

## **If Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ for Us, Who Can Stand Against Us?** **Romans 8:33-34**

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We have this Sunday in Romans 8 and we finish the grand chapter in two Sundays. The Apostle Paul is bringing the threads of all that he has said so far in Romans together here in the last portion of Romans 8. What does he say is the conclusion of all this? Realize he could have gone any number of directions, but his pastoral heart shines through as he brings the great doctrines of the gospel to application where we need it most. Assurance. Confidence. Security in God's purpose to save us forever. Let me read this whole section. Our attention is on verses 33-34:

*"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31–39 ESV)*

The pinnacle is verses 35 and following, in light of all that God has done, what can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Answer: nothing.

The step that prepares us for that pinnacle step is verses 33-34. In 35 he asks, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* In verses 33-34 he asks, *what can separate us from Christ's saving work for us? What can separate us from our justification? What can separate us from our freedom from guilt?* His answer is to grasp who declares us righteous and who accomplished it for us.

### **If God Declares Us Righteous, Who Can Declare Us Unrighteous?**

*"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?" (Romans 8:33-34)*

Most of my adult life I have read from either the ESV or NIV English translations. I have always hit a speedbump as I read this verse because it seems odd that the answer to *"Who is to condemn?"* is Jesus. Now we could say he's making the point that if God doesn't condemn—as he is the one who justifies—the only person left to condemn is Jesus. But wait, he died for us. We may get to heaven and find out that's correct. However, it seems better to me to go with the NASB translation which includes *who is to condemn* in the flow of v. 33. So, we could read it, *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies, so who can condemn us?*

Let's define our terms here before we see what it all means. *"Who shall bring any charge?"* "Charge" here is in the legal sense. Somebody may be arrested for something and they will

say, *they have been charged with such and such*. It doesn't mean they have been found guilty yet, just that charges are being made. It's an accusation legally made.

With God there are no investigations or discoveries. God knows everything about everybody and sees it all through the lens of perfect justice. So, this isn't what we call false charges or trumped up charges. These are real moral accusations that stick.

Who shall bring any charge that sticks against God's **elect**? "Elect" is tied to election which we saw a few weeks ago is God's foreknowing and foreloving those whom he will save. So "elect" is shorthand for all the redeemed. All the truly saved.

*"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who **justifies**."* There's that ever-present gospel truth in Romans again, justification. Declared righteous. God's declaration over the sinner that in his legal determination we are righteous, and his promise is to treat us as righteous as Jesus forever and ever. It is a legal declaration of right standing or innocence in our position before God. Are we actually righteous in the way we live? Nowhere near where we should be. How can God declare us righteous? Because of the righteousness of Jesus imputed or given to us by faith.

It is **God** who justifies. If salvation was a human construct, we would be fearful that, like the house built on sand, the whole thing could come crashing down. But who is doing the justifying? Who is it that has declared us righteous? The highest court in the land. The highest authority, God himself. If God declares us righteous, who can undo it or overrule him?

Remember, Paul is writing to the Roman church where the Roman judiciary system was highly advanced with levels of courts and governors and with one ultimately high authority, the Roman emperor Caesar himself.

This plays a huge part in Paul's own story. Paul was a citizen of Rome, a very significant status. Our country is embroiled in a citizenship debate and who qualifies. Citizenship was different in Rome. Not everybody who lived in the Roman empire was a Roman citizen. Most were not. With few exceptions, there were two ways to become an official Roman citizen; you had to be born to a mother and father who were both Roman citizens or pay an enormous fee which most people could not afford.

In Acts 25, Paul has been under arrest for two years and is tried by King Festus, a regional king. Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar himself. This was a right only Roman citizens had to make their case personally to the emperor. Why does that matter? If Caesar declares you not guilty then it doesn't matter what any lower court or judge or governor has ruled. There was no human authority higher than Caesar.

*Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?* The answer? Lots of people bring charges against God's people. Let's take a look at a few of them.

### **Satan the accuser**

*"And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."  
(Revelation 12:10)*

Satan slandered Job. Satan slandered God in the garden temptation. Satan is a slanderer. Could it be that Satan has slandered you by name to God Almighty? It's possible. Does the accusation of the highest demon alter our status before God? No.

*"There is never the danger that Satan with all his cleverness and wiliness will be able to come forward one day and produce a clause that brings me under condemnation. God knows it all infinitely better than even Satan does. God knows all about the Law in its every detail, comma and jot and tittle, so nothing and no one shall ever be able to bring this charge against God's elect."* (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones)<sup>1</sup>

## **The law of God**

Sin is any violation of God's law in action or intent. The law condemns us, and it should because we violate it all day long. We sin. We are sinners by nature and action. Do the accusations of the law stick? No.

*"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."* (Romans 8:2)

Through union with Christ we are under a new jurisdiction. A new law. The law of the Spirit under which we are free from condemnation.

## **Our conscience**

I will come back to this in the end, but I think this is a huge problem, particularly if you struggle with perfectionism or legalism. Our consciences will scream at us that we are guilty, and apart from God's grace, our conscience is right. Or a weak conscience will tell us we are guilty for doing something that violates our conscience even if God doesn't care about it. This is the struggle of the legalist who is not only trying to obey God's law but man-made laws too. The result is living like we are perpetually losing when we are by grace winning in God's eyes. What do we say to this?

*"For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God."* (1 John 3:20-21)

## **Other people**

If we escape Satan, the law, and our conscience, there is no escaping the accusations of others. If we live any resemblance to a Christian life, other people will condemn us. It may be our beliefs which are out of step with societal beliefs, it may be our lifestyle which is at odds with the moral choices of people around us, it may be our inconsistencies which family and those close to us see. This all results in condemnations that sound like, *you are a hypocrite, you are a bigot, you are holier than thou, you are a Bible thumper, who are you to tell me what's right? etc.*

Who can bring any charge against God's elect? Lots of humans, demons, laws and conscience. They can, and they will.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, p. 410.

What do we do when they do? Like Paul, we appeal to Caesar. We appeal to the highest authority and the only opinion that matters forever, God's. *God, who do you say that I am? What is my status? Is what they are saying how you see me?*

*"It is God who justifies."* (Romans 8:33) God declares us innocent. If God's judgment is for us, whose charges can stand against us? Here is the Bible's answer to our worry that we may get to heaven and find out that something went awry, something was missed, something is brought up at the last second and we are judged guilty and sentenced to hell. Can that happen to God's elect? Can that happen to God's justified? Unequivocally no!

### **If Jesus \_\_\_\_\_ for Us, Who Can Stand Against Us?**

*"Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."* (Romans 8:34)

This may be the most beautiful, succinct Christological statement in the New Testament. This is itself an important reminder of where our souls must go when life is hard, or our faith is shaken. Paul doesn't seek to assure us by encouraging us to look to our experiences or our feelings or even the church or pastors over us. He grounds the believer's security in the deep doctrines of the gospel and here, the fullness of Christ's saving work on our behalf.

He starts with the Messianic title, Christ. Christ Jesus...who,

***Died → Cross***

***Raised → Resurrection***

***Right Hand → Ascension***

***High Priest → Intercession***

Notice the tenses of the verbs. Two are past tense, *died* and *raised again*. Two are present and ongoing, *seated at the right hand* and *interceding for us*. He did. He did. He is. He is. For the sake of our time, I want to focus on the final two. These ongoing assurances.

Jesus, *"Who is at the right hand of God."* (Romans 8:34) What does this mean? This speaks to the present heavenly glory of Christ. He is at God's right hand. Not his left, as right is the place of highest honor; the highest glory. How is this assuring to us? The person who died for us, the one who was raised for our justification, is now at the highest possible place in the physical and spiritual universe.

Who is the most important person you know? Who is the most important person you ever spoke with, shook their hand, or have a friendship? My mom is here today, and years ago President George Bush shook her hand. Because of that my mom reckons they're good friends. Who is the most important person you know?

For the Christian, it is Christ, seated at the right hand of God. Talk about a friend in high places! The highest place with the highest glory with the greatest access to God the Father. But you know, it wouldn't do any good to have a friend in such a high place if he refused to do anything for you. But what is Jesus doing there?

*"Who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."* (Romans 8:34)

*What is Jesus doing there? Resting? No. Interceding. For who? The angels? The animals? No. For us. Intercession. What is that? Verse 27 tells us that the Spirit of God intercedes for us; prays to the Father on our behalf. I thought intercession was something the Holy Spirit*

*did. Is it the Holy Spirit interceding or Jesus interceding?* Answer: both. Would you rather have Billy Graham praying for you or D.L. Moody? What if you could have both of them? It's even better, right? Both the Spirit and Jesus intercede to the Father for us.

Jesus is our High Priest representing us and advocating for us to the Father. Think of this friend, we have a human at the right hand of God. Not an angel. Not a Spirit. A human. From that lofty seat he speaks to God the Father on our behalf. *Speaks what? What does Jesus say?* This is in the category of ineffable but to humanize this, he preserves our salvation by reminding the Father of his own death and resurrection for our sins. He reminds the Father, in the words of Romans 8:1, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

*"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."* (Hebrews 7:25)

How can I know I will be saved in the end? One assurance is that Jesus is in the highest place advocating for us to the highest authority, the Father, who also loves us with everlasting love.

How does Christ's intercession work? Here's an example:

God the Father: *Do you see the sin of Steve down there?*

Jesus: *Yes, I do.*

The Father: *I am grieved by it.*

Jesus: *As am I.*

Father: *What shall I do about it?*

Jesus: *Do? Father, remember, he is one of your children. I already paid the full price for that sin. Remember how the sky went dark when I died? There's no condemnation for Steve, only love and life forever. Instead, let's work to rid him of this joy-stealing selfishness. What should we do?*

The Father: *I know, Let's send him some cantankerous church members.*

Here in one verse God provides everything we could need for confidence in our salvation. *Death* for our sin. *Resurrection* for our justification. *Right Hand* for our representation. *Intercession* for our preservation and every other need in this life.

What if it were just any one of these, how would we feel? Just that he died for sins? Merely that he was raised for our justification? Simply that our Savior is at God's right hand? All he does is intercede for us. If there was just one of these we would be dancing all day long knowing our salvation is secure. But taken together as a whole, what can we say to it? What Paul says next, "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*" (Romans 8:35)

One little word of application as I know there is a kind of PTSD for recovering legalists and performance-based grace types amongst us. What is the blight of legalism? You always feel guilty. You've never done enough to be sure your saved. When you sin, you are shocked that someone like you could do something like this. Despite your repentance you wonder if you might not be saved at all. Your conscience and past allegiances continue to haunt you. What should we do? Take your conscience to the gospel. Friend see it here. It's been under your nose all the time. It's the gospel. It's Jesus and what he has done and what he *is* doing. He did. He did. He is. He is.

Do you believe he died for your sins and was raised for your justification? Do you believe he ascended to the right hand and from there advocates for you to the Father? Can you see in this that your salvation is as secure as God is God? As the Bible is God's Word? As Jesus is

your Savior, King, and friend in the highest possible place? Rest assured in him. Rest in his work not yours. Be confident of your status as a child of God which, as the song says, "No power of hell, no scheme of man/Could ever pluck me from his hand/Til he returns or calls me home/Here, in the power of Christ, I stand."<sup>2</sup>

*"Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:33-35)*

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