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JESUS, THE SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS PEOPLE

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*“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*

I. Fear of Condemnation

The most dreadful alarm that can disturb a reasonable man is the fear of being condemned by the Judge of all. To be condemned of God now, how dreadful! To be condemned of Him at the last great day, how terrible! Well might Belshazzar’s loins be loosed when the hand-writing on the wall condemned him as weighed in the balances and found wanting (Dan 5:27). And well may the conscience of the convicted one be comparable to a little hell when, at its lesser judgmentseat, the Law pronounces sentence upon him on account of his past life.

I know of no greater distress than that caused by the suspicion of condemnation in the believer’s mind. We are not afraid of tribulation, but we dread condemnation. We are not ashamed when wrongly condemned of men, but the bare idea of being condemned of God makes us, like Moses, “exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb 12:21). The bare possibility of being found guilty at the great judgment-seat of God is so alarming to us that we cannot rest until we see it removed.

When Paul offered a loving and grateful prayer for Onesiphorus, he could ask no more for him than, “the Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day” (2Ti 1:18). Yet, though condemnation is the most fatal of all ills, the apostle Paul in the holy ardour of his faith dares ask, “Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:34). He challenges earth and hell and heaven. In the justifiable venturesomeness of his confidence in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, he looks up to the excellent glory and to the throne of the thrice holy God, and even in His presence before Whom the heavens are not pure, and Who charged His angels with folly, he dares to say, “Who is he that condemneth?”

By what method was Paul, who had a tender and awakened conscience, so completely delivered from all fear of condemnation? It certainly was not by any depreciation of the enormity of sin. Amongst all the writers who have ever spoken of the evil of sin, none have inveighed against it more heartily, or mourned it more sincerely from their very soul, than the apostle. He declares it to be exceeding sinful. You never find him suggesting apologies or extenuations; he neither mitigates sin nor its consequences. He is very plain when he speaks of the wages of sin and of what will follow as the consequences of iniquity. He sought not that false peace which comes from regarding transgression as a trifle; in fact he was a great destroyer of such refuges of lies.

Rest assured, dear hearer, that you will never attain to a well-grounded freedom from the fear of condemnation by trying to make your sins appear little. That is not the way: it is far better to feel the weight of sin till it oppresses your soul than to be rid of the burden by presumption and hardness of heart. Your sins are damnable, and must condemn you—unless they are purged away by the great sin-offering.

Neither did the apostle quiet his fears by confidence in anything that he had himself felt or done. Read the passage through and you will find no allusion to himself. If he is sure that none can condemn him, it is not because he has prayed, nor because he has repented, nor because he has been the apostle of the Gentiles, nor because he has suffered many stripes and endured much for Christ’s sake. He gives no hint of having derived peace from any of these things, but in the humble spirit of a true believer in Jesus he builds his hope of safety upon the work of his Saviour. His reasons for rejoicing in non-condemnation all lie in the death and resurrection, the power and the plea of his blessed substitute. He looks right out of himself, for there he could see a thousand reasons *for* condemnation, to Jesus, through Whom condemnation is rendered impossible. And then in exulting confidence he lifts up the challenge, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” (Rom 8:33), and dares to demand of men and angels and devils, yea of the great Judge Himself, “Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:34).

Now since it is not an uncommon thing for Christians in a weakly state of mind, exercised with doubts and harassed with cares, to feel the cold shadow of condemnation chilling their spirits, I would speak to such, hoping that the good Spirit may comfort their hearts.

Dear child of God, you must not live under fear of condemnation, for “there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), and God would not have you fear that which can never come to you. If you be not a Christian, delay not till you have escaped from condemnation by laying hold on Christ Jesus. But if you have indeed believed in the Lord Jesus, you are not under condemnation, and you never can be either in this life or in that which is to come. Let me help you by refreshing your memory with those precious truths concerning Christ, which show that believers are clear before the Lord. May the Holy Spirit apply them to your souls and give you rest.

II. Why the Believer Cannot Be Condemned: Precious Truths Concerning Christ

A. Christ hath died

And first, you, as a believer, cannot be condemned because *Christ hath died*. The believer has Christ for his substitute, and upon that substitute his sin has been laid. The Lord Jesus was made sin for His people. The Lord hath made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all. He bare the sin of many. Now our Lord Jesus Christ by His death has suffered the penalty of our sin, and made recompense to divine justice. Observe, then, the comfort which this brings to us. If the Lord Jesus has been condemned for us, how can we be condemned? While justice survives in heaven and mercy reigns on earth, it is not possible that a soul condemned in Christ should also be condemned in itself. If the punishment has been meted out to its substitute, it is neither consistent with mercy nor justice that the penalty should a second time be executed.

The death of Christ is an all-sufficient ground of confidence for every man that believeth in Jesus; he may know of a surety that his sin is put away and his iniquity is covered. Fix your eye on the fact that you have a substitute who has borne divine wrath on your account, and you will know no fear of condemnation.

*“Jehovah lifted up his rod—O CHRIST, it fell on thee!
Thou wast sore stricken of thy God; There’s not one stroke for me.”*

Observe, dear brethren, who it was that died, for this will help you. Christ Jesus the Son of God died, the just for the unjust. He Who was your Saviour was no mere man. Those who deny the Godhead of Christ are consistent in rejecting the atonement. It is not possible to hold a proper substitutionary propitiation¹ for sin unless you hold that Christ was God. If

¹ **propitiation** – an appeasement; a sacrifice that turns away wrath.

one man might suffer for another, yet one man's sufferings could not avail for ten thousand times ten thousand men. What efficacy could there be in the death of one innocent person to put away the transgressions of a multitude? Nay, but because He Who carried our sins up to the tree was God over all, blessed forever; because He Who suffered His feet to be fastened to the wood was none other than that same Word Who was in the beginning with God, and Who also was God (Joh 1:1-2); because He Who bowed His head to death was none other than the Christ, Who is immortality and life—His dying had efficacy in it to take away the sins of all for whom He died. As I think of my Redeemer and remember that He is God Himself, I feel that if He took my nature and died, then indeed my sin is gone. I can rest on that. I am sure that if He Who is infinite and omnipotent offered a satisfaction for my sins, I need not inquire as to the sufficiency of the atonement—for who dares to suggest a limit to its power? What Jesus did and suffered must be equal to any emergency. Were my sins even greater than they are, His blood could make them whiter than snow. If God incarnate died in my stead, my iniquities are cleansed.

Again, remember Who it was that died, and take another view of Him. It was *Christ*, which being interpreted means "*the anointed*." He Who came to save us did not come unsent or uncommissioned. He came by His Father's will, saying, "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psa 40:7-8). He came by the Father's power, Him "hath God set forth to be a propitiation...of sins that are past" (Rom 3:25). He came with the Father's anointing, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luk 4:18). He was *the* Messiah, sent of God. The Christian need have no fear of condemnation when he sees Christ die for him, because God himself appointed Christ to die; and if God arranged the plan of substitution, and appointed the substitute, He cannot repudiate the vicarious² work. Even if we could not speak as we have done of the glorious person of our Lord, yet if the divine sovereignty and wisdom elected such an one as Christ to bear our sin, we may be well satisfied to take God's choice, and rest content with that which contents the Lord.

Again, believer, sin cannot condemn you because Christ died. His sufferings I doubt not were vicarious long before He came to the Cross, but still the substance of the penalty due to sin was death, and it was when Jesus died that He finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. The Law could go no further than its own capital sentence, which is death: this was the dire punishment pronounced in the garden—"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17).

Christ died physically, with all the concomitants³ of ignominy⁴ and pain—and His inner death, which was the bitterest part of the sentence, was attended by the loss of His Father's countenance and a horror unutterable. He descended into the grave, and for three days and three nights He slept within the tomb really dead. Herein is our joy; our Lord has suffered the extreme penalty and given blood for blood, and life for life. He has paid all that was due, for He has paid His life; He has given Himself for us, and borne our sins in His own body on the tree, so that His death is the death of our sins. "It is Christ that died" (Rom 8:34).

I speak not upon these things with any flourishes of words; I give you but the bare doctrine. May the Spirit of God apply these truths to your souls, and you will see that no condemnation can come on those who are in Christ.

It is quite certain, beloved, that the death of Christ must have been effectual for the removal of those sins which were laid upon Him. It is not conceivable that Christ died in vain—I mean not conceivable without blasphemy, and I hope we could not descend to that. He was appointed of God to bear the sin of many, and though He was God Himself, yet He came into the world and took upon Himself the form of a servant and bore those sins, not merely in sorrow but in death itself, and it is not possible that He should be defeated or disappointed of His purpose. Not in one jot or tittle⁵ will the intent of Christ's death be frustrated. Jesus shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isa 53:11)). That which He meant to do by dying shall be done, and He shall not pour His blood upon the ground in waste in any measure or sense. Then, if Jesus died for you, there stands this sure argument: that as He did not die in vain, you shall not perish. He has suffered and you shall not suffer. He has been condemned and you shall not be condemned. He has died for you, and now He gives you the promise, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (Joh 14:19).

B. Christ that is risen again

The apostle goes on to a second argument, which he strengthens with the word "rather." "It is Christ that died, yea *rather*, that is risen again" (Rom 8:34). I do not think we give sufficient weight to this "rather." The death of Christ is the rocky basis of all comfort, but we must not overlook the fact that the resurrection of Christ is considered by the apostle to yield richer comfort than His death—"yea rather, that is *risen* again" (Rom 8:34). How can we derive more comfort from Christ's resurrection than from His death, if from His death we gain a sufficient ground of consolation? I answer, because our Lord's resurrection denoted His total clearance from all the sin which was laid upon Him. A woman is overwhelmed with debt: how shall she be discharged from her liabilities? A friend, out of his great love to her, marries her. No sooner is the marriage ceremony performed than she is by that very act clear of debt, because her debts are her husband's, and in taking her he takes all her obligations. She may gather comfort from that thought, but she is much more at ease when her

² **vicarious** – endured by one person substituting for another.

³ **concomitant** – conjoined with; accompanying.

⁴ **ignominy** – public disgrace; dishonor.

⁵ **tittle** – the tiniest bit.

beloved goes to her creditors, pays all, and brings her the receipts. First she is comforted by the marriage, which legally relieves her from the liability, but much more is she at rest when her husband himself is rid of all the liability which he assumed.

Our Lord Jesus took our debts; in death He paid them; and in resurrection He blotted out the record. By His resurrection He took away the last vestige of charge against us, for the resurrection of Christ was the Father's declaration that He was satisfied with the Son's atonement. As our hymnster puts it—

*“The Lord is risen indeed, Then justice asks no more;
Mercy and truth are now agreed, Which stood opposed before.”*

In His prison-house of the grave, the hostage and surety of our souls would have been confined this very hour, unless the satisfaction which He offered had been satisfactory to God; but being fully accepted He was set free from bonds, and all His people are thereby justified. “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again” (Rom 8:34).

Mark further that the resurrection of Christ indicated our acceptance with God. When God raised Him from the dead, He thereby gave testimony that He had accepted Christ's work, but the acceptance of our representative is the acceptance of ourselves. When the French ambassador was sent away from the Court of Prussia, it meant that war was declared, and when the ambassador was again received, peace was reestablished. When Jesus was so accepted of God that He rose again from the dead, everyone of us who believe in Him was accepted of God too, for what was done to Jesus was in effect done to all the members of His mystical body. With Him are we crucified; with Him are we buried; with Him we rise again; and in His acceptance we are accepted.

Did not His resurrection also indicate that He had gone right through with the entire penalty, and that His death was sufficient? Suppose for a moment that one thousand eight hundred and more years had passed away, and that still He slumbered in the tomb. In such a case we might have been enabled to believe that God had accepted Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, and would ultimately raise Him from the dead, but we should have had our fears.

But now we have before our eyes a sign and token, as consoling as the rainbow in the day of rain, for Jesus is risen—and it is clear that the Law can exact no more from Him. He lives now by a new life, and the Law has no claim against Him. He against Whom the claim was brought has died; His present life is not that against which the Law can bring a suit. So with us: the Law had claims on us once, but we are new creatures in Christ Jesus; we have participated in the resurrection life of Christ, and the Law cannot demand penalties from our new life. The incorruptible seed within us has not sinned, for it is born of God. The law cannot condemn us, for we have died to it in Christ, and are beyond its jurisdiction.

I leave with you this blessed consolation. Your surety has discharged the debt for you, and being justified in the Spirit, has gone forth from the tomb. Lay not a burden upon yourselves by your unbelief. Do not afflict your conscience with dead works, but turn to Christ's Cross and look for a revived consciousness of pardon through the blood washing.

C. Christ Who is even at the right hand of God

I must pass on now to the third point upon which the apostle insists: “who is even at the right hand of God” (Rom 8:34).

Bear in mind still that what Jesus is, His people are, for they are one with Him. His condition and position are typical of their own. “Who is even at the right hand of God” (Rom 8:34). That means *love*, for the right hand is for the beloved. That means *acceptance*; Who shall sit at the right hand of God but one who is dear to God? That means *honour*; to which of the angels has He given to sit at His right hand? *Power* also is implied! No cherub or seraph can be said to be at the right hand of God. Christ, then, Who once suffered in the flesh is—in love, acceptance, honour, and power—at the right hand of God. See you the force, then, of the interrogation, “Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom 8:34). It may be made apparent in a two-fold manner. “Who can condemn me while I have such a friend at court? While my representative sits near to God, how can I be condemned?”

But next, I am where He is, for it is written, “and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). Can you suppose it possible to condemn one who is already at the right hand of God? The right hand of God is a place so near, so eminent, that one cannot suppose an adversary bringing a charge against us there. Yet there the believer is in his representative, and who dare accuse him? It was laid at Haman's door as his worst crime that he sought to compass the death of queen Esther herself, so dear to the king's heart; and shall any foe condemn or destroy those who are dearer to God than ever Esther was to Ahasuerus, for they sit at his right hand, vitally and indissolubly⁶ united to Jesus.

Suppose you were actually at the right hand of God, would you then have any fear of being condemned? Do you think the bright spirits before the throne have any dread of being condemned, though they were once sinners like yourself? “No,” say you, “I should have perfect confidence if I were there.” But you are there in your representative. If you think you are not I will ask you this question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom 8:35). Is Christ divided? If you are a believer you are one with Him, and the members must be where the head is. Till they condemn the head they cannot condemn the members—is not that clear? If you are at the right hand of God in Christ Jesus, who is he that condemneth? Let them

⁶ **indissolubly** – in a way that is unable to be changed; permanently.

condemn those white-robed hosts who forever circle the throne of God, and cast their crowns at His feet; let them attempt that, I say, before they lay anything to the charge of the meanest⁷ believer in Christ Jesus.

D. Christ “Who maketh intercession for us”

The last word which the apostle gives us is this: “who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).

This is another reason why fear of condemnation should never cross our minds if we have indeed trusted our souls with Christ, for if Jesus intercedes for us, He must make a point of interceding, that we may never be condemned. He would not direct His intercession to minor points and leave the major unheeded. “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am” (Joh 17:24), includes their being forgiven all their sins, for they could not come there if their sins were not forgiven. Rest assured that a pleading Saviour makes secure the acquittal of His people.

Reflect that our Lord’s intercession must be prevalent. It is not supposable that Christ asks in vain. He is no humble petitioner at a distance who, with moan and sigh, asks for what he deserves not; but with the breast-plate on, sparkling with the jewels which bear His people’s names, and bringing His own blood as an infinitely satisfactory atonement to the mercy-seat of God, He pleads with unquestioned authority.

If Abel’s blood, crying from the ground, was heard in heaven and brought down vengeance, much more shall the blood of Christ, which speaketh within the veil, secure the pardon and salvation of His people. The plea of Jesus is indisputable and cannot be put aside. He pleads this—“I have suffered in that man’s stead.” Can the infinite justice of God deny that plea? “By Thy will, O God, I gave Myself a substitute for these My people. Wilt Thou not put away the sin of these for whom I stood?”

Is not this good pleading? There is God’s covenant for it; there is God’s promise for it, and God’s honour involved in it—so that when Jesus pleads, it is not only the dignity of His person that has weight, and the love which God bears to His only begotten, which is equally weighty, but His claim is overwhelming, and His intercession omnipotent.

III. Conclusion

How safe is the Christian since Jesus ever liveth to make intercession for him! Have I committed myself into His dear hands? Then may I never so dishonour Him as to mistrust Him. Do I really trust Him as dying, as risen, as sitting at the Father’s right hand, and as pleading for me? Can I permit myself to indulge a solitary suspicion? Then, my Father, forgive this great offence, and help thy servant by a greater confidence of faith to rejoice in Christ Jesus and say, “there is therefore now no condemnation” (Rom 8:1).

Go away, ye that love Christ, and are resting on Him, with the savour of this sweet doctrine on your hearts. But, oh, you that have not trusted Christ, there is present condemnation for you. Ye are condemned already, because ye have not believed on the Son of God. And there is future condemnation for you, for the day cometh, the dreadful day, when the ungodly shall be as stubble in the fire of Jehovah’s wrath. The hour hasteneth when the Lord will lay justice to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and sweep away the refuges of lies. Come, poor soul, come and trust the crucified, and you shall live, and with us you shall rejoice that none can condemn you.



⁷ **meanest** – most base or common.