

I. Introduction

- A. We are doing things a little bit out of order today. That is because we are making space for one of the most awesome things that any church can ever do.
- B. This weekend it is our privilege to witness one of the great miracles of the church. Over the course of this weekend, we will all share in the Power and pageantry of baptism. We will bear witness as 52 men and women declare their faith in Jesus through baptism.
- C. So a little less music. A little less preaching. I know you are disappointed. But the baptisms will make up for it I promise you.
- D. We are actually in a really different kind of series at our church.
- E. The title of the series is Giant Steps. This is basically going to last us for the whole year. And there will be three kinds of messages for us.
 1. **Step out:** in these messages, we want to get ourselves unstuck from dysfunctional, addictive, or psychologically destructive forces that are holding us back. So we will be talking about stepping out of... anxiety, fearfulness, an affair, cohabitation, dysphoria, self harm, anger issues, dysfunction, addiction, and more.
 2. **Step into:** in these messages, we want to incorporate healthy stuff into our lives. The stuff that brings happiness, wholeness, and peace. So we will be talking about stepping into... attachment, bonding, shedding negative labels, a healthy relationship, dating, healing, taking back agency, and dominion, and more.
 3. **Step up:** these are the talks where we make sure that our lives have meaning and purpose that shake us out of our narcissistic skins, and make sure that we are making a difference for good in this world, and in the world to come. So step up to leadership, writing your book, entrepreneurship, prosperity, financial freedom, baptism, and maybe even a missions trip, or full-time Christian ministry.
- F. So, if you show up at Pathway this year, you are going to hear about Giant Steps. It is not going to be business as usual. We are committed to taking giant steps to get you into an amazing place that Jesus promised. That place would be called the Abundant Life. Jesus promised an abundant life, and that is where we want to get in this series.

II. Favorite Chapter

- A. Depending on how familiar you are with church or the Bible, you might or might not have an answer to this question... it's okay if you don't...
 1. **QUESTION:** If you were stuck on a deserted island and could only have one book in the Bible with you, and only one chapter from that one book with you, what chapter of the Bible would you want?
- B. About a hundred years ago a famous pastor from Philadelphia, named Barnhouse, wrote to 20 prominent pastors and asked them that question.
- C. The top answer he got back is the same answer I would give.
- D. If I could only have one book in the Bible, it would be the Book of Romans. And if I could only have one chapter from that book, it would be Romans, chapter 8.
- E. Let me show you how that chapter ends, and then how it begins.
- F. Near the end of Romans 8, there is a question: What can separate us from the love of God. The chapter ends with this answer, which is spectacular:
 1. *"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, [39] nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)
- G. Nothing, nowhere, nobody, nohow, never... there is no power or enemy that can ever separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- H. I love this chapter because it ends with NO SEPARATION.
- I. But now, look how it begins:
 1. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1)
 - a) You've got a chapter that starts with NO CONDEMNATION and ends with NO SEPARATION, so that's the one I'm taking with me when I land on Gilligan's Island.
 - b) It's my favorite chapter of my favorite book in the whole Bible.
 - c) In the peak, the pinnacle, the summit of the mountain of all the love and grace of God.
- J. So my talk today is one of the Step Out talks. I invite you to meditate with me on the topic:
 1. **Step Out of CONDEMNATION**
- K. Quit beating yourself up. Quit putting yourself down. Quit punishing yourself, hurting yourself, hiding yourself, isolating yourself, erasing yourself, and cancelling yourself... and don't accept that treatment from anybody else either.
- L. Let me put the verse back up, and really dig into it.

III. Scripture

- A. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1)
- B. What makes this true?
 1. "Therefore" - this tells us HOW
 2. "Now" - this tells us WHEN
 3. "Those who are in Christ Jesus" - this tells us WHO
- C. These are the three STEPPING STONES for anyone who wants to step out of Condemnation.

IV. Three Stepping Stones

- A. **HOW (Therefore...)**
 1. The word "therefore" means that this is the only conclusion we can draw from whatever has come before.

2. This is chapter 8. Chapters 1 through 7 lay down some train tracks. These tracks are logical. They are historical. They are theological. They are also unarguable.
3. Once you hop on these tracks, there's no getting off. The destination is Romans 8:1, which says therefore, there is NO CONDEMNATION.
4. Let me rewind to Romans 3, which says the opposite.
 - a) *"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."* (Romans 3:19)
5. All the world is guilty before God. Everybody. Good people. Bad people. Religious people. Church people. All people.
 - a) All have sinned.
 - b) All fall short of the glory of God.
 - c) All the world is guilty before God.
6. And anybody who is honest with themselves has to agree.
7. We don't even live up to our own standards... so if there is a Supreme Being, and if he has even one little shred of moral goodness with him... if we don't even live up to our own standards, how could we possibly live up to his?
8. So all the world is guilty before God.
9. This shows up psychologically, because pretty much everybody lives with some measure of guilt.
10. There is a kind of psychological condemnation that goes on in everybody.
11. So how do you step out of that? How do you go from guilty to not guilty? And how do you do that in a way that sticks? In a way that doesn't bend the truth, or feel fake?
12. If we are going to be made clean that has to happen in a way that is strong and meaningful, or we'll always have a little voice inside whispering that you're still guilty.
13. If you want to get rid of condemnation, there are two REALLY POPULAR ways that won't work:
 - a) **DENIAL: to say that wrong things aren't wrong.**
 - (1) God told Adam and Eve that if they ate the forbidden fruit they would die. He said: *"You shall surely die"* (Genesis 2:17).
 - (2) Then in comes the devil, he catches them by surprise, sucks them into a creepy "conversation" and tells them to go ahead and eat it. The devil says: *"You shall not surely die"* (Genesis 3:4).
 - (3) This is the way that pretty much all philosophy and all psychology handles sin and guilt today.
 - (4) Sin is relative, so guilt is unnecessary, they say.
 - (a) You're not guilty before God because there is no God. Or...
 - (b) You're not guilty before God because there is nothing in God but love. Or...
 - (c) You're not guilty before God because sin is just a psychological problem, and if we can erase your guilt you can go on enjoying the behaviors that caused it.
 - (5) The problem is none of this ever works.
 - (6) Denial never works.
 - (7) And the reason denial never works is because God put something inside you that you can't turn off. It's called your CONSCIENCE. No matter how much you deny that wrong things are wrong things your conscience keeps telling you... that was wrong, you're in trouble, you fall short.
 - (8) This draws a person right into the second way of dealing with condemnation that doesn't work.
 - b) **PENANCE: to punish yourself or others in an attempt to balance the scales of justice.**
 - (1) We all carry an internal logic that says bad stuff must be punished. The scales of justice must be balanced.
 - (2) You do the crime, you gotta do the time.
 - (3) A lot of times, we turn that justice back on ourselves. This becomes a psychological problem.
 - (4) And people do penance, even if they're not part of a religion that believes in penance.
 - (5) People hurt themselves and others. Sometimes they don't know why.
 - (6) But this is why:
 - (7) They're trying to atone for sins. This comes out in a lot of ways, and all of them are emotionally painful. It creates mental health issues.
 - (a) **Perfectionism.**
 - (b) **Workaholism.**
 - (c) **Type-A Personality (give yourself a heart attack)**
 - (d) **Self-critical voices.**
 - (e) **Cutting/burning**
 - (f) **Self-isolation (INCEL, Hikimori)**
 - (g) **Drug/alcohol abuse or dependency**
 - (h) **Prescription abuse or dependency**
 - (i) **Any addiction**
 - (j) **Porn**
 - (k) **Hyper-religion**
 - (l) **Self-judgment**
 - (m) **Self-punishment (flagellation, etc.)**
14. Please don't look at these behaviors and shake your head in judgment. These behaviors always make sense to the person doing them. There is an internal logic here, and it makes sense...

- a) It makes sense because people are innately stuck trying to figure out what to do with their moral imperfections, failures and guilt.
15. How do you fix that?
16. Let me go back to Romans 8:1 and the beautiful word *therefore*.
17. If we start at a place of “all the world is guilty before God” and we want to get to a place where we can say “there is therefore now no condemnation,” how do we get there?
18. How do we get there without either denying our guilt, OR self-punishing our guilt?
19. The one and only answer that can deliver you and me and anybody and everybody is always going to be the same:
 - a) Yes, someone needs to atone for your sins, but it doesn’t have to be you.
 - b) “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” (Romans 5:8)
20. The ‘THEREFORE’ points to this.
21. He was your substitute.
22. He took your place.
23. He paid the price.
24. He paid it in full.
 - a) The payment is complete.
 - b) The punishment is complete.
 - c) The scales of justice are balanced for you.
 - d) No penance.
 - e) No self-punishment.
 - f) No taking it out on others.
 - g) Your sins are paid in full.
 - (1) Which means...
25. You don’t have to punish yourself...
26. You can live with nothing left to prove...
27. And God himself has forgiven you for everything...
28. So he can say...
 - a) THEREFORE... Because of Romans 5:8...
29. So you can say...
 - a) THEREFORE... Because of Romans 5:8...
30. So we can say...
 - a) THEREFORE... Because of Romans 5:8...
 - (1) There is therefore no condemnation.
 - (2) No condemnation.
 - (3) None. Zero. It is finished.
31. So, take your stand on Romans 8:1. Step out of condemnation.
32. That’s the HOW.

B. WHEN (“now”)

1. “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.*” (Romans 8:1)
2. You are forgiven now. You are accepted now. You are perfect in God’s eyes now.
3. You are good enough for God, now.
4. You are qualified for heaven, now.
5. You have the blessings of God, now.
6. You have a door open to the abundant life, the riches of grace, the Promised Land of maximum blessing, maximum love, maximum joy, maximum peace, now.
7. Now.
 - a) Not tomorrow.
 - b) Not when you’ve earned enough points from God.
 - c) Not when you’ve improved your life.
 - d) Not when you’ve become religious enough.
 - e) Not even when you’ve been baptized, and we’re doing 50+ baptisms this weekend.
8. There is therefore now no condemnation.
9. I grew up in the church. And as I’ve often said, my church was a travel agency for guilt trips.
 - a) I heard I was forgiven, but I never felt forgiven.
 - b) I felt guilty. I was afraid of God because I was afraid that he was focused on my sins. I was embarrassed. Ashamed. Messed up.
10. But then I read this verse, and it hit me.
11. No condemnation... NOW. Not even a little.
12. Because when Jesus died on the cross, God took every single sin out of me. He didn’t skip any. He didn’t overlook any.
13. He took them all, he put them on Christ, he punished Christ instead of me, so we can say, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
14. I realized that the only one who was conscious of my sins was me.
15. They are gone. NOW.

16. And if you have Jesus, they're gone for you too, NOW.

17. Which leads to the WHO.

C. WHO ("for those who are in Christ Jesus")

1. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

2. Are you saved?

3. Then you're in Christ Jesus.

4. This "no condemnation" clause is not for all the world, not for all the good people, not for all the church-goers, not for all the moral people, not for all the decent people.

a) It is for all the people who are in Christ Jesus.

b) It says so, right here.

5. In other words, Saved people. People who have received Jesus as their Savior.

6. Why?

7. Because these are the people who have the scales of justice balanced on their behalf.

8. These are the only people.

9. Before we baptize anybody, we ask them to tell us about when and how they came to know Jesus as their Savior.

a) "But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. [13] They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God." (John 1:12-13)

10. When did you accept him? When did you believe in him, I mean officially? When were you reborn?

11. There's a really "churchy" word for this... it's called your testimony.

12. We ask for your testimony.

13. Do you have a testimony?

14. Because if you do, then you can say,

a) There is therefore, now, NO CONDEMNATION FOR ME.

V. Conclusion

A. So, step out of condemnation.

B. The most important relationship in life—your relationship with your Father in Heaven—is settled.

C. And that relationship is great.

1. His acceptance of you is total and all the time.

D. When he thinks of you, he smiles. That smile does not fluctuate with your performance or your conduct.

E. He is pleased with you.

F. Anything you've ever done wrong has been dealt with. Any condemnation was already meted out. This is the great gift of Jesus to you.

G. It's 100 percent him and the strength of his sacrifice for you, 2,000 years ago, once for all, finished.

H. So why punish yourself at all? Why damage your relationships? Why sabotage your future? Why harm yourself, your body, your emotions, or your soul in any way, shape or form?

1. The voice that says:

a) I'm no good. I've got something to prove. I have to push myself.

(1) Or...

b) I have to hide myself. Nobody wants me. Nobody loves me. Nobody cares for me.

(1) Or...

c) I'll never make it. Life is too hard. I'm bad. I'm not worthy.

I. Where is that voice coming from?

J. It's not coming from God.

K. And I promise you it's not coming from reality either.

1. So, take all that Perfectionism, Workaholism, Type-A Personality behavior, and dump it at the foot of the cross.

2. Silence every self-critical voice right there. Look at Jesus.

3. Picture Jesus being nailed to the Cross for you, so no more cutting, burning, addiction, or abuse.

4. His death washed you clean, so you are worthy of love — end your self-isolation. Exit your exile and step into love.

5. If there's ever a dependency in your life, let be a dependency on Jesus and his Spirit within you, not on drugs, alcohol, prescriptions, or porn. He's the one you can depend on who will never let you down.

6. Because of the cross, you can kiss penance goodbye. It's all been paid for. Same for self-punishment, hyper-religion, or any religion.

L. Hear now, the voice of God to you.

1. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)

M. So, I invite you today, to Step out of Condemnation.

N. I'm going to pray for that for you right now. During that time our worship team will return to the stage, we'll sing one more song, and then we get to move into a time of baptism.