

No Condemnation
John 8:2-11, Romans 8:1-4

Brothers and sisters, as I have mentioned over the past couple weeks – when it comes to talking about love and God’s love in particular – we have an instinctive response as modern Canadians to contrast love with judgment and see them as opposites.

So much so that many people would understand a statement that “God loves us” to mean that God does not judge us – or at least He doesn’t judge like judgmental people judge us – He’s not like that. He doesn’t get hung up on silly religious rules; he can see that we have good intentions and that we are just trying to be authentic. Do you know what I’m talking about?

And in our instinctive response of contrasting love and judgement we often turn to John 8 as an example of how Jesus – as God’s Son – does not judge... and how he shows love by refusing to judge the woman caught in adultery, and then how he prevents her execution by turning the tables on

the judgmental people with that famous phrase *“let he who is without sin cast the first stone.”* What a great example of how – to borrow another famous phrase - *“love wins”*

Now brothers and sisters, I believe there are two main reasons why we are so quick to contrast love to the exclusion of judgment.

The first is that we don’t really believe the punishment fits whatever crime someone is being judged for, so while very few of us would condone adultery, we really don’t believe that it’s an offense that deserves death – let alone a barbaric death by stoning - so good on Jesus for showing love and refusing to go along with that - right?

And this line of thinking get applied to a whole host of other offenses – or sins – that as modern woke progressive people we no longer consider to be serious offences deserving of judgement – especially God’s judgement. Do you know what I’m talking about?

If you don't – ask yourself how you would feel about Jesus' response in John 8 if the Pharisees had wanted to execute a man who was caught molesting children as opposed to a woman caught in adultery....

So in many cases we contrast love with judgment because according to our opinion and standards and beliefs – we don't think the punishment fits the crime. Do you see how this works?

But there is another reason why we contrast love with judgment, which I'm far more inclined to be sympathetic towards.

Because brothers and sisters, there are many people - and maybe some of us here are among them, who for various reasons are prevented from experiencing God's love and being able to love God in return because they feel judged by God or they view God as judgmental.

In such instances people may feel like they can never be good enough for God, maybe they struggle with desires and habits which they know are wrong but won't seem to go away, perhaps it seems like God is always pointing out their faults and failings, like He is always waiting for an excuse to punish them...

Or perhaps they are guilty of some truly serious offences and deep down know they know what they deserve and it's going to take more than a glib "God loves you man" to convince them of the truth of that statement.

So I can understand why we contrast God's love with judgment and communicate that God's love means that He does not judge us – we want to help people get past this so they can experience God's love.

But brothers and sisters – in our zeal to help people experience the truth that God loves us we have confused some important terminology - and as the scriptures say "*zeal*

without knowledge is not good, how much more will hasty feet miss the way” (Prov 19:2)

So let me humbly suggest to you brothers and sisters that in our well-intentioned efforts to tell people that God loves us we have confused and conflated judgement and condemnation.

We have made them synonymous – and while they are certainly related –they are not the same thing.

Judging is simply discerning one thing from another – as in I judge you to be a man and you to be a woman. In scripture, most instances of judging are related to determining what is right or wrong - according to God’s laws.

So on its own judging isn’t something that ought get us so worked up – but – we never judge simply for the sake of distinguishing differences. There are always implications that come from our judgements – and this is what usually gets us worked up about judging.

If this person is a man then I will treat them as a man, if they are a woman I will treat them like a woman. If this action is right – then I must pursue it, if this action is wrong – then I must avoid it. Do you see what I’m talking about?

There are implications that come from our judgments and this is where condemnation comes in, condemnation is one of the implications that can stem from our judgments. To condemn someone is to sentence them, to decide that they will experience negative consequences based on our judgment of what they have done wrong.

So judging is simply the determination of distinction and condemning is the sentencing that we hand down when we’ve determined that someone is deserving of it. Do you see the difference?

And because they are so connected to each other we have begun confuse the two, so much so that most of our reaction against judging is actually a reaction against being condemned – do you understand?

And so we need to re-articulate this distinction because this is actually how we get past our hang-ups about judgment – and come to correctly understand what God’s Love really is – from the scriptures.

So instead of saying people have a hard time experiencing God’s love because they feel judged by God – it’s more accurate to say that people feel condemned by God, and by implication they feel condemned by the Church and other Christians.

But brothers and sisters – hear this good news this morning. The story of the woman caught in adultery is not a story about no judgment – it’s a story about no condemnation. Jesus says to the woman in vs. 11 *“neither do I condemn you!”* and Paul in Romans 8:1 says *“Therefore... there is no condemnation”*

So do you feel condemned by God, have you done something that ought to be condemned by God, or are you worried that you might be condemned by God? Brothers and sisters – this

morning we get the good good news that there is no – none, zip, nada – condemnation.

However before we get to the point where we can say - God’s love means that He doesn’t condemn us – we need to understand how we can get to that point, we need to know and believe and trust what makes that able to happen.

Otherwise it’s like telling people that they can get in to an amazing concert for free – but failing to give them the complimentary ticket that will get them admitted. People will show up at the door and will be turned away because they did not have their free ticket.

Now the key to understanding how and why we can truly say that God’s love means He does not condemn us - actually lies in His judgment. This is why it’s important not to contrast God’s love with his judgment - because it will actually keep us condemned.

What do I mean by that? Well perhaps you noticed that when I quoted Romans 8:1 I didn't finish it – I deliberately left off the second half of the verse where Paul states the condition is that we must be *“in Christ Jesus.”*

Because sometimes when we read or hear references to Jesus in this way – it's become so familiar to us that our eyes glaze over and these things go in one ear and out the other.

But brothers and sisters, please pay attention and hear this important condition. For us to be able to say that God's love means He does not condemn us – we **MUST** be IN Christ Jesus.

And Jesus Christ is God's judgment on our human nature.

Now I know that sounds a bit strange to us – and we might say but what about John 3:17 *“God did not send his Son into the world to - condemn... the world”* there's that important distinction between judging and condemning again.

You see brothers and sisters - when God in Jesus Christ, takes on our human nature and becomes one of us in the

incarnation- it is a determination, it is a judgement - by God... that our human nature had proven itself to be insufficient, incapable, and deliberately disobedient when it comes to being a faithful covenant partner with Him.

And if we look closer at the story in John 8 we will discover that's exactly what this story is telling us.

First – notice that Jesus is in the temple teaching people, He did this a lot – but did you ever wonder why Jesus needed to have a teaching ministry? I mean Israel had God's law given to them through Moses, they had all sorts of religious teachers and prophets – what could Jesus possibly teach them that they didn't already know?

Well the answer to this question also explains why the Pharisees and other religious teachers were at odds with Jesus and why they were always trying to trap Him and shut Him down.

Let me summarize it like this – The nation of Israel was God’s covenant people. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, gave them his Covenant Law and settled them in the Promised Land and if they were faithful to Him they would stay and enjoy the land and have their political independence and freedom to worship and serve Him.

But as you know – by Jesus’ time they had been unfaithful so many times – they had lost that freedom and endured a period of exile in Babylon and were scattered across the known world.

And while the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt along with the Temple the people of Israel were merely the inhabitants of the province of Judea within the larger Roman Empire.

Yet the prophets seemed to hint at a time when God would completely restore the nation of Israel after they had returned from exile – so the post-exile religious leaders were very careful to make sure that God’s people were not unfaithful to His Laws this time around. It was a matter of national

prosperity and security in their quest for independence– and political power.

But in their quest to be obedient so that God would restore them as a nation- they turned God’s Law from being a means of living in gratitude into a burden that condemned people. This was never what the Law was intended to be – and Jesus’ teaching ministry is all about restoring the Law to be a means of grace instead of what the Pharisees and Sadducees had turned it into.

This is why they were at odds with Jesus and they were worried that by getting rid of the additional “safety laws” which they had added on to the Mosaic law, Israel would again be at risk of being unfaithful and sent into exile again – rather ironic isn’t it.

So this is why a group of Pharisees brings a woman who was actually caught in the act of adultery before Jesus to see how He will treat the Law of Moses in such an instance. They

believe they finally have Jesus in a catch 22 – He can't possible claim this situation is something they've added on to the law.

Exodus 20:10 states clearly *"If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death."*

So if Jesus denies or breaks the Law of Moses here – they have him – and it will undermine His credibility with the people.

But if Jesus says "You're right – she's guilty and deserves death, stone her as the Law commands" Then Jesus has undermined his graciousness with the people and his reputation as one who is willing to eat with sinners and show mercy and offer forgiveness and make the Law a means of grace is all undone – He essentially becomes one of the Pharisees.

So what does Jesus do? Well like any good Presbyterian Jesus catches the Pharisees on due process and uses it to expose their intentions to manipulate the law for their own purposes

instead of using it to lead the people to be faithful to God. In their eagerness to trap Jesus – they've overlooked somethings

You see, from what I've studied on this passage, bible scholars will tell us that in order to be executed for adultery you had to be caught in the actual act – by two witnesses, which more than likely meant that this woman had been caught in a sting.

Now that the punishment for adultery was death – if anyone had foreknowledge of this situation and used that knowledge to set a trap to condemn her instead of urging the woman to turn away from this sinfulness and thus spare her life... they would essentially be guilty of her murder wouldn't they...

And speaking of sparing someone's life – where is the man? Ex 20:10 clearly says both the adulterer and adulteress are to be put to death and the emphasis of this law places the onus of responsibility in this situation clearly upon the man. So where is the man?

There are some problems with the case the Pharisees have.

So – can you see here how this story is an indictment of how our human nature is proving itself to be insufficient, incapable, and deliberately disobedient when it comes to being a faithful covenant partner with God?

Look at how the Law is being disobeyed by the man and woman committing adultery, and how it is being twisted by the Pharisees, and ignored by those who helped to trap the woman!

Thus – when Jesus says *“Let He who is without sin cast the first stone”* He is actually calling out the Pharisees on their legal procedural bungling by making a veiled reference to Deuteronomy 13:9 and 17:7 which says *“The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people.”*

So Jesus isn't saying, as we so often take this phrase to mean, that we should refrain from pointing out other people's sins because we have our own, or that we should refrain from telling people what is right or wrong.

In fact if someone had done exactly that – this woman might have been spared from the ordeal that she went through here.

Jesus is actually “judging” their legal presentation and saying that if they are going to be the witnesses who condemn this woman to death then they had better make sure they have not sinned or neglected any part of the Law in how they have put together their case against her lest they be equally condemned for breaking the Law - for their own purposes.

It's a strong statement but the evidence and the legal process has been so obviously bungled that they realize Jesus has trapped them and they give up and leave.

And thus it is Jesus' judging and implied warning that saves the woman from being condemned by the Pharisees misuse of the Law. So we are starting to see how Jesus actually shows love through judging and how it leads to no condemnation. Jesus has dealt with the Pharisees and they can no longer condemn the woman for their own twisted purposes.

However, in spite of the case being thrown out on procedural grounds both Jesus and the woman and the people who have been watching know that she is actually guilty of adultery and has broken God's Law and technically the charge still stands before God.

So it's pretty amazing then to hear Jesus say to the woman - neither do I condemn you. Who is this Jesus who can absolve the sentence that God knows and she knows she rightfully deserves before God? He must be God.

Jesus gives her the undeserved grace that we spoke about last week – and then he shows her even more love by judging her and doing what those who trapped her ought to have done.

He says to her “go now – leave your life of sin” He takes her off the path of condemnation to death and through his judgement of calling what she is doing “sin” and telling her to leave it - He sets her on a path towards life.

So – do you see how this story shows us that God's judgment is actually an expression of God's love by which we are spared from being condemned?!

And to take it even further we can say that Jesus is able to take away her condemnation to death before God because He himself is going to offer His own life in her place.

The Apostle Paul gives the precise explanation of this in Romans 8:3-4, let me read it for you and listen to it keeping in mind all that we just learned from John 8.

Paul says “For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us...”

Not just in the woman caught in adultery – but in us as well brothers and sisters.

Therefore, having looked at all this – now we can say - that God's Love means that there is NO condemnation for those who are IN Christ Jesus.

IN the very body and person of Jesus Christ, the Law of Moses was kept perfectly and so Jesus was the faithful covenant partner with God that no other human could ever be. When we are IN Jesus that faithfulness is ours as well.

IN the very body and person of Jesus Christ, God put Sin to death on the cross. When we are IN Jesus our sin is put to death on the cross as well – God no longer sees it or condemns for it.

So brothers and sisters – by believing IN Jesus Christ, by putting our faith and trust IN Jesus Christ – and most importantly, by the work of the Holy Spirit who immerses us IN to the actual body and person of Jesus Christ – so that our life is in Him and His life is in us – and we are really IN Christ and thus there is NO condemnation for those IN Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters if you were at all worried about being condemned or feeling condemned by God – hear this good news this morning and believe it IN Jesus Christ.

God's Love means there is NO condemnation in Christ Jesus. If you want to be assured that you are IN Christ Jesus brothers and sisters - all you need to do is accept God's judgment of us and confess that you are not a faithful covenant partner, that your human nature is sinful and deceitful and deliberately disobedient - so that you need Jesus' new nature instead.

Then ask the Lord to give you that life by the Holy Spirit – as Paul says in Romans 8:2 *“the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”*

Then live by faith that you are IN Christ – receive your Baptism by faith that the Holy Spirit has immersed you IN Christ – eat the Lord's Supper by faith so that you are IN Christ – and be confident that since you are IN Christ – there is no condemnation. NONE! It's gone.

So brothers and sisters - God Loves you! Amen.