

# NO CONDEMNATION IN CHRIST JESUS

By John Piper



*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

What Paul is saying is that all of God’s condemning wrath and all of His omnipotent opposition to us in our sin has been replaced by almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance. In other words, if you are in Christ Jesus all of God’s action toward you is almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance. It is not mixed. It is not as though some days He is against you with wrath - and those days are bad days—while other days He is for you with love—and those days are good days. That is emphatically not the case and not the way to think about it. It may seem that way. But that is precisely why we need the truth of God’s revelation in His word. Most of the time in this world of pleasure and pain things are not what they seem. To understand what things are really like and what is really happening we need to put on the lens of God’s word.

So I say it again: what God wants us to understand from Romans 8:1 when He says through the apostle Paul, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” is that all of God’s condemning wrath and all of His omnipotent opposition against us in our sin has been entirely replaced by almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance. In Christ Jesus God is always for you. Always! This is where Paul is going in Romans 8. He gets there in verse 31 and says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us!” His point is that in Christ Jesus “no condemnation” means that God is always omnipotently for us and not against us. Always!

Now this is breathtaking. If we could believe it, practically, morning till night deep in our souls—if this truth that God is only for us and not against us, and that He is for us with almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance all day and all night, waking and sleeping, Oh how differently we would live and sleep! What freedom! What a joy! What a peace! What a risk-taking boldness! What a fearlessness! What a sacrificial life-style of love and service and mercy! What a patience! What a serenity . . . we would have.

### *Two Obstacles and Solutions for Believing God Is Always For Us*

But it just seems too good to be true. It doesn’t seem to fit this fallen world of sin and sickness. So let me try to help you believe it by dealing with two obstacles. I’ll try to show how each one is dealt with in God’s word. The first obstacle is remaining sin and the feelings of guilt that follow. And the second obstacle is remaining experiences of sickness and the feelings of doubt or fear that follow. Sin and guilt on the one hand, and sickness and fear on the other hand. If there is no condemnation, if God is not against me, but He is only for me with almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance at the time, what do I make of my sin and my sickness?

#### 1. Sin and Guilt: Fight with Gutsy Guilt

First, let me point you to a text that helps us with sin and feelings of guilt, Micah 7:5-10. I will relate this text to the situation in North Korea.

I was in Jackson, Mississippi, this week and spoke with a Korean man whose burden is reaching North Korea. True Christianity is an illicit faith in North Korea. I asked him what the real state of things was. He said that there is a thin veneer of public Christianity in a few officially endorsed churches. But in fact there are probably as many as 80,000 Christians in the underground church. He said that recently the communist government made it known that this was illegal and urged people to report their own family members. He said that even some children and

young people were turning in their parents—betraying them to death.

You remember that Jesus said that would happen, “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death” (Mark 13:12). Those words come from a prophecy in Micah 7:6, and that leads into some of the most astonishing words on grace and “no condemnation” in the Old Testament. Here is Micah 7:5-9:

*Do not trust in a neighbor; Do not have confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom Guard your lips. For son treats father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother; Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; A man's enemies are the men of his own household. But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, And I will see His righteousness.*

I preached a sermon on this text in July of 1988 and called it “When I Fall I Will Rise.” And in it I called the people to “gutsy guilt.” And that is what I want to hold up again today. Notice the jarring words in verses 8-9. This is a description of what we do when there is “no condemnation” and yet we have sinned. How do we think and act?

(8) “Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise [So there has been a temporary “fall”]; Though I dwell in darkness [so there is a season of darkness and guilty feelings], the Lord is a light for me [so the Lord who is angry with him is nevertheless His light]. (9) I will bear the indignation of the Lord [so the Lord is displeased, and angry with Him—but it is not the anger of a condemning judge, but of a light-providing disciplining Father! He spans the child and sends him to his room for a time, but He does not turn off the light of hope] Because I have sinned against Him [so there is real sin], Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me [so this angry God is FOR HIM and not against him. He will justify him and not condemn him!]. He will bring me out to the light, And I will see His righteousness.”

Now that is a picture of how to think and act when you sin against your Father whose whole disposition toward you is almighty mercy and omnipotent love. He will not always handle you gently. But He will always love you. And always be for you and not against you.

So we take our sins seriously. We hate them. We see them as a contradiction of who we are in Christ and a contradiction of our Father's love. We confess our sins (1 John 1:9). We look to the cross where all our pardon and righteousness was fully secured. We accept the Father's displeasure and discipline, and may dwell in darkness for a season. But if our enemy rejoices and says to us in our night of sorrow, “See, God is against you. He is angry. You are guilty and under His condemnation,” then we will say, with the authority of Romans 8:1 and on the basis of Jesus Christ's death

and righteousness, and in the words of Micah 7: “Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, And I will see His righteousness.”

That is what I mean by gutsy guilt. I know of no other way to persevere in the Christian life in view of our constant failings—no other way to stay married for Christ’s sake, to rear children, and be single and chaste, and maintain hope and fruitfulness in ministry, than this gutsy guilt: When I fall I will rise . . . though I have sinned, the very one against whom I have sinned will plead my case and execute justice for me –not against me, but FOR me! Oh, love this gospel! Love and live this gospel!

## 2. Sickness and Fear: May Be a Saving Judgment

Now what about sickness and fear? If that is how “no condemnation” endures through sin and guilt feelings, how does it endure through sickness and fear? 1 Corinthians 11:28-32 is Paul’s warning not to treat the Lord’s Supper lightly but to examine yourself to see if you are trusting Christ when you eat.

*A man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep [that is, weakness and sickness and death may be owing to our misuse of the Lord’s Supper]. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.*

Now look carefully at this last verse (32). When we are judged—with weakness or sickness or even death—we

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are, Paul says, being disciplined by the Lord so that we would not be “condemned with the world.”

Let me make crystal clear what I am not saying: I am not saying that every time you get sick or if you die, it is always owing to a particular sin that you committed—like the abuse of the Lord’s Supper. I am saying that it might be. And here is the stunningly good news: even if and when it is, this “judgment” from the Lord is a loving judgment. A fatherly judgment. Indeed a precious, saving judgment.

And you can see this clearly in verse 32: “But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.” Don’t miss this: God’s design in your weakness or sickness or death is “so that you will not be condemned.” There is “no condemnation” for those who are in Christ Jesus, EVEN IF their sickness is a token of God’s fatherly displeasure and discipline.

Here is another call for gutsy guilt. You may be lying there in the hospital room and wondering: “Has God turned against me? Has he become my enemy?” That’s what Job cried out in his sickness: “Why do You hide Your face And consider me Your enemy?” (Job 13:24). But Job was wrong (James 5:11). God had not become his enemy. And He won’t become yours either. Not even if He brings you weakness and sickness and death.

*Things Are Not as They Seem*

We must learn this. Things are not what they seem. We need the Word of God to know what is really happening when we sin and feel guilty for it and experience a season of indignation from God. We need to know what is happening when we are sick and on the brink of death. And what we know is this: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” When we fall we will rise. Our displeased Father loves us with almighty mercy and omnipotent assistance, and He will bring us out into the light. And if we are sick and dying we know that even if it is the very judgment of God, it is to spare us condemnation with the world because He loves us with an omnipotent, death-dealing, death-defeating love. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Believe this. Take Christ as your Treasure and live in Him. Glory in this truth and this Savior! Live this freedom! 

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