

Who can Condemn? It is Christ that Died

24th August 1988

“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” Romans 8:34

It is needful to notice first who these persons are that the apostle speaks of as ‘us’ including himself with the rest. They are indeed just that number of persons whom God has been pleased to call by his grace according to his purposes; that is as to the manifestation, the realisation and the enjoyment of the blessing. These words are applicable to all from Adam’s day down to this and all to the end of the world who are called by God’s grace, being loved of God and the called according to his purpose.

It is a wonderful mercy if you and I can see our calling, if we have some sweet and blessed evidences in our poor hearts that God has been gracious to us in separating us out from the world and from the rest of mankind by that divine act of the Spirit in quickening into divine life and calling by effectual grace. This is a Scriptural evidence and proof of a person having been chosen of God before the foundation of the world and an elect vessel of mercy. This brings such within the bounds of the sweet words in the precious verse: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth,” and then the first words of our text: ‘Who is he that condemneth?’

Well, it is these same persons who are blessed with life in their souls and the communication of a principle of grace, that effectual call, who only and alone know what it is to be distressed, troubled, afflicted, cast down and well-nigh in despair on account of the condemnation they feel and those things which are spoken of them and in them in a way of laying much to their charge. But in these words we have a question as well as a challenge. ‘Who is he that condemneth?’ If God has justified and if we are interested in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ and his death, then who is he that can bring a charge or an accusation? Who can bring condemnation against one of these justified characters? For as we have in the first verse in this chapter, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

I will attempt to notice those who do condemn God's people and somewhat of those things for which they are condemned, for which there is indeed an absolute, complete and perfect answer in those words: 'It is Christ that died.' Not only is it so, but there is the effectual working out of the wonderful effects of his finished work by him who is at God's right hand making intercession for his people.

Who is he that condemneth? There are those who condemn unjustly, falsely, and in a way of perjury and slander. There are also those who indeed may bring just accusations against God's people, yet their condemnation, though right, is answered in this one great and important fact: 'It is Christ that died.' This answer puts away every accusation and every charge that may or could be brought against God's people. There may be those, indeed, who condemn the people of God—these persons called by grace—charging them with hypocrisy, with error, with a false profession, with many things brought in a way of calumny and of false accusation. There are many voices that are ever ready to do this, within as well as without. God's people may have heaped upon them many charges. Yet there are those who bring just accusations against God's people, from which they cannot possibly be relieved and delivered, but by this one way spoken of in our text. 'Who is he that condemneth?'

Moses brings in bills exceeding large. The law of God can do no other or less but bring charges against us and condemn us utterly for our transgressions and trespasses. These are just accusations. Satan, the accuser of the brethren, lays much to their charge. He loses no opportunity to bring things which fill the heart with apprehension, sorrow and distress, condemning them for those thoughts and feelings and intentions which are so obviously evil and sinful in the sight of God—sins against the gospel, the truth of God, his Word, his will; unbelief, blasphemy, envy, pride, idolatry and a multitude of other things that lay heavy upon the heart by reason of the guilt and condemnation they cause. There might be a multitude of seasons throughout our lives and through a single day when conscience accuses. The hymn writer says,

Should conscience accuse us, as oft-times it may,
Here's blood that can take its defilement away.

(Gadsby's 1097)

The apostle speaks of our own hearts condemning us, and they may have many reasons for so doing. "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart." (1 John 3:20) How many times there are in the experience of a child of God, whose conscience is tender and who possesses the fear of God, when he has cause to hold up both his hands and plead guilty! Condemnation by Satan, the law, conscience,

men and his own heart; condemnation by the Word of God that searches him and tries him, and causes him to feel condemned. But now all these accusations and all these condemnations may be thoroughly removed by that wonderful matter being known and experienced—God's justification of the sinner. No condemnation! Not one accusation, but that perfect, complete and absolute justification in the sight of God. We have this illustrated in the experience of many in the Word of God, when the Lord was pleased to pardon them freely and to show them the way in which he could be just and still be the justifier of the ungodly.

Now if this is our case—if we are called by grace and if indeed Christ has died for our sins—these words are sweet and blessed: ‘Who is he that condemneth?’ If God justifies, who can condemn? If God has freely pardoned, who can lay sin to that person’s charge? “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity...” (Psalm 32:1-2) That is an amazing truth, a most wonderful blessing. Two persons may live together, two persons may sit together, two persons may walk together. God’s justice imputes sin to one and does not impute sin to the other. He is just in both matters. One is cleared, the other condemned; one is pardoned, the other is not; and why is it that the one who is justified and pardoned should be so justified and pardoned? For this simple reason, Christ has died for that one person and not for the other.

Well then, the great and important point is, ‘It is Christ that died,’ and to have the sweet and blessed experience of this wrought in our own poor hearts, that when he thus laid down his life he did so to make atonement for my sin and for your sin.

Let us look at this amazing truth in regard to the person who died. None less than Jesus Christ, God’s eternal Son, took upon himself our nature and thus, being in a suitable and proper condition to be a substitute, laid down his life. The effect, efficacy, merit and wonderful power of the death of Christ is by reason of the glory and dignity of his person. O that we might be given a faith’s glimpse of the glory of Jesus Christ, the person who died, shedding his blood, laying down his life for his people! This death of the Lord Jesus Christ was not for himself but was on the account and behalf of that people whom God had loved and chosen and will call in due season—every one of them. His death was substitutionary. Glorious doctrine! It was one in place of another. It was vicarious and representative; it was on the account and behalf of others that Christ laid down his life. He is the true paschal lamb; he answers to that type of the red heifer upon whose head the

transgressor should lay his hand, indicating the laying of his sins upon a substitutionary sacrifice, as Christ was for his people.

My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine;
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.

My soul looks back to see
The burdens thou didst bear,
When hanging on the accursed tree,
And hopes her guilt was there.

(Gadsby's 125)

'It is Christ that died.' God's eternal and co-equal Son in our nature. Here we have the boundless, infinite and incomprehensible merit, worth and efficacy of his death. My friends, it is a blessed truth and a wonderful fact that sin is actually, really, justly and properly put away. It is put away. Jesus died that this should be the case and that God should be as manifestly infinitely just as he is holy. He cannot and never will condemn and punish sin twice. Sin has been condemned in the flesh of Christ and he has borne the punishment. There is no condemnation to the people of God. 'Who is he that condemneth?' "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." (v. 3) Sin was imputed to him, and sin having been condemned and punished, God justifies the sinner. 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.' He has died and by his death he has absolutely and completely put away the guilt and sin of his people; there is no condemnation. 'Who is he that condemneth?'

Now, when our hearts and our consciences are troubled and distressed (as doubtless they are frequently and often with those who are tender in the fear of God) on account of their oft-committed sins—besetting sins, guilt, transgression, worldliness, wanderings, backslidings, darkness, death, wretchedness, filth and sin all lying heavy upon the conscience—O, where is the sinner to find relief and help and deliverance? By taking his case to the Advocate at God's right hand and seeking that this precious and blessed person would plead his cause before the majesty of heaven and that the words might sweetly be fulfilled in his experience—

For our acceptance pleads his own,
And proves our cause completely good. (*Gadsby's 1107*)

But just a little further. 'It is Christ that died.' When he laid down his life God then declared a complete, absolute and final forgiveness of all the sins of the elect.

There and then it was accomplished, sin was put away. ‘Who is he that condemneth?’ The devil has no right, Moses and the law no longer any authority to condemn, conscience and our hearts have no just cause for condemnation, because those sins have been propitiated for. ‘Who is he that condemneth?’

What a blessed mercy if we are brought by the Holy Spirit’s teaching and grace to know something of it! Peace with God, perfect peace—if we are made to know and feel there is nothing between our poor soul and God but peace and justification through the love, blood and merit of the Lord Jesus Christ!

‘It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again.’ In the resurrection we have, and can have no greater, more sweet and blessed proof of the absolute satisfaction of the finished work of Christ, the perfection of his sacrifice, the perfection of his obedience. This is the proof of it; this is the Father’s manifest approval of the person and that work which he accomplished on the behalf and account of poor sinners. ‘He was raised again for our justification.’ (Romans 4:25) The resurrection was a plain, clear and unquestionable demonstration that divine justice was satisfied and appeased. Through the finished work of Christ—his blood and his substitutionary death—the whole church was totally justified. This blessed person is a living Saviour. He ever liveth. ‘Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him.’ (Hebrews 7:25)

The apostle has written these words: ‘For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.’ (Romans 5:10) Now this blessed person has risen again and he is able to save us by his life from all those things which do so distress, oppress, weigh us down, the many things which lay upon our hearts as a burden and weight in guilt and condemnation through freshly contracted transgressions and backsliding. He has risen again. One of the sweetest proofs of this that we have in our own hearts and conscience is to feel his presence and to hear his voice and to feel the influence of his love and to know something of that sweet and blessed communion which is possible between a living soul and a living Saviour. That is our personal proof that he has risen again, ever liveth, and that indeed he is ever living at the right hand of the Father to carry on his work above.

The next point in regard to this most precious and altogether lovely person who is risen again is that he is even at the right hand of God. O for faith to be given us in exercise to sweetly believe this precious truth, that this same Jesus is at the right hand of God! Well, let us try and look at it a little first as to the person himself. It is this same Jesus that died and rose again, not another. He has that same human nature that he took into possession and indissoluble union with his Godhead,

formed in the womb of the virgin. He is that same glorious man who dwelt here below, who passed through this world, "A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53:3) He who manifested himself to be the sinner's friend, the helper of the helpless, the strength of the needy, the deliverer of the oppressed, that same Jesus who hung upon the cross, who bled and died there, is now at the right hand of God—this same Jesus.

A Man there is, a real man,
With wounds still gaping wide,
From which rich streams of blood once ran,
In hands, and feet, and side. (Gadsby's 23)

The glorious, all-sufficient and precious person in our nature at the right hand of God did not ascend for himself or by himself, but as the covenant Head and representative of his people. He is sat down now at the right hand of God upon his mediatorial throne. The right hand of God is the place of power and authority, for all power is given him in heaven and in earth. He possesses that rightful sceptre and majesty and glorious authority which is properly and essentially his and is given him of the Father. This authority is exercised on the account and behalf of all his people, and among the many other exercises of this power and authority there is that one which is sweet and sensible and comfortable to us;

But with authority he asks,
Enthroned in glory now. *(Gadsby's 117)*

Whilst he was here below, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, burdened, tried, tempted, distressed, knowing so painfully every sinless infirmity of human nature, he was a suppliant, he spent whole nights in prayer upon the mountain top, calling upon God. But now with authority he asks, he has every authority and right to demand salvation for all that come to God by him. He is no longer a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but is an ascended, glorified, triumphant Saviour and friend. O how glorious, how sufficient, how suitable he is! He spoke to John on the Isle of Patmos, and may he speak to us those comfortable words, “Fear not ... I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” (Revelation 1:17-18) This is his authority and his power now that he is at the right hand of God.

Another point in regard to this is his acceptance. The proof and the demonstration of his acceptance by God the Father is that he is at his right hand, and the point of comfort and sweetness is this—Jesus is accepted as the Head of his people. They are accepted because he is accepted; they are received because he

is received; they are approved of because he is approved, for he and they are but one. Christ and his church are in union and this is a sweet and blessed matter; he is at the right hand of God.

Another aspect of this wonderful fact is that the Church of God, those who are called by grace, those who are brought to believe and trust in this precious person only and alone for salvation, have a real friend in heaven at the right hand of God. A friend who sticketh fast, a friend who changeth not and a friend who is immutable and boundless in his grace and goodness. O I do wish that oftentimes I could receive this blessed truth in the love of it and to the comfort of my heart more sweetly, that Christ is the friend of sinners! Easy words to utter, but O, my friends, to be enabled to receive and believe it! The sinner's Friend: "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." (Luke 15:2) This friend, this faithful friend who has manifested and demonstrated his love by suffering, bleeding and dying for his people, is at the right hand of God. The poor, needy sinner has got a friend at court, one who will undertake his case and cause. The same precious person who manifested such pity, compassion, kindness and goodness whilst he was here below—he who healed poor sinners of their diseases and delivered them from their distresses and who, on more than one occasion forgave their sin—is now at God's right hand. To one he said, "Daughter, be of good comfort;" (Matthew 19:22) to another, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," (Mark 2:5) and to another, "Hath no man condemned thee? ... Neither do I condemn thee," (John 8:10-11) and so on. These things are the communication of his sweet, powerful and tender kindness such as we have in our text. There is no condemnation. They were forgiven and justified through the merit and efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ.

Now this same person who is ever at the right hand of God, the Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, is the ever-living advocate and intercessor. In this particular point regarding the person and his offices and precious work, what a marvellous, suitable and wonderful provision this is for us! I would just notice the necessity of it as well as the blessedness of it. You and I need an intercessor, we need a mediator, we need an advocate—and there is one on the right hand of God. The God with whom we have to do is a holy God, so righteous, so just and so full of majesty and glory that it is impossible, utterly impossible, that we should find any way of approach apart from the mediator. How can we draw near to such a holy God? If we consider the character and nature and greatness of God in an abstract way, how dare we attempt, think or presume to draw near to such a great and holy God as he is? We need a mediator, and God has provided one.

The other reason is, because we are such sinners, so vile, guilty, and filthy. How can we approach a holy God? But here is the way that God has both provided and revealed, a new and living way. Those words of the hymn writer are very sweet:

'Tis he, instead of me, is seen,
When I approach to God.

(Gadsby's 119)

If this be the fact—and it is the fact with all God's people—then they may approach and they will find access and acceptance. God will look upon them in compassion and pity.

Whoe'er believes aright
In Christ's atoning blood,
Of all his guilt's acquitted quite,
And may draw near to God.

(Gadsby's 311)

O, there is a mediator, there is an advocate! “And if any man sin” (not an ‘if’ of doubt. O no! For what man is there that does not sin?) “And if any man sin, he is the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 2:1-2) May we be given but a sweet faith’s glimpse of Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God, a mediator, an intercessor, an advocate, a friend; yea, he who is his people’s righteousness! He is their great High Priest at the right hand of God even now. At this moment he is there; O yes, he is there, ever living to make intercession for all that come unto God by him. By virtue of this, he is able, and indeed, he is as willing as he is able, to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. It is he who presents the persons, prayers, confessions and supplications of his people—they are made acceptable through the sweet savour of the incense of his own merits.

This blessed fact we have set before us in the ceremonial dispensation. The appointed high priest, the typical high priest, entered into the holiest of all with blood, coals from the altar, and much incense, and the cloud filled the holy of holies and enveloped the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:12-13). All which sets forth both the efficacy and the sweet savour of the sacrifice of Christ, which God has said is a sweet smell to him, a sweet savour, acceptable on the behalf and account of poor sinners.

Now he ever liveth before God and is ever at the right hand of God to make intercession for us. What do we understand by intercession? It is one person speaking on the account and behalf of another. It is for one person to undertake the cause and the case of another and plead that cause and case successfully. It is for a person to represent the case of another before the majesty of heaven, and he who does this for sinners, is none other and no less than Jesus himself.

What is the reason for the success, the prevalence and the authority of this intercession? Why, it is the dignity and goodness of the intercessor and the sufficiency, glory and merit of his finished work. That which he pleads is the value, the efficacy, of his own atonement.

Points to their names upon his breast,
And spreads his wounded hands. (Gadsby's 117)

Just as certainly and as surely as the high priest of old entered the holy of holies with the names of the tribes of Israel upon his breast and shoulders, so Christ bears the names of all his people upon the shoulder of his power and the bosom of his love, and he represents every coming sinner in the realms of glory.

Let us look, then at this: "Who also maketh intercession for us." A blessed provision! Has the Holy Spirit taught us our need of an advocate, a mediator, and an intercessor? Do we know what it is, sometimes, to come to the place of the closing of mouths? Are we among those who are dumb, have no excuse, have no self-justification, cannot attempt to palliate the heinousness of our guilt, so that we are in the condition suitable for the intercessor to undertake, as we have in the type of King Solomon in Proverbs: "Open thy mouth for the dumb, in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction?" (Proverbs 31:8) This is exactly what Jesus does. That is his office, his precious work. He is an intercessor at the right hand of God. O, may we be enabled, as the hymn writer speaks, to—

Give him, my soul, thy cause to plead,
Nor doubt the Father's grace! *(Gadsby's 121)*

This blessed intercessor will make the cause of every one of his people completely good. It is with authority he asks—

And now thou in thy kingdom art,
Dear Lord, remember me. (Gadsby's 117)

O, how prevalent, always successful, blessedly suitable is the intercession of the Advocate, the Mediator! He is altogether lovely and suitable and sweet. O, may we be brought to know him more and better in our own heart's experience and be enabled to venture just as we are, no matter how condemned we feel, and walk in that experience, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!" (1 John 1:9) "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John 2:1)

May we know him, love him and trust him and be enabled unreservedly to commit our cause and case into his glorious hand! “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25) He ever lives to save them from their sin, to save them from their guilt, to save them from their oppression, to save them from their desert, and to save them from the love and power of sin. He is a most able and willing Saviour, ever living to intercede.

The Lord grant us a knowledge and experience of this truth.

Amen.