Jesus,' because the spirit is fulfilling the law's work, verse 2, and because sin itself has been condemned in the Messiah's death, verse 3. We come to understand, there is 'no condemnation,' because of the cross and the spirit.

But there are many other things going on as well in what Paul is saying here, so we go to the second rule. This rule is more technical, but it works over and over again.

The connecting words Paul uses from the Greek are *kai* (and), *de* (but), *gar* (for), *hina* (in order that), *ara* (so then), *oun* (therefore), and so on. As with all translations, the Greek and English may not always match exactly. So, a word in one language, even a small conjunction may not have all the possible meanings of its closest equivalent in another language. As all those who study exegesis will explain, we do the best we can. In so doing, we must realize Paul doesn't throw these little words around at random. What it means when he uses a string of *gars* as he does here, he is teaching a deeper truth.

When he's gone deep enough, he will then follow with another sequence using *de*, (but using logic, saying 'but if that's so, then it follows that...') and he concludes with verse 11 ending with *ei* (if) *de* (but) - (but in the logical sense of 'but if that is the case, then it follows that...') and ends with since the law has been fulfilled in us, resurrection life is at work in us. He brings together verse 4 and verse 11. We will see how these connecting words are so important in getting the revelation of the entire passage in chapter 8. We will see this more as we continue to study. The following is N.T. Wright's translation using this understanding:

1 So therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in the Messiah, Jesus! 2 Why not? Because the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus, released you from the law of sin and death. 3 For God has done what the law (being weak because of human flesh) was incapable of doing. God sent his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin-offering; and, right there in the flesh, he condemned sin. 4 This was in order that the right and proper verdict of the law could be fulfilled in us, as we live not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

If we do not apply the third rule in thinking with the first-century perspective, we will find ourselves saying, "what Paul meant to say or would have been better if he had said it another way," and change what Paul intended. We need to realize the Jewish way of thinking isn't the same as our thinking today. We need to see it from a Hebrew mindset when we look at things like this; then we'll be able to see that Paul has said exactly what he meant. As some have done in teaching Romans, we don't need to try and help Paul out.

What does this then mean for us today? It means the same thing for us as it did for them in that day. The problem is our response when we hear the word "law." Most people today when they hear the word, law, they think of the laws of the land, or they may think of "the law" as the Ten Commandments given on Mt. Sinai. But when we get into Paul's first-century Jewish world, things are very different. It is in that difference we come to understand the heart of his explanation of why 'there is now no condemnation for those in the Messiah, Jesus.'

If we forget the biblical story is focused throughout the Old Testament on Abraham's physical family, in Paul's day, the Jewish people, we will overlook the Israel-dimension,

and the therefore, the *Torah-dimension* in Paul's key arguments. In Romans 7, Paul is clearly dealing with the law, the Torah, and in that day was mostly understood, not as just a moral code, but it is the covenant God gave for His people. Now, we find the Jewish perspective has been pushed away, with many believing since we have the gospel, we don't need to bother about the law. Just as we find in this letter to the Romans, that was never Paul's view.

The other question then becomes, how will the gospel become 'relevant' for non-Jews? Some indicated Paul might have needed to translate it into non-Jewish, meaning, gentile terminology. That's not so. The gospel, a deeply Jewish message *for* the world was the news that the world was now under new lordship. Paul discovered this to be very powerful. Therefore, he was determined to bring into focus the whole story of Israel.

Some may raise the question then, 'why should I bother with all this complex stuff about the law?' With this comes the temptation to go down a different path and settle for a less genuine biblical thought life and less biblical focus on Israel's Messiah, Jesus. As we have seen spreading throughout the body of Christ today, the teaching has emerged that the church has replaced Israel; 'Replacement Theology!' Not so!

II. The Framework

When we look again at verses 1-4, and apply the first rule of Paul's teaching: the start and finish. In verse 1, 'there is no condemnation'; verse 4a, 'that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us,' and the second translation; 'the proper verdict of the law is fulfilled in us.' That is the conclusion. Both of these verses then say, 'for those who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. The law is fulfilled in Jesus, our Messiah and through the spirit.

Many Christians have believed what Paul is teaching here is: the law condemns us as law-breakers; but in Jesus' death God declared that the law was now wrong, irrelevant, demonic or redundant, no longer needed or useful. The idea of the law being a moral charter and now abolished by the gospel is not what Paul is saying. Now we look at the second rule of what Paul is saying.

Pay attention to the little connecting words. Why is there no condemnation in verse 1? Paul is using the little connecting word, *gar* to answer this question. Because, *gar*, the law of the spirit of life has released you from the law of sin and death, verse 2. Why is that the case? How had that been accomplished? For, another *gar*, God has done what the law couldn't do (verse 3). He has done two things, the first providing for the second.

- 1) The death of His Son. (verse 3)
- 2) The work of the Spirit. (verse 4)

The *hina*, (in order that) at the start of verse 4, shows that the latter (the work of the spirit) is the purpose of the former (Jesus' death). The life of Jesus in within us! The sad thing that has happened in western theology, they stop here at this point when Paul

has much more to say about the law. How do we know? Because we find in verse 1, the first word, *therefore!* One of the oldest clichés in studying scripture is, when you see a *'therefore'*, ask *what it's there for*. This 'therefore' is at the start of Romans 8 which is a well-known puzzle among Bible teachers. It implies that Romans 8:1-11 is the *conclusion* of a longer argument, not the start of a completely new one.

We find Romans 7 ends with frustration with someone crying out in what seems to be despair. Romans 7:24, "Who is going to rescue me from the body of this death? Paul answers this question in verse 25a, "Thank God, through Jesus our Messiah and Lord!" But then the last half of the verse, he declares, "that left to my own self I am enslaved to God's law with my mind, but to sin's law with my human flesh." We'll look back in Romans 7 and see how the flow of Romans 8:1-4, with Paul's statements about the law, actually work.

III. Romans 7 - the Build-Up to Romans 8

Romans 7 for a very long time has been like a mystery to all who read it. It brings up the question, "Who is this 'I' Paul is talking about?" Is it the pre-Christian Saul? Paul as he is now? Or who? So, how does this desperate description of this "I", particularly at the end of chapter 7, then allow Paul to say immediately at the beginning of Romans 8:1, that "There is *therefore* now no condemnation for the Messiah's people."

There are four points we will need to understand:

- 1) The whole chapter, Romans 7, is about the law - the Jewish law, the Mosaic Torah.
- 2) Romans 7:7-25 is telling the story of Israel in relation to the law.
- 3) These verses are telling the story of Israel in such a way as to show how Israel has re-enacted the sin of Adam.
- 4) Especially vital for understanding Romans 8:1-4 - the villains in the story are 'Sin' and 'flesh.'

First, The Greek word for 'law' is *nomos*, and should not be translated as 'principles' as many have done. That should cause us to stop and think. Paul has said a lot of strange things about the law, but here he does bring all he has said together to show how it works. In verses 4-6, Paul makes the statement that belonging to the Messiah, 'now we have been delivered from the law, the Torah.'

4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, ...5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members.... 6 But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. (Romans 7:4-6)

This makes it sound like he is shedding Torah in a bad light. However, that is not the case and he goes on to explain what he means by that in the following 19 verses and elsewhere in his writings.

Some who have studied Romans 6-8 looking for understanding of the Christian life and have struggled with who the subject of Romans 7 may be, have missed what Paul is actually talking about. Then, it brings up the question about the Jewish law being relevant to us today. In doing this, they are not thinking of Paul's train of thought here.

The key passage Romans 7:7-25 have two significant questions Paul writes. In light of what he has explained, he asks, "Is the law sin?," verse 7 and "was the good (law) then responsible for my death?," verse 13. The answer to both of these questions is no. Sin *used* the good law to bring death. Torah brought 'Sin' out in fulness through the moral confusion in those who were trying to follow it.

To the first question, Paul is talking about the Torah being given to Israel. The second answer is what is going on now in the situation of 'Israel according to the flesh.' This brings Paul to discover the law appears to be split into two. The Torah promised life, but could only bring about death, because of the sin of the flesh. This makes it appear that the Torah is doing two opposite things. He proceeds to show that the law of God is good, provided we understand its function, which is to reveal sin and to teach what is right. Powerless in itself to produce righteousness, it exposes sin for what it really is.

We need to remember that for a Jew like Paul, 'the law', the Torah, was much more than just the Ten Commandments. It was the whole 'five books,' the Pentateuch from Genesis to Deuteronomy. That was the foundation, the covenant, of all of Jewish life. To think that the 'law' simply means a moral code, we will miss much of the point Paul is making.

Second, Romans 7:7-25 is telling the story of Israel in relation to the law. The character Paul refers to as 'I' is the whole people of Israel, from before the giving of the law, through that time and on to Paul's own day. This rhetorical use of the 'I' allows Paul to tell this large and complex story as his own, which it is, but in looking back, instead of removing himself away from the problem, and from the people of Israel, he doesn't say 'they' or 'them.' We are mistaken to only view this as Paul's own personal experience. This is his present understanding, from his position 'in the Messiah,' compared with his previous historical and theological position as a Pharisee.

To ask about Torah, it is asking about Israel as a whole. Torah was given to Israel; so if we want to see how it all plays out in Israel's story, we need to look in the Pentateuch and also the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. As we do that, we find a sequence Paul is following from Exodus in Romans, chapters 6-8. In chapter 6, is the crossing of the Red Sea, arriving at Sinai in chapter 7, then, God dwelling in their midst, then being led to the inheritance in chapter 8.

Torah remains God's law, holy and just and good. It really does promise 'life', Romans

7:10. In Romans 8:1-11, Paul will show how this promise is dramatically fulfilled through the Messiah and the spirit. In Romans 8:3, Paul will show how, just as the Torah's promise of life is fulfilled through the spirit, this warning of condemnation has come to its fulfillment, in God's promise through the Messiah's death.

Third, Paul is emphasizing that Israel's failure, foreseen in Torah, law, itself, has brought into light, the sin of Adam. Many non-Jewish believers, then and now, may be asking at this point, why does this matter to us? We are gentiles! The problem here we're facing is the whole human race comes into focus, within God's purposes in this one people, Israel. So, the Christian message must not bypass the story of Israel!

This whole theme of Israel's story as the central focus, is that of the larger human story. This point is written into Romans in several verses. In Roman 5:20 with the statement that the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more. The problem of chapter 7, was that Israel itself had the sin nature of Adam. All the Torah could do was to produce more sin exposing the pagan idolatry, and had to condemn it. Sin was dormant until the law.

But, in this passage, Paul is making the point; God's plan to rescue the human race (including the whole creation) was focused on Israel. Israel found itself in the same plight as all other people. Paul says in verse 13, all this happened in God's divine purposes, to cause sin, very sinful, had the positive purpose of preparing for the moment when God would condemn it once and for all through Jesus death, burial and resurrection, Romans 8:3.

Fourth, What Paul is trying to express for the Jewish and Gentile believers is, **sin** and **flesh**, not **the law**, was to blame. God's law, reflecting His righteous moral principles, **is holy**. It simply does not have the power to make us righteous. The law aroused a desire to do that which was forbidden. The same is true of every christian. The more we are subjected to do's and don'ts without knowing how to yield to the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill such requirements, the more we will sin. However, the resurrection of Jesus brings victory over sin, the Law, and death.

The problem is not the law itself, or that of being human, or of being Israel. Paul uses 'Sin' (*harmartia*) here to indicate, as not merely specific acts, but the dark power, 'the satan', that lies behind all human idolatry, injustice, and immorality. Paul uses 'flesh' here to indicate human beings, not simply as bodily, but as physically and morally corruptible. And to align Israel 'according to the flesh', that is, ethnic Israel, with corruptible human nature as a whole, whether Jewish or gentile.

God's creation is good and will be reaffirmed despite corruption and death. Israel is God's people, and they will be reaffirmed in the transformation that had been brought about by Israel's own Messiah. God's law, the Torah, is itself holy, just, and good, and will be vindicated through the gospel, even though by itself, cannot give the the life it promised.

It is vitally important for Paul that, though the Messiah's people are still composed of 'flesh' meaning the human physical body that will decay and die, they are not *determined by* 'the flesh.' This means being determined by the flesh, as in the physical body. Clearly he doesn't mean, in Galatians 2:20 or Philippians 1:24, when he speaks of being or remaining 'in the flesh,' or that he is 'determined by the flesh,' in the negative sense. He is simply talking about the physical body. Later, when he is speaking of 'walking according to the flesh,' it is to follow the sinful desires of one's old life.

This is why the resurrection matters so much whether in Romans 8 or elsewhere. Paul is careful to speak of the resurrection of the *body*, not the flesh. The flesh for Paul speaks of the present corruptible, decaying world and humans; the new creation, and the new body, will be incorruptible. In Paul's sense, the present 'flesh' will decay and die, but God will raise his people from the dead into a new body like that of the risen Jesus. In the context of Romans 8, the main emphasis of all this lies upon the moral life as in Romans 8:5-8 and 12-16. All of this lays a foundation to better understand the *ara* 'so then' or 'therefore,' at the beginning of Romans 8:1.

IV. The Spirit and the Messiah's Death

So, there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Messiah Jesus! How does this work? *Because*, verse 2; *because*, verse 3; *because*, verse 5; *because* verses 6 and 7; *well then*, verses 9-11! The 'therefore' in verse 1 is then explained in verse 2. There is no condemnation because the Torah, law, of the spirit of life in Messiah Jesus released you from the Torah, law, of sin and death. Here Paul takes the two-sided Torah, law, and turned it into a new direction. God's law is now taken up within a whole new light, allowing it at last to do what it was always meant to do.

Here the spirit 'comes in alongside' the good and life-promising Torah, law, and enables it to do at last what it really wanted. Paul here picks up the double Torah, law, we find in Deuteronomy 28, evoking the blessings and curses. The Torah, law, promised life, and it is now given in the Messiah. Verse 2 then states the reason for verse 1. 'The law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus, released you from the law of sin and death.'

Verses 2, 3, and 4 together explains the rescue operation brought about through the Messiah and the spirit is the outworking, through God's promise of the original intent of Torah. Verse 2 says, 'the law....released you,' verse 3 says, 'God has done what the law wanted to do but was incapable of doing,' verse 4, says, 'the right and proper verdict of the law is fulfilled in us.' The problem with many misunderstandings, was that Torah, law, was a bad thing and needed to be pushed out of the way for God's purposes to go ahead. What Jesus said in Mark 10 was that the people to whom the Torah was given were hard-hearted.

Paul is clearly pointing out that the Torah itself was the active agent in the work of release, of liberation. That may sound like a paradox, but it isn't. Paul states in Galatians 2:19, "through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God." This has caused some to pit the old covenant against the new. Paul is saying this happened 'through the

law.’ What God has done in the Messiah’s death, and in the gift of the spirit, is to give the ‘life’ which Torah, law, had promised all along.

Thus, ‘the law of God’ in which every devout Jew delighted in, is now revealed in a whole new way: through the gospel, it is **transformed** into ‘the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus.’ So, in verse 2, Paul is naming ‘the law’ in a newly revealed sense, as the active agent of liberation! What is this new sense? It is ‘the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus.

The rest of verses 1-11 explains what he means.

- 1) ‘Life’ is the goal, as in Romans 7:10 and 8:10-11;
- 2) this life is given by the spirit;
- 3) the spirit is actively at work within the Messiah’s people;
- 4) giving life was Torah’s original object; thus
- 5) Paul can bring all this together by speaking of ‘the law of the spirit of life in the Messiah, Jesus.

The start of verse 3, literally translated, reads, “For the impossible thing of the law, in that it was weak through the flesh, God (has done).....” Most English translations, including N.T. Wright’s, have turned this around, starting the sentence with ‘God.’ What was it that Paul is saying Torah couldn’t do? Some have suggested the ‘condemnation’ of sin at the end of verse 3 is the answer. That would be missing what Paul is saying, because the Torah had no problem condemning sin! The answer we find again in Romans 7:10 and now 8:2, and 10-11, is that *Torah couldn’t give life.*

Verses 3 and 4 form a single sentence, explaining how it can now be the case that the law’s verdict of ‘life’ can be fulfilled in those whom Paul is describing. We can say it like this: *God condemned ‘sin,’ so that the law’s life-giving verdict, not guilty, might be fulfilled in us.* Jesus’ promise of the spirit that ‘the spirit wasn’t available yet, because Jesus was not yet ‘glorified.’ (John 7:39) Only after Jesus’ glorification’ on the cross can the spirit be breathed on the disciples. (John 20:22)

“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” (John 7:39)

“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:22)

It will become clear in the rest of Romans 8, the spirit establishes the new way in which the living presence of God himself will dwell in and with his people, establishing them as the new “Temple.” But, for God to dwell in the Temple, the Temple must be cleansed of everything that pollutes it, everything that smells of death.

How is that to be done? Paul states emphatically what God has done - in the death of his son. 'Right there in the flesh, God condemned sin.' Paul does not say God 'condemned Jesus,' or even 'condemned the Messiah.' God condemned Sin - in the flesh of the Messiah!

We cannot or should not use the term 'atonement' lightly. Jesus dies with the weight of sin placed on him; his people do not. God sent Jesus, his only son, who has taken the heaped -up hatred, bitterness, sin and death of the world on to himself. This is the historical story of God's people, Abraham's family, called to be God's partners in dealing with the problem of Adam. That purpose is finally complete when Torah's curse was placed on Jesus, Israel's Messiah. So now, the Messiah wins the victory over sin so the spirit can come to dwell and to give life.

V. Conclusion

We cannot tell the story of the cross apart from Israel, God's people. Here, then, is the heart of all Christian theology. God made humans to be his stewards, reflecting his wise image in the world, so he might himself come into his world as the ultimate steward of creation. Following sin, God called Abraham and his family to be the means of rescuing humans and in doing so the whole creation. So that he might himself come, as the anointed One, representative, of Abraham's family, to rescue Israel and the whole world from sin. The sending of God's son, is the moment when the creator's desire to come and dwell with his people, at the heart of creation, is radically fulfilled.

The life that Torah promised but couldn't give is provided because of the Messiah and the spirit; there is therefore no condemnation for the Messiah's spirit-indwelt people. When the spirit, poured out on the Messiah's faithful people, produces in them the change that verses 5 to 8 will describe, then the right and proper verdict of Torah is what Paul indicated in Romans 7:10: life. In this case, resurrection life. Whenever we sense in our hearts an accusation, in whatever context it comes, we should go back to Romans 8:1 and pray through verses 2, 3, and 4. We should praise God for the world-changing and life-giving work of the son and the spirit.

