

Romans: God Has Justified Us, So Who Can Condemn Us?

Romans 8:33-34

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you turn with me to Romans, chapter 8. We'll be in the 33rd and 34th verses today. We are continuing in this section of Romans 8, which is the climax of Paul's argument in the first eight chapters of the book. When you get to verses 31 to the end of the chapter, Paul is summing up. He's giving you a grand demonstration in summary of what he has taught you so far. They sum up the main argument of the first eight chapters. And he does it by way of a series of enormous questions. Questions with tremendous significance. The first of those grand questions we saw asked back in verse 31. Who is or can be against us? In other words, if God is for us, all opposition against us is of no account. It doesn't mean that we don't have opposition or enemies, but it does mean that the center having been surprised by the grace of God realizes now that God is for him. And so fears no other. And so the apostle wants to drive home this truth that God is for us in this particular passage. And he does it through this series of four questions. We are going to look at the second of those four questions in the passage today.

But I do want you to look very briefly at verses 33 and 34, and then look down to verses 35 through 39. Because you will notice that in the three questions that are asked from verse 33 to 35, that Paul is basically reinforcing the argument that he made in verses 31 and 32, with two illustrations. One illustration, one that we will look at today in verses 33 and 34 comes from the court of law. It's an illustration drawn out of the law courts to show how much God is for us. Then in verses 35 through 39, the question that is asked in verse 35, gives a relational illustration of how God is for us. Now notice how Paul puts the illustration of the law court side by side with the relational illustration. It's very common in our own day to set in opposition a pattern and illustration in the word which are in fact complimentary. And sometimes we will hear people say, well, I want a God who is relational, not a God who is legal. Well, in fact, Paul gives both a legal and a relational illustration here at the end of Romans 8, precisely to comfort our souls. And we don't want one or the other, we want both. And so we see a beautiful illustration of how this forensic or judicial or legal metaphor or illustration comes to the aid of Christians wrestling with a sense of continuing sin, and fearing potential condemnation. He'll give a relational illustration to buttress it, but the two

illustrations basically affirm the same message. They are not in opposition to one another; they are complimentary to one another.

Now with that as illustration, or as introduction, let's then look to God's Holy Word here in Romans, chapter 8.

"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the One who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes rather who was raised, who was at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, this is Your word. Bring home its truth to us that we might grow in grace and praise Your name, both now and forever more. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Many of you struggle with knowing, with experiencing, with really existentially embracing the benefits of God's redemption. We talk about the benefits of God's redemption, and by His grace we really do believe them. But sometimes it's very, very hard to really know, or experience or feel those realities. Many of you struggle with assurance. Many of you struggle with a sense of God's love. You don't feel forgiven. Your heart is flooded with a thousand accusations. You believe the truth of *Shorter Catechism* 36. I know you all remember it, but why don't you pick your hymnals and turn to page 872. That's not a hymn, that's a page number. The back of your hymnal, look at question 36. It asks, "What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification?" And it says, "The benefits which in this life." Notice *in this life*, not sometime later, but "in this life do accompany and flow from justification, adoption and sanctification are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace and perseverance therein to the end." And we believe it. We really do, and we rejoice in it. But sometimes it is so hard to say that those realities have really gotten through. Assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit. There are some circumstances in life which are inimical to those things. Some of us carry baggage from our backgrounds which makes it very hard for those things to ever get through. Paul knows that. That's why he's writing this passage. Paul wants believers to be awash in the sense of God's love, assured of His grace, completely aware of the reality that He is for them in ways that transcends comprehending. So what do you do about it? You struggle with assurance. You are not fully aware of God's love. You fear God's rejection, perhaps His condemnation. What can you do about it? Where can you go for relief? Of course, the first and greatest answer to that is to God Himself. But how do you go to God with this? In His word. Paul's waiting for you, you see. He's waiting for you right here in this passage with yet another strengthening word of consolation. And here's the word. No one can successfully accuse and convict you, because God Himself has shown that He is

for you by justifying you. He has acquitted. So who else out there is going to convict? He has freed you from pardon and penalty. He has pardoned you and given you freedom from penalty. Who is it who is going to condemn you?

That's Paul message. And he brings it home from two perspectives in these little verses. In verse 33 he wants to show you how God the Father is for you. In verse 34 he wants to show how what God the Son has done for you, assured that God is for you. But in both verses he is looking to bring home the same point from different perspectives. He's wanting to give you a certain answer to your fear and your sense of guilt and the fear of accusation in verse 33, by pointing you to the Father's love, and to the Father's justification. In verse 34, he wants to give you an answer to your fear of condemnation by pointing to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's look at these two verses together today and see these two great comforts that Paul has for us.

I. Every consolation of this life flows from God's fatherly kindness and His free justification.

First of all, he says in verse 33, asking a question. "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies." This is the second of four grand questions that Paul asks from verse 31 to 35. We'll see the third of those grand questions in the very next verse. In this question, Paul is relating to the statement that He had made back in Romans, chapter 3, verse 19. You remember where he had said that all the world was found guilty and accountable before God? He, after making that grand argument from Romans 1:18 all the way to 3:19 had demonstrated that the whole world was accountable, liable to punishment, justly under the condemnation of God. And in contrast to that, here he says no one can bring you a charge. No one can charge successfully the elect? Why? Because if we have been freed by God's grace from the guilt of condemnation about which Paul spoke in Romans 3:19, what other charge can be brought. And if God Himself is the One who has freed us from that charge, who is going to appeal this to a higher court? What person or being in the universe greater than God is going to reintroduce this charge? And so the apostle says this in order to give us a sense of how much God is for us. And behind these words are that marvelous passage that we just read earlier in the service from Isaiah 50, verses 8 and 9. I couldn't have planned this if I had tried. Months ago we were on the chart to read through Isaiah. Months ago. And who knew where we were going to end up working through Romans. And here they coincide. Because behind Romans 8:33 is Isaiah 50, verses 8 and 9. Turn with me there. This is an incredibly important passage. Isaiah 50, verses 8 and 9 are part of that servant's song. In other words, they are part of that passage in which Isaiah records God's prophetic word about the servant, the suffering servant, the servant of the Lord, the Messiah. The incarnate Lord Jesus Christ come to redeem His people. And this is the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ in Isaiah 50, verses 8 and 9, speaking about Himself. Look what He says. "He who vindicates

Me is near. Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other. Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me. Behold, the Lord God helps Me. Who is He who condemns Me?" Now the apostle Paul takes that servant song, which Isaiah puts in the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ, as a word of confidence in the Lord. Even though the world rejects Him, even though He comes and His own receive Him not, yet He knows the Lord will vindicate Him, even though He is condemned to death by the religious leaders of His own people, yet he knows the Lord will vindicate Him by resurrecting Him. And so the Lord Jesus speaks.

But the apostle goes back to these words, these words that Christ, as it were, is speaking about Himself, and He applies them to you and me. Now that's an amazing move, isn't it? But you remember that Paul intimately understood the doctrine of union with Christ and not only from studying it in the scriptures, but from experience. You see in Acts, chapter 7, when Stephen was stoned. Paul had stood by holding the cloaks. He had been involved in the persecution and death of Stephen, the great martyr of the church. And when Paul was met by the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, you remember what Christ said to him? "Saul, Saul, why did you persecute Stephen?" No, that's not what He said. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" You see, the believer is united to the Lord Jesus Christ, and you touch the apple of the Lord Jesus Christ's eye, and you touch Him. So the apostle Paul knew from experience that what happens to the Master, happens to the disciple, and so he takes hold of this servant song in which Jesus speaks about the Lord God vindicating Him, and he applies it to you.

Now what's the significance of that? Well, there are a thousand of them. But here this one. Paul is not saying here that God is for you. Let me show how God is for you. You've got God to judge on judgment day. Satan, the accuser comes, he brings a charge against you, and then Jesus, the defense attorney, comes in, steps in-between and pleads with His heavenly Father to acquit you. That's not Paul's picture.

What's Paul's picture? Paul's picture is that the judge and the justifier is the heavenly Father. God the Father is for you, because He is your Justifier. He will vindicate you just as the Son had confidence that the Father would vindicate Him. This is so important to understand, because this is indeed usually our picture. What do we do to persuade our fears of condemnation on judgment day? We think of the fact that we have an advocate with the Father, and that is true, but we draw a wrong deduction from that particular truth. The deduction that we draw is that somehow Jesus has to get the Father on our side. And that's not Paul's picture at all. First of all, Paul generally likes to talk about Jesus as the Judge. Secondly, Paul's explicit emphasis here is that God, the Father, is the Justifier.

So here's the picture. It's the final day of judgment, and we stand before the bar of justice, and the accuser, the evil one, Satan, hurls, slings arrows and accusations at us, just like he did to Job; just like he's done to God's people all

along. And what's worse? Those accusations ring so true. We've known those accusations somewhere before, and it is not that Jesus Christ steps in and begs the Father to love and to forgive. It is that the Judge from the seat says I dismiss all the charges. This man, this woman is free. I am for him. The deck is stacked. The Judge of the court is the Justifier. It's the Judge from the bench who speaks as the defender as the justifier, as the acquitter. That's the picture. Paul wants you to see how much God is for you. It's God the Father who is for you. Every consolation of this life flows from God's fatherly kindness and from His free justification.

Calvin has a beautiful sentence describing the truth of this passage. He says the first and chief consolation of the godly in adversity is to be persuaded for certain of the fatherly kindness of God. And that is precisely what Paul wants you to see. Paul wants you to see that the judge is also the Father who is for you and the Justifier of His people. You know, we so often try and make God a little more approachable, a little less frightening. We will hear religious leaders attempt to scale down the reality of God as Judge. You know they will say things like this, God isn't a judge, He's a Father. Or they will say things like this, God isn't a hanging Judge. You know, indicating that maybe He grades on the curve. He allows things to slide, sort of slip in a pardon here, even though you don't deserve it. That's not how Paul comforts you about God. Paul's comfort to you is this: Our God is like no hanging judge that you've ever known. He's the most compassionate God of straight and upright justice that you could possibly imagine. He is a God who is strict in His justice, and is more compassionate than you can ever imagine. And He metes out His judgment in such a way that His mercy is visited upon you. And He visits His mercy upon you in such a way that His justice is not denied, but rather glorified. That's how Paul raises before your eyes a God who can be approached, not by downplaying His justice for judgment; but by saying alongside of His justice and judgment, you must also learn about this the one true God. That His mercies are new every morning and His faithfulness is great. Well, there's his first word of comfort to you. How is it that the believer can take in this assurance that He will not be condemned, because the judge is for you. He's the justifier.

II. The grounds of our confidence of salvation: the justice of God, the vindication of Christ, His heavenly rule, for us.

Secondly, he then wants to press home the reality that this judgment of God, this acquittal that God visits on us is just. You see, if we don't believe that what God does in justification is just, we'll always question our justification. If we think that God is somehow letting us off the hook, and that the due penalty of sin is not being dealt with, we will always question our justification. But the apostle goes on in verse 34 to make it clear that we have a four-fold ground of confidence of our salvation. And that confidence is in the justice of God, the vindication of Christ, the heavenly rule of Christ, and in the heavenly rule of Christ for us.

Look at what he says, asking this third question. Who is he who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died the death of Christ. Yes, rather who was raised. The resurrection and vindication of Christ who is at the right hand of God. The session of Christ, the heavenly rule of Christ who also intercedes for us, the heavenly intercession of Christ for us. These four grounds give us confidence of our salvation.

You see in verse 34, you're meeting the third grand question of Romans 8, 31 through 35. Who was the one who condemns? This question relates to what Paul taught you in Romans, chapter 6, verse 23. You remember that? What is the wage of sin? Death. The wages of sin are death. That's the penalty of sin. It's the due penalty of sin. It's the right penalty of sin. That's what sin deserves. That's what sin will get without divine intervention.

Now the apostle says, how is it that a person stands before God on judgment day, and doesn't fear that? Because we know that what we have done warrants that. We know that what we have done merits that penalty. How is it then that you can face your Judge and Maker unafraid? Four words of confidence. First, Christ Jesus is He who died. Here we see the judicial substitutionary death of Christ. Paul is pointing us to the costly justice of God. And he is saying the costly justice of God secures you. It gives you security standing before the Lord. Think of it my friends. If you have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, and if the Lord Jesus Christ has died bearing the due penalty for your sin, what is the Bible's answer to this question? Is it just for God to bring to bear the punishment of satisfaction of His justice upon those for whom Christ has died. And the answer is absolutely not. God cannot punish those whose sins have already been dealt with in Jesus Christ by His own decree. So the apostle is saying, look at who died? The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of His love. He died. Those for whom He died will never, ever face the wrath of God in His satisfaction because the Son has faced the wrath of God in His satisfaction for them. And, therefore, you have every ground that you will not be condemned.

But He's not finished. In fact, his next phrase is, how much more? He says yes, rather, how much more? Christ Jesus who was raised. He's pointing to the vindicating resurrection of Jesus Christ, the raised and vindicated Lord Jesus secures us. You know in the New Testament the resurrection isn't something sort of tacked on at the end of Jesus' death as an afterthought. It was one of the central events of redemption. And it doesn't just show that Jesus was divine, or let us know that our sins have been forgiven. It is fundamental, it vindicates the claims and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It shows the heavenly Father's acceptance of His work on our behalf. It recognizes His divinity. It is essential for our salvation. And the apostle Paul is saying, the fact that God has raised Him from the dead, and that we serve a resurrected and living Lord, secures us when we contemplate the final judgment of God.

Thirdly, he goes on to say that this resurrected and vindicated Lord, this One who was raised is at the right hand of God. Paul says, think of the heavenly session. When that phrase *right hand of God* comes to mind, Psalms 110 comes to mind. And we think of the one who said, "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool." This speaks of the sovereignty and dominion of Christ. When we say that Christ is seated at the right hand, we are talking about the fact that God has made Him to be sovereign and exercise dominion over the universe for His people. Think of how Paul emphasizes this. He has been put over all things, He says in Colossians. Now Paul says this. You fear condemnation, the One in whom you trust is sovereign in His dominion over all things. But the best is yet to come. Because He's not only sovereign in dominion over all things, He is sovereign in dominion over all things for you.

Look at the next phrase. He intercedes for us. That is very important for you to understand. You shouldn't have a picture of Jesus somehow pleading in prayer for His Father to bless His people. That picture is wrong from two perspectives. It's wrong from one perspective because it doesn't do justice to the status and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is seated at the right hand of the heavenly Father. In other words, He is the power in the universe. His dominion and authority is unquestioned. It also doesn't do justice because it pictures the Father as someone who is not involved in His people's salvation. And He's already on their side. He's already justified them. He's already given them the Son.

So what's the picture there? That He ever lives to intercede. That He intercedes for us. Here's the picture. Christ rules providence for the good of His people. Now go back and think what Paul told you in Romans 8:28. And you correlate it with what Paul is telling you in Romans 8:34. He's telling you that every time you think of the truth that "all things work together for the good of those who love God and who are called according to His purpose" you remember that the One who works all things together for good *is* the Lord Jesus Christ. Who, in His sovereign dominion is at the right hand ruling the world by His word and Spirit, so that individually and personally and specifically and comprehensibly everything in your experience works for your good. That is what Paul is saying. He's saying, in light of that what possible fear can you have of condemnation? Think by the way of the contrast. In the *Apostle's Creed* we say that Christ died and was raised and sits at the right hand and what? Comes to judge. Now notice the Pauline emphasis in this passage. Paul emphasizes all four of those things. But here it's Christ died and was raised and sits at the right hand and not comes to judge but intercedes. What is Paul reminding you? The judge, Jesus Christ who will indeed come to judge. Paul himself says this in Romans 2. Christ is coming to judge the world. But the judge is interceding for you. The judge is on your side. How can you fear condemnation?

You know all of us from time to time we face our sins, and when we face our sins, there is a certain tendency to tremble and to fear condemnation. And those times when some of my severest detractors have spoken to me face to face and

made me aware of my own sins. I must confess to you my friends, I've had to think inside. You don't know the half of it. You don't know the half of it. And that fear, that fear robs us of that great and full assurance of salvation and assurance of God's love that He wants His people to experience. And when that fear comes, the apostle is waiting, and he is saying this. Who can bring a charge against the elect? God is the one who justifies, and Christ Jesus is the one whose blood and sovereignty guarantees that that verdict will never, ever, ever be anything other than not guilty.

You know in this life whether we are accused rightly or wrongly, there is always a pall of guilt that attaches in our own minds we can never get away from. But when this verdict is finally written, then given, we will be rid forever of the least smidgen of fear of rejection by the sovereign God. Because in Him we are more than conquerors. Let us pray.

Our Lord and our God, the realities of Your word is so grand that they are hard to believe. But You mean us to believe them. By the grace of Your Spirit, bring these truths home. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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