

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Growing up for me, like many people, was not totally straight forward. We moved house every few years, and each new location meant fitting in to a new school, breaking into established friendship groups, dealing with new locations and the general feeling of always being the 'outsider'! For a shy kid lacking confidence this lifestyle certainly held it's challenges! I always seemed to be having to justify myself and recall constantly feeling that anything and everything was 'my fault'. Add to that the challenges of being a practising Christian in peer groups at school where this was not the norm. I just didn't seem to fit in! I'm not complaining, I had a great childhood with loving parents, but life was unsettling - that's just how it was!

I guess many people live with that burden of disapproval or feeling censure because they don't conform to standards, rules and regulations that their immediate social network demands of them. Most of us will live by the law of the land, but for the Jewish Nation, God's chosen, The Law went much further and deeper than conforming to an accepted code of moral conduct. By Jesus' time there were hundreds of laws the people were expected to abide by, most of them made by people who were trying to exert power and control over others. Jesus and his followers were not law breakers but they were law discerners. They would recognise the God given laws. Those that glorified God and honoured his people. But those that burdened the people for the self gratification of the hierarchy were challenged. God never wanted his creation to be weighed down by do's and don'ts but to live in the freedom and confidence of no condemnation. Just as Paul wrote. Man made laws would only ever be as good as the men making them, and conformity to these many laws was detracting the people's focus on God.

In today's reading, Paul was saying that the heavy load of guilt should no longer have power over the people because Jesus' life, death and resurrection had brought in a new way. Now, the spirit has been at work to do what the law had intended to do – to give life, moral life in the present, resurrection life in the future. Yes, we are to be law abiding, but we are not to let the worldly rules and regulations prevent us from living to the fullest potential God created in us. The Holy Spirit has given us a better way! Tom Wright (Paul for Everyone Romans part one) eloquently unpacked this for us - "There is no condemnation, **because** the spirit-law has set you free from the sin-law, **because** God has acted in his son and his spirit to condemn sin and provide life, **because** there are two types of human beings and you are the spirit-type, **because** these two types are heading, respectively, for death and life. There is no condemnation, **because** of all this." Jesus has paid the price and set us free!

The set Gospel for today tells the parable of The Sower. One of the categories of seed was sown among the thorns, representing those who hear the word but who yield nothing because they are choked by the lure of wealth and the cares of the world (Matthew 13:22). I would count those of us who live under condemnation in this category too. The world will always tempt us away from the treasure of a life filled with Christ. The world will always be trying to take us back to a situation that controls through condemnation and censure, but Jesus has broken that power. It is up to us now to choose to live our lives as closely as we may to his example and embrace the words Paul wrote - "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. "