

No Condemnation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2024

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] I want to tell you today about the 10 words that will utterly transform your life. Grasp these words and friends, you can walk out those doors today a completely different person than the one that you came in here as. And if you're here today and you're new to the Bible, if you're new to church, then these 10 words are going to take you right to the heart of what it is to be a Christian. And they're going to take you right to the heart of this thing that Christians called the Gospel, which is just the summary of the good news about Jesus Christ. In fact, William Tyndale, this man who lived many, many years ago, who first translated the Bible from Latin into English, he said of this word when he was trying to translate it, the Gospel, he said, this is news that makes a person's heart sing, leap and dance for joy. And if you're here today and you're a Christian, then it is going to do our weary souls, the world of goods to put Romans A in the CD player and just play it on repeat. And these 10 words are a paraphrase of what you see in front of you at verse 1 of Romans chapter 8. So here's what I want to do. If you're a visual learner like me, maybe this helps. Hold your two hands out in front of you.

And here are these 10 words. There's, and I know that's two words, but chill out, okay? There's, therefore, now, no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. That's our 10 words that will transform our lives. Now, maybe you're feeling underwhelmed. Maybe you're feeling confused as you hear that.

But let me just show you how this works. Now, I'm a 90s kid. Grew up on the days of dial-up internet and of a young Leonardo DiCaprio making his way in Titanic, of CD players, of baggy jeans. It's funny seeing a whole new generation today trying to get into Oasis. And the old man in your head is saying, you weren't there, man. But 90s kid, what a magical decade to be alive. One of the biggest names in the 90s in the UK music scene during that time is this man called Robbie Williams. Robbie Williams leaves Take That. He goes solo and he does okay. In fact, he goes on to have as many number one albums in the UK as Elvis. He was one of the biggest names, not just in showbiz, but in culture back in the 90s. And in 1998, he releases a song called No Regrets. And some of you might remember this song.

It's one of his biggest, actually. No Regrets. And here's the chorus. It went like this. No regrets, they don't work. No regrets, they only hurt. And all of a sudden, it becomes the done thing amongst my peers. To look back on your life and talk about it like you wouldn't change a single thing about it.

And let me tell you, as a teenager, trying to figure out what life was all about, trying to find my way in the world, that kind of mindset appealed to my ego. And yet the thing is, as hard as I tried, I just could not square that circle. And it didn't add up as a teenager then. And let me tell you, as a near 40-year-old, having been a Christian for just over half of my life, it certainly doesn't add up now. Because what life teaches you, the more rings on the tree that you gather, is that regrets. I've got absolutely thousands of them. And those are just the ones that I can remember because of God's grace. I've got little ones. I've got big ones. I've got actions I can't undo.

[3 : 46] I've got people that I wasn't there for. I've got people that I used. I've got relationships that I strained. I've got dates that I missed. I've got words that I can't take back. I've got opportunities that I failed to take. I've got loved ones that I hurt. And I wonder if you two have what we would call in our day, in your life, some serious baggage. We are like, all too often in our lives, that bag that goes around the carousel at the airport that just is labelled fragile.

And add to that the failings that we feel, that they aren't just against us and against others. Primarily, this passage would tell us that the condemnation here is against the God who made us in his image and who we are not right with because of our sin. And add to that the fact that the devil is the great grave digger who is dead set on digging up, raking up our mistakes and rubbing salt on those wounds. Something I learned this week that according to scholars, the word Satan comes from the Aramaic root meaning one who lies in ambush.

And our guilt against the Holy God, plus the failings in our hearts, plus Satan's ambush, that is a three-pronged fork combo that can bring discouragement to our lives.

And that's kind of where chapter 7 ends of Romans. Paul is saying to himself, if you look at verse 24, just before our verses today, Paul says, wretched man that I am. He feels this battle. And I take, you can bat this out if you want afterwards, that this is Paul talking about what he was like before he was a Christian, how he really tried, but he just couldn't square that circle.

And all of this means that we can live our lives thinking to ourselves, what hope do we have? As Christians who take two steps forward, one step back, one step forward, two steps back, where we feel in so many ways that we make no progress in the Christian life.

[5 : 57] Romans chapter 8, what does God have to say to people who keep failing at Christianity? How does God offer help to those who so often falter, those who so often doubt? I think that's what this chapter is all about. And it's all about assurance. The chapter that begins saying, no condemnation ends, and we'll see this in a few weeks time by saying, no separation.

This is all about not what you and I have done. This is all about what God has done, right? I always think Jesus would make the worst social media influencer ever. Because you would see him there, he would not be saying, be the best you, you can do it, just up your game, you can do it. No, no, no, no. You read him in the gospels, he's always saying to people, you can't do it.

You can't do it. But that's why I've come. Because you can't do it, but look to me who can. This is all about what God has done out of his love for us to secure and deal with our past, our present, and our future. This is all about, no matter how you're feeling today, this is all about the God who's got you. The wonderful good news, verse 3, is that there is a way, if you see it, no matter how messed up you think your life is today, no matter how many mistakes you think you've made in the past, to have the almighty, holy God who knows it all, declare over you no condemnation. And that's a place, dear friends, where we can finally breathe. No condemnation is not a level that we progress to. Like our girls love brownies, they're really into brownies at the minute, they go home and they just do their badges, I want another badge, I want another badge, trying to be the best, right?

No condemnation is not a level that we progress to, it's not a badge that we earn. No condemnation is a declaration from God over our lives, it's where we start, it's where we end, and it's where we stay in the Christian life. You know, I always say to people when they head out to explore Edinburgh, see if you ever get lost in our city, and you want to find your way back to the centre. Listen, just forget the bus app on your phone, forget Google Maps, forget asking a stranger in the street where you are. Sometimes the old ways are the best ways.

How do you find your way back to the centre in our city? You just get your head up, and you look for the castle. You just get your head up, and you look for your castle, and you head for it. And dear friends, if we find ourselves, as it were, stuck in the Christian life, the call here is to lift your eyes and head for the castle that is Romans 8. We live in a world that's clamouring to find purpose, to find love, to find identity. And you listen to the world out there, and it says to us, doesn't it, follow your heart. Jesus comes along and he says, no, the problem is your heart. We live our lives in a world that says you've got to look inside of you to find the answer. And Jesus comes along, you read them in the scriptures, and he says, no, no, no, you need to look outside of you to me who's come to be your answer. Because this is all about not what we have done, this is all about what God has done to give us our identity. And you just need, all of us need to feel that today, that the initiative here is all his. Now in Romans chapter 8, and we'll see this as the weeks tick on, the key word in this chapter is the word spirit. 21 times Paul uses it in this chapter when he's talking about the Holy Spirit of God. The very presence of God, you'll see that from verses 9 to 11, sent to dwell, and notice that word, Paul uses it three times in that little section, to dwell in the very hearts of every single believer. It's one of the great themes of the Bible that God longs to dwell with his people. So when Jesus said that he would be with us always right until the end of the age, he really, really meant it. And the you that Paul uses there, and this is something I hadn't seen until this week really, the you that Paul uses there is not individual, it's plural. So this is not, if you like, about Christ in me, so much as it's about Christ in we, God through his Holy Spirit has bound us together.

[10:38] And we are one, we are a church family, we are invested in each other's lives, and that is a profoundly theological point. This is what God has done. Now what does the Spirit do?

We've got two points today, you can take these home, put them in the bank. What does the Spirit do in our lives? Particularly at times when we feel really weak. He helps us to realize two things are true about our lives that we would not believe possible if it weren't written in Scripture.

Here's the first one. He helps us remember that God's put us in a new place. And this is all wrapped up in that phrase, in Christ. Did you see that in verse one?

In Christ. That is the key way that the New Testament talks about what it is to be a believer and a follower of Jesus. Now here's something radical I hadn't thought about again until this week. The key question to understanding ourselves as Christians is not to ask ourselves first and foremost, how are we? Because our feelings will fluctuate all the time. Our health will dip in and out.

No, no, no. The primary question we need to ask ourselves is not how we are, it's where we are. We are in Christ. And take note of the preposition there. We are not beside Christ. Christ is not beside us like he's some kind of co-pilot or some kind of business partner who's out in a new venture with you.

[12:09] No, we are in Christ. And to be in Christ means that we are united to him. It's the language not of the wrestling ring. It's the language not of the boardroom. Actually, it's the language of the wedding day. Now you'll have heard those words, I'm sure, that the husband and wife declare to each other at the front on their wedding day. What do they say? All that I have, I share with you.

And all that I am, I give to you. What's mine is yours, and what's yours is mine, as the two become one.

You know, I remember when Alex and I got married. At that time of my life, Alex was what they call a saver. And I was at that point in my life, what they call a spender. How that worked out, not in Ferraris, don't freak out, okay. Alex made her lunch every day, and I bought my lunch every day.

We had to work through that in marriage prep. And I vividly remember the week that we got married, going to my bank. And so little money did I have in my account. Actually, they just put it all in an envelope, and they said, do you want to do a bank transfer? I realized that was 20 quid, Scottish, living in England, not paying that. But they put it all in an envelope, and they said, if you just walk across there, you can go to her bank, and you can deposit it all in her bank. Put it all in an envelope, and just not a worry concern in the world, just walking across and putting it in her bank account, which of course was now our bank account. And let me tell you, I remember feeling in that moment that I have done a lot better out of this than Alex has. And I saw the figures.

And being blown away, being really humbled, that she was willing to say, your debts are my debts, and my money is your money. That's what happens when two become one. That's what it is to be united to Christ, in a spiritual sense, in a more real sense. Do you see that language at verse three?

[14:17] God sent his son in the likeness of flesh. And do you see the language there? For sin. That's why Jesus came. It's what we've been singing about earlier. Jesus comes to earth as a human, and he takes our debt of sin. All of that shame, all of that guilt, all of the past, present, and future mistakes that we will make. And he says, I will pay for it. And he dies the death that we deserve to die on the cross.

And as it were, he is saying, what's yours is mine. And his perfect life, again, do you see that language? What we were not able to do, we can buy the flesh we could not do. Jesus lives the perfect life. Jesus, the only human being to have lived in perfect harmony with God. The only human being to love God with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind, all his strength, the only human being to perfectly love his neighbor as himself. Jesus, the only human being who has fulfilled the law of God.

And so when Paul writes there, the righteous requirement of the law, the one that you and I could not fill, what Jesus does is he dies on the cross. He says, what's mine is yours. And our lives are now bound to him. So our death, he absorbs for us. And get this, his resurrection life, he shares with us. And the spirit comes to make this a reality in our lives. And that means where he is, dear friends, where he is now at the right hand of God, we are there. Bound to him, united to him. Where we are, he is. Now I'm always jealous of those people, and I suspect there's many in this room right now who have got two passports. Yeah, what do we call them? We call them, we call them dual citizens. But the Bible says that in such a more real way than that, to be in Christ means that every Christian is a dual citizen. You've got to think about our lives like that, a dual citizen.

We have our lives down here. We live them down here. And yet, in a more real sense, our lives are up there with Jesus, at the right hand of God. That means all of us, ever-faithed in Jesus, are always in two places at once. We're at Brunswick Evangelical Church right now. At the same time, we're at the right hand of God in Christ in the heavenly places. We do the big shop at Aldi during the week. We're scanning that middle aisle. In a real way, we are hidden with Christ on high. It's another day, another dollar at your workplace tomorrow as you sit at the office. Simultaneously, your life is right at the right hand of God in Jesus. And friends, I know for many of us right now, tomorrow is another day where you can't face getting out of bed. Life's too hard. It's too tough.

And even then, and I wonder whether especially then, the Spirit of God would bring that knowledge that your life is hidden with Jesus on high. Do you see just how committed a king we have in Jesus?

[17:29] I would not believe this. It's too good to be true if it weren't the fact that God told me it in his word. Do you see how Jesus has written our story into his?

Maybe you're here and deep down you have this gut feeling that God just tolerates you. You know, you might be saved. You might get that, but you just feel that God's, kind of jury's a little bit out still on you. Friends, we need to understand that in Christ, God loves us in the same way that he loves his son.

The Spirit helps us to know that God has put us in a new place. And don't underestimate the spiritual attack that may come upon us to believe that that's true.

Because if I were the devil, and I know that sounds really weird, but the one place I would keep you from is here, very closely, secondly followed by here.

Because it's here, and it's here that we're reminded of what is true. It's almost as if God calls us in the Christian life not to live it so much through our eyes, but to live it through our ears.

[18 : 41] Because we believe what God has said is true, and the Spirit comes into our lives and helps us understand that that is true. God has put us in a new place. The Spirit helps us understand.

And then secondly, he set us on a new course. And flowing from this new identity, do you see how Paul, from verse 5, he sets up this contrast? And just see it there if you've got it in front of you.

He sets up this contrast between the battle that now rages in the hearts of every believer. Do you see it between the flesh and the Spirit?

And what Paul's putting his finger on is the fact that there is now raging in our hearts a tug of war. The flesh and the Spirit are pulling us in different directions.

Because formerly, when we didn't know Jesus, and I know this was true in my life, we were dominated by the flesh. We just wanted the things that we wanted. We didn't even realize we were doing it.

[19 : 39] Ours were natural, anti-God, us-at-the-center-of-the-universe instincts. In other words, we wanted the selfie, and we didn't want God in the picture. Verse 7, we were hostile to God. That's what that means.

But the indwelling Spirit of God, as it were, friends, picture this. Again, visual learners. As it were, he picks up the other end of the rope in this great tug of war. And he pulls us hard in the other direction, towards Jesus.

And we'll see this as the weeks tick on. What Paul is saying here is, go with the Spirit's pull. Don't go back to the old ways. Don't go back to the old us.

Set our minds on the things that Jesus has called us to. Don't go back. You know, we were watching Shrek Forever After as a family last week.

The one where they finally decided to call it a day on the franchise. Have you ever watched that? I don't imagine many of you have. The plot line is that Shrek has married Princess Fiona.

[20 : 48] But he daydreams about going back to the swamp. And about going back to the life that he used to have. And so strong a desire, is it, that he makes this deal with Rumpelstiltskin, who grants him this wish to go back and relive his former life.

And he's there, the scene's there. He's just making snow angels in the mud. He's loving his former life before he realizes that he's been duped. And that's what sin does in our lives.

It just offers us the bait and the switch. The devil's been doing it since Genesis 3, the bait and the switch. Do you see the language there? The stuff that we think promises us life, actually where does it lead?

Do you see it? It leads to death. Verse 6. And Paul is saying, don't allow your minds to go back to the former things that used to dominate you.

God's lifted you out of it. God has given you a new identity. Now, we're going to think on this more next week. But for now, feel the challenge that comes at us.

[21 : 55] I'm saying, what are we filling our minds with? What are we putting in front of our faces, as it were? What are we feeding our souls? You know, every night we have that battle with our kids.

Do I have to eat the greens? Do I have to eat them? And they demand it at the stage where they're demanding the why. Why do we have to eat them? And of course, what is the answer? Not because they taste nice. Because it's good for your soul.

It's good for your growth. It's good for your development. But that's a battle we have every night. Friends, don't think this won't be a battle as well. What are we putting in front of our minds? What are we filling our souls with?

In our day that's drowning in distraction, here is the call to feed our minds with God's words. And see two great encouragements here as we engage in this spirit-inspired tug of war.

First, at verse 6. To do so, to set your minds on the things of the spirit, is to set your mind on life and peace.

[22 : 57] And second, verse 11, that this same spirit who now indwells us. When our bodies age and decay, when we're at our final breath, this same spirit will give life to our mortal bodies.

I find that such a precious, precious promise when I've been visiting people. And you can see that they're worried about the future. What does life look like now that I'm not as active?

Now that I feel like I'm almost at the end of the race. And this verse is so incredibly encouraging. That the same spirit that gave life to Jesus' body is the same spirit that will give life to ours if our faith is in him.

Now we need to wrap this up. But do come back over the next couple of weeks as we dig into this chapter more. But just as we close, let me just give you one little image to try and help us just solidify what this is all about.

You know, I used to take our girls every week now and again to their swimming classes at the Commonwealth pool. And we'd always get there a little bit early because of bus times and school pickup times.

[24 : 09] And what we'd do is we'd just, for 10 minutes, we'd go to the viewing gallery at the Commonwealth pool. And just in before the kids, before they went down to get changed for the swimming lessons, just in before us were the Scottish diving team.

And we used to watch them dive. And we used to try and mark them. Have you ever did that during the Olympics? You realise you actually don't have a clue about what a good dive is. But we'd watch all these people as they'd climb the stairs and there's some serious amount of steps to get to the top one.

And we'd see them do their thing. We'd see them psych themselves up. We'd see them dive. We'd see them hit the water. We'd see them make the splash. And we'd see them emerge two seconds later. And every single one of them, without fail, looked to the side.

And they looked to the judges who were sitting there. And the judges, some of them, would hold up seven. Sevens. Some of them would hold up fives. And one person even held up a three, which I thought was ridiculously brutal, since I'd given them a nine.

But every single person getting up out of the water, looking to the side, looking to the judge, and saying, tell me I was good enough. Tell me I was worth it. Tell me I've made it. And friends, there are all sorts of places that we look to for that kind of love and assurance.

[25 : 23] But we know the feeling in our lives, don't we, of never quite measuring up. You know, this has been my week, honestly. Parent, average.

Husband, selfish. Pastor, weak. Christian, pass marks. And that's a really heavy thing to be carrying around. And let me tell you, the devil has done everything this week, everything this week, to keep me from this passage.

Because it's here we come to it, and we're reminded what God says of us. Friends, let me tell you, at the end of the day, his is the only commentary that counts. And I found it so helpful this week to take my ten fingers, and we're back there, especially at the times when I felt like there's dirt in my hands.

To hold up those ten fingers and say those ten words together, find the life and the security and the assurance that's there, that there's therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

And just to add to the wonderful symmetry of it, I've taken my two hands with those two points. What's true of me now is that he's put me in a new place, and he's set me on a new course.

[26 : 36] And do you know what? That truth is true on your best day. And if your faith is in Jesus, it's true just as much on your worst day. And so here today, God declare over you, if your faith is in Jesus, no matter how you're feeling, that there's therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

Let's pray. And why don't we just, before we stand to sing again, let's just be quiet for just a moment. And I trust that the Spirit of God will be taking this word and applying it to our hearts in all sorts of different ways.

But let's just pause for a moment and then I'll pray. Amen. And so Father, we just thank you for the fact that we could never find nor wish for a more committed Savior King than Jesus.

And so Father, I pray that as we move to just a short time of communion, Lord, that you would help us understand even more sweetly, and maybe even for the first time today, what he has done for us and where he is and what he is doing right now at your right hand.

And the fact that one day he will return and he will make all things new. Father, bring a sweet assurance of that by your Spirit we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[28 : 15] Amen.