

What difference does it make to be a Christian?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, as I mentioned during our reading today, we are continuing our study of Romans and we have come to the first verse of the great chapter that is chapter 8, Romans 8 verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And today I want us to ask the question that I'm sure you've seen on the bulletin and that we want to shape our thoughts as we look at this verse. And the question is, what difference does it make to be a Christian? That's a really important question because that is basically one of our primary goals as a church, that people would become believers in Jesus Christ and that we would all live our lives as followers of Him. Jesus gave us that great commission where he told us to go and make disciples. That's our mission as a church and that here in the community of Carlyway or wherever God has placed us that we would be used by God to help people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and to live new lives as part of the new humanity that God is restoring through the gospel. That's our great goal, that people would become Christians.

But that of course raises the important question, why? What difference does it make? And that's a really, really important question because I think that a lot of people would probably say that it doesn't really make much difference. Because if you looked at two people, if you were to look out into Carlyway and you picked two people, one of whom is a Christian, the other of whom is not, you would say, well, they're not really that different. They're quite similar. They would both have similar routines, they'd go to work, they'd have hobbies, they'd have interests, they'd have a fairly similar pattern to their week. Both of them would face similar challenges, so both would have to deal with the pressure of work. Both would have the burden of financial concern, both would have the responsibility of looking after loved ones. And they would both have similar needs. So they would both need food, both need water, both need clothing, both need shelter, both need friendship, both need exercise. They're both going to get tired, they're both going to get old, they're both going to get sick. And so in many ways you could look at these two people and you could say, well, they're not that different. So becoming a Christian doesn't really make much difference to your life. In fact, some people might even go further than that and think that that any difference that becoming a Christian is going to make in your life is going to be negative.

In other words, if you become a follower of Jesus Christ, it's actually going to spoil your life and restrict you and change things for the worse. Whilst I don't like to presume what people think, I think it's fair to say that probably a lot of people would be of the mind that being a Christian or not doesn't make much difference. So that's the question we have to ask. What difference does it make to be a Christian? And if you are a Christian or if you become one, what differences are going to be? Well, as with everything, there's a lot that we could say, but I've only got half an hour, so we have to be careful. And I think that most of all we want to try and grasp what Romans is telling us and in particular what Romans chapter 8 verse 1 is telling us. And in order to get a clearer picture of that, it's helpful if we take a step back and recognize the fact that we need to think a lot bigger than simply in terms of the difference that being a Christian might make to our daily or weekly routine. Because in terms of the letters of the Romans, Paul is not really interested so much in our daily or weekly routine. His concerns are far, far bigger than that. And as we've been saying throughout this letter, Paul is making us think about our worldview. That's one of his great concerns, that our general conception of reality, how we understand the universe, our worldview would be something that we think about and that is something that is shaped by the Bible.

Now, we don't necessarily talk about worldview very often, but it's something that everybody has. Everybody has a worldview, whether you think about it or not, whether it's something that concerns you or not, we all look at the world around us and we have certain assumptions, certain considerations, certainly certain conceptions as to how we're going to understand the world around us. There's lots of different worldviews. Our goal is to have a biblical worldview. And at the heart of that biblical worldview is something that Paul has emphasised throughout this letter that we've looked at before, which is what we call the creator-creation distinction. There's a diagram here. It's a very simple diagram, but it's a very, very helpful diagram that theologians use to describe that distinction. Now, diagrams are always a simplification, but at the same time, they're also helpful for teaching us. That diagram there is telling us that God is creator of every other reality. And so, He is the big circle. And all of history, all of time, all of matter, the entire universe is in the we circle. God is creator and the universe around us is the creation. And you and I are just tiny, tiny specks in the we circle. And this worldview is at the heart of what Paul has been saying in his letter. God is creator, we are creation. But back in chapter one, Paul has highlighted the fact that humanity's great problem is that we have rejected the creator and we have started worshiping the creation instead. And so instead of us looking to the one who's made us, as you'd naturally expect from that diagram, we've started worshiping the tiny circle or tiny little things within that tiny circle. We've turned away from the God who made us. And as a result, we are liable to God's judgment, which is totally justified, totally fair. He is created, we are His creation, we are accountable to Him and answerable to Him. And in chapter two of Romans, Paul emphasizes the fact that we are liable to judgment. And that's an important thing to recognize because, again, this is a key part of the biblical worldview.

If you look around us today, you will see that humanity spends a lot of time judging one another. And we are maybe guilty of that ourselves. We judge other people. We judge people by the kind of car that they have. We judge the kind of house they have. We judge them by how much they earn.

[7 : 51] They judge, we judge them by their political viewpoints. We even judge people because of what football team they support. And so all the time we are judging other people. And yet a biblical worldview is not so much concerned about judging others. A biblical worldview is concerned about the fact that we are going to be judged. We are accountable to our Creator. So Paul is reminding us of these big fundamental truths. God is Creator. We are creation. We've turned away from our Creator and therefore we are liable to judgment. And the great standard of judgment that God uses is defined in terms of righteousness. Righteousness really is a key word in the letter to the Romans.

And it basically describes God's standards. God's standards of morality. God's standards of behavior. God's standards of judgment. God has perfect standards. So with God, truth is always perfect truth. Love is always perfect love. Holiness is always perfect holiness. He has these standards and he never ever ever compromises. God is righteous. He's always true, always fair, always holy, always righteous. But because we have rebelled against the Creator, because we have sinned, we are unrighteous. And the key point we have to recognize is that righteousness and unrighteousness are antithetical. They are opposites of one another. So God is righteous and yet if we sin, even if we sin once, we are unrighteous. To remind you that the opposite of perfection is not chaos. The opposite of perfection is simply imperfection. And God's standards are so high, so good, so pure, so wonderful that our sin means that we are not at his level. There's no in between.

God's standards are perfect and we are not in that same category. And Paul highlights that point in Romans chapter three when he comes to the devastating conclusion that none is righteous. No, not one.

And that's a big claim that the Bible makes, but it's very, very easy to prove because it is evidenced by the world around us. Think of the news in the past week. Is everything in the world perfect? Is everything in the world righteous? No. Is the world improving? You know, that we give this impression that the world is improving and I'm guilty of thinking it as well. You think, you know, we've made really good progress. And then last week you hear Marshall Campbell say there are 100 million street children in Africa. You think we're not, we're not making any progress at all. We look at the world around us and none of us can logically, rationally conclude that it's the way we want it to be. And the reason for that is because we've turned away from the God who made us. It's all, it all makes perfect sense. God made us. He's given us instructions. We've ignored them and we've made a mess. We have turned away from God. And so that means that there's a lot wrong with the world and probably no doubt you experience that every day. Maybe through people being hostile at work, maybe through struggles with health, maybe through sorrow or stress or pain. You, we, all of us, experience the brokenness of the world. And so given the fact that none is righteous, given the fact that there's a lot wrong with the world, that raises the question, are we all condemned? In other words, is the human race doomed?

Well, in a moment we're going to look at the biblical answer to that question. But before we look at the biblical answer, I want to look at how other worldviews or other approaches have answered the question, are we all condemned? Because it's quite interesting, if you look around, you'll discover that the most common answer, as far as I can tell in Britain to the question, are we all condemned? The most common answer to that question in 2018 is yes.

[12 : 42] For example, the scientific world says yes. Science, as far as I can gather, is telling us that the Sun and every other star, I assume, is going to eventually burn itself out.

And we'd have put a quote up from the mathematician Bertrand Russell, a very, very capable mathematician and writer in the early part of the 20th century. All the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast depth of the solar system. Science says we're doomed, ultimately.

The medical world says yes, we're all condemned, because we're all aging, we're all deteriorating, and absolutely nobody is able to prevent themselves, ultimately succumbing to old age or illness.

It's just a simple medical fact. The world of philosophy, by and large nowadays, will say the same thing. We live in an age where philosophy is often dominated by skepticism, or even more negative attitudes like nihilism, where everything's just pointless and meaningless, seems to be resigned to the fact that we are doomed. Another quote here, and John Paul Sathra, an existentialist philosopher, he says there's no sense in life a priori. That means a priori means like from beforehand. So there's no sense in life as a kind of given, definite assumption.

Beforehand, as it stands in its original state, life has no sense. It's nothing until it's lived, it's used to make sense of it, and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose.

[14 : 36] He advocated the kind of philosophy that if we make choices ourselves, then it will bring a meaning to life, because ultimately, a priori, life is meaningless and we're doomed. Even secularism will say the same thing, because there's no supernatural. So beyond this life, there is nothing so we're condemned. And even humanism, which in many ways attempts to be very positive about life, is doing that because life is all there is. Beyond that, there's no hope of anything.

So if we ask the question, are we all condemned? Science says yes, medicine says yes, philosophy says yes, secularism says yes, Christianity says no. And that's what Paul says in the wonderful words of Romans 8 verse 1. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And that's why the biblical worldview is far, far better than anything the world will offer you. That's why the story of Jesus is good news, because although alternative worldviews will give you some level of distraction just now, ultimately they are messages of doom for the human race. But the gospel, the message of Jesus is not a message of doom, it's a message of hope. And that's why it is almost impossible to understand why people would reject Christianity and choose one of these other worldviews instead. It makes absolutely no rational sense at all. People think that we're the irrational ones, but really I think the charge is on their own doorstep, because the Bible provides you with a coherent logical explanation for the universe. The Bible provides you with meaning and purpose for life. The Bible provides you with a glorious hope for the future. While these popular worldviews today give you a universe that's ultimately originless, a life that's ultimately pointless, and a destiny that is ultimately nothingness. And it's only if you're blind that you would choose one of these other worldviews. And of course that's what the Bible says, the devil has blinded our eyes.

The worldviews of today provide us, they promise us condemnation. The most they can give us is a temporary distraction from ultimate doom. But Christianity says no. The message of the gospel is that through faith in Jesus Christ there is no condemnation for you. And you think to yourself, how is that possible? How is it that Christianity can say that? Well, in order to answer that question we need to notice a really important word in this verse, and that's the word, therefore. Therefore is a brilliant little word, but it's a very important little word, because it immediately tells us that what is being said in this verse is connected to what has previously been said. So whenever you're reading the Bible and you see the word therefore, it's good to go back and try to see what the therefore is referring to. There's an old saying which I read in a book recently, whenever you see a therefore you have to ask what is it therefore.

And here the therefore is referring to all that Paul has taught us in the first seven chapters of this book. So as we read that verse we want to have in mind all that we have learned so far.

[18 : 40] Paul has shown us how the good news of Jesus Christ can solve all the problems that lead to our condemnation. I'm going to highlight four things just very very briefly in terms of somebody.

First of all, four things that leave us condemned, four things that have been solved. First of all, our unrighteousness. We mentioned that at the start. We're not at the standard that God requires. We can't reach it and we justly provoke God's wrath. But the glorious truth of the gospel is that even though we are unrighteous, we can be righteousified or justified as we tend to say through faith in Jesus Christ. That means that we can be declared righteous, legally declared righteous before God because our sin has been placed on Christ and his righteousness has been counted to us. That's what Jesus did on the cross. He died in our place so that our sin could be put on him and his righteousness could be put on us. A beautiful, glorious, wonderful exchange. So our unrighteousness has been dealt with. Another problem that leaves us condemned is our alienation from God. As Paul says in chapter one, we've turned away from the Creator, we've pushed

God away and we've made ourselves enemies of God. But the wonderful truth of the gospel is that because of what Jesus has done, we can now have peace with God. The great word we used to describe that is reconciliation. Our enmity against God has been exchanged for friendship. The Christian is no longer an enemy of God who awaits condemnation. They are now God's friend. Their relationship has been restored. Thirdly, our slavery to sin leaves us condemned. We are not our own master and no matter how hard we try, we're unable to stop ourselves from sinning against God. Sin is like a slave master. Seeking to destroy us and even when we hear God's law it can sometimes just provoke us to rebel against it. But through Jesus Christ, we are bought out of that slavery.

We are redeemed so that we're no longer slaves, but we no longer slaves to sin but children of God and able to serve Him. And the fourth thing is our own inability. We are unable to earn our salvation. But as Romans tells us, we don't earn it. It's given to us because of the grace of God.

So all these problems that we have, I'll just summarize them here, our unrighteousness, our alienation, our slavery to sin, our inability, all of these are solved by Jesus Christ. Our unrighteousness is dealt with through justification. Our alienation is dealt with through reconciliation.

[21 : 40] Our slavery to sin is dealt with through redemption. That's what redemption means, to buy someone out of slavery. And our inability is dealt with by the fact that God is gracious and He gives us a salvation that we could never earn for ourselves. And this is where we see the amazing transformation that takes place when we put our trust in Jesus. And to see that we need to notice the contrast between Romans 3.10, which we've highlighted, and Romans 8.1. Just put the verses up here. Look at what it says there. No one is righteous in Romans 3.10. And then Romans 8.1, there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. So do you see the difference between these, these verses? We go from no righteousness to no condemnation. And it is all because of what Jesus has done. Jesus is putting right all of these issues so that we will not be condemned.

And so if you're asking the question, what difference does it make to be a Christian, that's the answer. That is the level that God is concerned about. That is why the Christian message is such good news, because the gospel doesn't just give us a better life just now. It doesn't just give us something to help us through the weeks. The gospel gives us hope for all eternity.

So science says we're doomed. And medicine says we're dying. Philosophy says that we're pointless. And secularism says that we have nothing to ultimately look forward to. But Christianity says rubbish. The gospel says that in Jesus Christ we can have eternal hope. We can look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, a place of unparalleled joy and peace and excitement and adventure and beauty and wonder and friendship and worship. And it lasts forever. And as we go into study chapter 8 in more detail, that's what Paul starts talking about. All the astonishing riches that are ours in Christ Jesus. And that's why we as Christians can stand up and say to the world, we have a message of hope. Here is a message that is not leading to ultimate doom. Here is a message of eternal blessing. And this message makes a massive difference to life. Because as a Christian, if you get up tomorrow morning, then you're not just heading into another pointless day in a pointless life. You're going out to serve King Jesus, to fulfill his purposes and to work for him and be a shining light in a dark world. If you face illness, which many of you do, and even right now in the midst of, as a Christian, you know that that illness might hurt you. That illness might weaken you. That illness might ultimately kill you. But it can never condemn you.

It can never condemn you. Because through the death and resurrection of Jesus, you have eternal life. If you're suffering or if you see suffering around you, if you long for a better world, then as a Christian, we can look forward to that better world. Every one of those longings will be fulfilled because one day God will renew the heavens and the earth. He will renew the universe. And unlike this one, which is full of so much awful stuff, it'll be a place where righteousness dwells. So the Christian can face a diagnosis and know that they're safe in God's hands.

A Christian wife can watch her Christian husband die and know that they're going to be together again for eternity. A Christian child can go through life knowing that they will never be abandoned by God. And a Christian who suffers can know that the pain in this life is temporary.

[25 : 55] But the peace and joy of the new creation is forever. And perhaps most amazingly of all, a Christian can look at the God who is the creator of the heavens and the earth and they can say, my father, my father. And we must recognize that this is the level of difference that God is concerned with. And if you're maybe not yet a Christian or not sure about where you stand before God, this is what it is really all about. It's not about the routine of life that's pretty minor. It's not about really the fact that that coming to church on a Sunday means you might miss the football or something else. The fact that if you come to the prayer meeting, people might talk about you or the fact that if you become a church member, you might have to make a public profession of faith. All of that stuff is just tiny, tiny compared to the difference that it makes to put your trust in Jesus. And even if it does come at a cost, and for some Christians it does come at a huge cost, it is totally worth it. Because what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? And all of this is pointed to the fact that faith in Jesus Christ is more important than anything else. And that's the last thing that we have to notice from 8.1.

There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It doesn't say there's no condemnation for anyone. It says there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. And that makes sense because without Christ we are aligning ourselves with a world that can only offer us condemnation.

And so without Christ we're with that world that's pushing against God and that is condemning itself. But through faith we are united to Jesus Christ. And if you're united to Jesus Christ, you cannot be condemned. It's impossible. Paul talks about that in later in Romans 8. He says, who is to condemn? Jesus died, more than that he was raised. He's at the right hand of God.

He's interceding for us. You think of Jesus at the right hand of God as king of kings and Lord of lords. You think, well there's absolutely no way that Jesus can ever be condemned. And if you trust in him, then you are united to him. And if he can't be condemned, then neither can we.

And so the vital thing is to be in Christ Jesus. So what do you have to do to be in Christ? What do you have to do? Well you know the answer to that is quite amazing because Jesus had to do a huge amount. Jesus had to come into this world. Jesus had to face temptation. Jesus had to endure horrendous suffering. Jesus had to experience betrayal. Jesus had to suffer physical and emotional abuse. Jesus had to carry the full burden and penalty of our sin. Jesus had to bear the curse of our disobedience.

[29 : 35] Jesus had to taste death and hideous death on the cross as what it was. Jesus had to do all of that. But all you have to do is trust him.

You think of the huge weight that Jesus had to carry. Does he ask you to do the same? No. He just asks you to trust him. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved.

Put a simple childlike trust in him and you will never be condemned. Put your faith in him and you'll have eternal life. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and Jesus is calling all of us to be part of that number. So today's the day.

Go for it. Let's pray. Our Father we thank you for these glorious words of Romans 8 1 that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and we acknowledge that that is all because of you. All because of the amazing saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross in his death and resurrection and ascension whereby he conquered death and brought life and immortality to light and brought hope into this world. We thank you so so much and we acknowledge that we are helpless on our own but yet we thank you that the gospel message is at the same time so profound and yet so simple and we pray that we would see the simplicity of it and that each one of us would put our trust in you that we would be able to know that that that when we say these words there's no condemnation for those who are in Christ. We pray that we would say those words as those for whom that that is true. So Lord we thank you for the hope of the gospel and please use us to bring that hope to the world around us in Jesus name. Amen.