

Who Is to Condemn Us?

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[0:00] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised.! It was at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So there is a story about Martin Luther, who I'll get to in a minute, once again.

That says that one day some of his people came up to him and they said, Dr. Luther, why is it that you just preach the gospel every week?

Luther said, well, because we forget it every week. So, my intention this morning is to preach the gospel plainly and clearly and simply.

I hope that you are okay with me preaching the gospel again. So before we begin, I'd like to ask a question. Have you ever gotten the feeling that you don't quite measure up?

[1:22] You ever been there? Or have you gotten the feeling that no matter what you do, you're going to fall short of someone's expectations for you? I think we're kind of wired to think that way, aren't we?

I look back on one of the traumatic events of my own life, and I think my dear mother probably remembers this. So, I happened to try out for my 6th grade basketball team. Now, most of us are probably thinking that the 6th grade basketball team is a shoe-in kind of thing.

And you'd probably be right if you're thinking that. But if you're thinking that, you're definitely underestimating how clumsy I am. I got cut from the team.

And that absolutely crushed me. I had been tested, and I failed to measure up. Remember how much I cried, Mom? Yeah, I see. That was terrible.

Or what about the expectations that other people have for us? I have to confess that I had something of a dad fail the other day. Mia, quite excitedly, tried to spell daddy for me.

[2:29] She was so happy, but I pointed out gently that she had gotten one letter wrong. And that absolutely broke her little heart. She wanted daddy to be impressed so much, and I tried to assure her that I was still really impressed, but she wouldn't hear it.

She felt like she didn't measure up, I think. Let's think about God for a second. We look at God's holiness. We look at God's utter opposition to sin.

We look at God's perfect standards. And then we compare ourselves to that. And we're actually right to see that we don't measure up. We fall short. And we often have one of two reactions to that. Either we lower the standards so that we can imagine that we're pretty good people, we're doing all right, that we're better than most, or we can just fall into absolute and utter despair.

Now, going back to Martin Luther, the great reformer and theologian, he once found himself in that dilemma as a young man. He was deeply aware of his sin, so he decided that he was going to become a monk, thinking that that would help him to get to the point where he could measure up.

[3:36] So he did. But no matter how hard he tried in his new life, he kept falling short. He was still confronted with that basic haunting question.

How can I, a sinner, stand before a righteous and holy God? And every time he stumbled on the phrase, the righteousness of God, he trembled.

Because when he heard that, he thought of God's righteous judgment of sinners, and it terrified him. But he had a breakthrough, and his reading of Romans had a lot to do with that.

He started to see that when Paul talked in Romans about the righteousness of God, he was talking about the righteousness that justifies the ungodly, that saves the unworthy. Because God credits the perfect righteousness of Christ, his perfect life, his atoning death, to everyone who believes in Christ.

The righteousness that Luther once feared, he came to recognize as his sure, certain, and only hope of salvation. It is through the righteousness of God that God saves, not the righteous, but sinners who know their need of Christ.

[4:51] Now, that meant for Luther, he realized that he could have assurance that God is for him, that Christ really has put away his sins, that his salvation was secure.

And our passage for us this morning points us to that same reality. We are secure in Christ. We might look and see that we don't measure up, but Christ has measured up when we were broken and sinful and helpless, so that we can stand before a holy and righteous God.

In the words of our opening hymn, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The portion of Romans 8 that we have this morning, like the portion that we read last week, is really kind of addressed to people who were in the trenches.

And just to let you know, we're all in the trenches. So it's for all of us. Even though we have salvation in Christ, Paul is deeply aware, after all the beatings and shipwrecks and all the horrible things that happened to him, right?

He was always aware that life is still hard, that we still stumble, and that we are going to be aware of our weakness, if we're being honest.

[6:07] But we see the answer to our dilemma in our verses for this morning, and that is God's grace to us in Christ. Grace that is sufficient to carry us through this life with all of its trials and troubles, and to carry us safely into eternity.

That's the answer. So let's dig into our text, starting in verse 26, which begins with a reminder of the weakness we feel and experience as we await the total fulfillment of God's promises to us in Christ.

Verse 26, Romans 8. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

So yeah, our weakness is a real thing. We don't even know how to pray as we should sometimes.

And this is especially true when things are hard.

Have you ever been in that place where you're dealing with something that is so hard that you don't know what to say or even how to pray? Or even how to begin to pray? I've been there.

[7:15] And we're reminded that we have help. We have the indwelling Spirit. Okay, so we're weak. We don't know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit lives in us, prays for us, prays in us.

And what a comfort that is, that God the Holy Spirit prays in us even when we feel weak and hopeless and we don't know what to say. Prays perfectly for us and prays deeper than words can go.

Now Paul goes on on that point in verse 27. He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

God the Holy Spirit is living in us, praying to God for us, praying perfectly. And God who searches hearts sees the perfect intercession of the Spirit in us and sees that it's according to His will.

So even when we are at our weakest brothers and sisters, the Spirit lives in us, praying for us according to God's perfect will. What a precious promise that is.

[8:25] And if we are in Christ, we know and we have the assurance that God's will for us, what the Spirit is praying for perfectly in us, is good.

See that in verse 28. We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

Fellow believers in Christ, we can trust that God's grace, God's will, God's good will towards us will carry us safely home. He called us to salvation in His Son, Jesus Christ, and everything that happens in our lives will work to bring us safely home to Him.

Now we look at verse 28. We might dismiss it because we're so familiar with it after seeing it on about a billion inspirational calendars. And that can cause us not to appreciate it fully.

Sometimes we don't appreciate it fully because it's something that someone throws at us trying to make us feel better when we're hurting. But the reality is that this verse is especially for those who are in the deepest possible pain and for those who are overwhelmed.

[9:47] It says to us, No matter how bad things look, God intends good for me, He will work through this, and He will carry me no matter what comes. And how do we know that?

It's because of the incredible reality of God's grace to us. Grace that was shown to us before we even knew Christ, as we'll see. And grace that will preserve us to the end.

We read in verse 29. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

So I was preaching recently for a friend's first service after His ordination to the priesthood. As I was preaching, I reminded him that we didn't get to that moment by accident.

I reminded him that before he was ever born, God knew that He would be a priest in Christ's church. And I remind us this morning, before we were ever born, God knew and was determined that we would be His beloved children in Christ.

[10:58] Now, predestination is one of those scary theological words that causes people to speculate or to agonize or to argue. What's it all about?

Well, I have to admit, this is one of those topics that Christians sometimes come to fisticuffs over. So I step into those waters with fear and trembling.

As I was talking about my sermon with my family as I was preparing it, Elaine says to me, you know, some people get really mad about predestination. My mom says, for it or against it?

And Elaine says, well, both. So, that being said, why is Paul appealing to predestination here?

He is appealing to predestination to assure believers not to perplex or to trouble them or to confuse them, but to assure them that God's good will towards them, His determination to save them in Christ is total.

[11:57] And that His work in them came before them and will finish what God started in them. That's what we see in verse 30.

Those whom He predestined, He also called. Those whom He also called, He also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified. So, how do I know I'm predestined?

There's a question, right? If your faith is in Christ, you can be assured that God predestined to save you. It's that simple. And you can be assured that it was God's grace that called you to faith in Christ.

And from that, you can be assured that you are justified, that your sins are forgiven, that you can stand before a holy and righteous God, not because of what you have done, but because of what Christ has done.

And you can be assured that you will be glorified. That, by God's grace, God will bring you safe to heaven and raise up your body on the last day. Fellow believers, God has determined to save us.

[13:07] God has saved us in Christ, and God will bring it to completion no matter what this life throws at us. It's true that we are weak, but He is strong.

God will bring it to us. If God has done all of this for us, what can stand in our way? Read in verse 31. What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? Now that doesn't mean that others can't try to be against us. It doesn't mean that others won't try to hurt us.

It doesn't mean that the devil won't try to drive us to despair. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know He does that. It doesn't mean that this life will be smooth sailing.

What it does mean is this. God is for us, we are victorious in Christ, and no one can change that. We read further in verse 32.

[14:07] 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? Reminds you a bit of John 3.16, doesn't it?

For God to love the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. Let's ask. If God loved us so much as to give his only perfect, righteous, spotless son for us, and we have received that by faith, can't we be certain that we have eternal life?

That God will follow through? If God didn't even withhold his own son from us, what is there that we could possibly need that he won't give us? And the answer is absolutely nothing.

And no one can take that from us. We see that in verse 33. Who shall bring any charge against God the elect? It is God who justifies. We are God's beloved chosen children in Christ.

The verdict for us before the judgment throne of God is that we are not guilty. We're not guilty because Christ's perfect righteousness is ours through faith in his blood. And if God says that we are not guilty, who can argue with that?

[15:29] Verse 34. Who is to condemn? Christ 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.

Christ died. Putting away our sins. Christ was raised. Conquering death for us. And Christ is in heaven for you and for me.

Acting as our advocate. And what does that mean? Recently in my reading I ran across this quote from Michael Horton who says this. From Genesis to the Gospels, Satan's favorite haunt is not wild parties and seances, but God's courtroom where he can accuse believers day and night.

That is why it is so significant that Christ cast Satan out of heaven by his victorious life and entered the heavenly court in his victorious ascension.

It means that in heaven where our salvation is determined, there is no prosecutor but only a defense attorney for the people of God. If that is not good news, I don't know what is.

[16 : 45] We have no prosecutor. We have a defense attorney and the Father who sent him to us out of love for us. So who is there to condemn us?

Absolutely no one. So we're weak. We've fallen short. Paul doesn't doesn't mince words there. He's clear. We don't even know how to pray as we should. But none of that changes the fact that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And that gets to the heart of the Gospel, doesn't it?

Pastor and theologian Tim Keller puts it this way. We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe.

Yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. Do you know that hope this morning?

[17 : 48] The sure and certain hope of being loved and accepted in Jesus Christ. If we don't, there can be a variety of reasons why we don't know that hope.

Maybe we don't realize how sinful and flawed we actually are in ourselves. Someone is in that place, he won't know and won't realize that he needs a Savior. But make no mistake, none of us can be saved on our own merits.

None of us can measure up to God's perfect standards. We are sinners, and Luther was right. None of us can stand before a righteous and holy God. We're relying on our own strength, our own good deeds, or our own righteousness.

We will find only condemnation. And even if we do know Christ, we can find ourselves falling back into trying to impress God with our own best efforts, when actually we are called to do good works, but not because we need to impress God, but because he has given us salvation as a gift of grace, and we have grateful hearts.

That's where Christian obedience flows from. And I think that all of us need to repent of falling back into works righteousness from time to time. It happens.

[19 : 09] Maybe we need to repent of that this morning. But let's look at the other side of the coin. And just as we are sinful and flawed in ourselves, we are loved and accepted in Christ.

Fully accepted. There is no condemnation. The debt of our sin has been paid by another, and we are free if we are in Christ. Do you know that joy and that freedom this morning?

And if you do not, the offer of the gospel goes out specially to you. Turn from your sin. Place your faith in Christ. Receive Christ as your Savior this morning, and if you want to do that and you don't know how, talk with me after the service.

But, my brothers and sisters who do know Christ, this word is for you too. This word is for us. Rest in God's promises to you this morning.

Because the whole of the Christian life, Christian holiness, obedience to God, the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, all of that flows from knowing, from resting in God's promises to us in the gospel.

[20 : 24] The promise that we are loved and accepted in Jesus, and that there is no condemnation for us. The whole of the Christian life flows out of gratitude for what is ours in the gospel.

gospel. So one great hymn puts it, Before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

My name is braven on his hands, my name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart. So who is there to condemn us?

The answer, absolutely no one. Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.