

Set Free From the Law  
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*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

That's Romans 8:1-2, and isn't it an amazing text? You hear it read all the time in traditional worship, usually as a formal Assurance of Pardon after the Prayer of Confession. Many people memorize it and will quote it at the drop of a hat. And every Christian I know will be happy to tell you that they believe it absolutely.

But let me confess: age being the touchy subject it is, I've been a Christian for longer than I care to admit. In my ministry with individuals both before and after ordination, I don't see people actually living as if they believed it. And from behind the pulpit, in my experience, we're far more likely to hear about law – rather than grace.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ cleanses us of sin and opens wide the door into the very presence of God. When we go to God in honest repentance, he forgives instantaneously, helps us learn what we need to learn, and then forgets all about it. It's pretty simple, really. But I have yet to meet a person who doesn't complicate matters in a huge way and end up living a life under condemnation, rather than grace. We seem unable to forgive ourselves. We bear the shame of sinful behavior from 20 years ago as if it happened just this morning. We keep apologizing to God; we live with guilt. And we worry constantly about temptation and resisting sin and being good.

In other words: law.

It was probably 25 years ago now that I sat in my living room one evening reading scripture and suddenly, for the very first time, that passage from Romans sunk in. What? NO condemnation? Not even a little? Ever? Then why was I living my life in such a state of worry and guilt and striving and failing and being disgusted with myself? I certainly was hearing a voice of condemnation, make no mistake about that. But with sudden clarity I realized whose voice it really was: my own, aided and encouraged by the Evil One. It was certainly not the voice of God.

Sin-ridden though I was, I knew with completely certainty that I was in Christ Jesus. And for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation. The Bible tells us so.

How we struggle with grace. Surely we need to earn and keep earning our salvation. We need to keep pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps and try harder. We are weak and despicable when we fail. It's almost as if we don't trust God's judgment: he may forgive us, but we've got enough sense to know how bad we really are.

Let's not minimize the power of the cross and the resurrection. If we insist on struggling with something, let's struggle with opening more and more of our hearts to God's Spirit. Let's begin to see that God looks at us just as we look at our own children – young, prone to sin, in need of training – but perfect and beautiful and beloved, no matter what. If God himself forgives us, we could consider possibly beginning to forgive ourselves from time to time, right? God's truth is that we've been set free from the law of sin and of death. Time for a prison break! It is all about God's love and grace.