

Who is he that condemns?

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon
at Poplar Baptist Church, on 15th October 2017

“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died –more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Romans 8.34)

Introduction

These last few weeks we have been considering what are known as the “rhetorical questions” at the end of Romans chapter 8. These are questions whose answer is obvious. They are designed to make the reader think. The apostle Paul poses these questions here in order to drive home to his readers the truth that, if they have been saved by God, it is utterly impossible for them to be unsaved. He wants his readers to be fully assured of their salvation, so that they may serve God with joy.

Today we are going to consider the fourth question: “Who is he that condemns?” Is there anyone in the whole universe who can condemn us? The answer is, “No”. There is no-one in heaven, or on earth, or in hell who can condemn the true believer. The only person who might have the power to condemn us is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. He is the one to whom all judgement has been given. But there is no conceivable way that he will condemn the person who trusts him for salvation, because he is the one who died for his people upon the Cross. On top of that, he is the one who was raised from the dead in order to secure the salvation of those who believe. Furthermore, this same Jesus is now at the right hand of God, with his people, who are united to him. To crown it all, it all, he is now making intercession for us. There is no way that this Jesus – who died for his sheep, was raised to life for their justification, has ascended into heaven, and is now interceding for them – there is no way that this Jesus, who has done such things for his people, will condemn them.

As we think about this verse, I want us to think about how Jesus is the one who will judge the world. I then want us to consider what the apostle says about the things that Christ has done, and is doing now, which make it impossible that he should condemn those who trust in him.

1. Jesus is the one who will judge

The apostle says, “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” We can paraphrase the apostle to say, “Who is the one that condemns? The only one who could condemn us is Jesus Christ, because he is the judge, but there is no way that he will condemn us because he is the one who died for our sins, was raised from the dead, ascended to God’s right hand in heaven, and is now interceding for us.”

The foundation of Paul’s argument here is that Jesus is the one who will judge the whole world. This is in line with the consistent teaching of Scripture. God the Father is the rightful judge of the world, but he has entrusted the job of judging to his eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus says in John’s Gospel chapter five and verse 22, “The Father judges no-one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.” He says further, in verses 26 and 27 of the same chapter, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.”

In Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 25, Jesus explicitly says that it is he who will judge the world. He says, in verses 31 to 34 of that chapter,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world....”

The term “the Son of Man” is the term that Jesus consistently uses to refer to himself. So clearly he is saying that he, Jesus, will come in his glory, will sit on his throne in heavenly glory, and will separate the “sheep” from the “goats”, in other words he will separate those who are

truly his people from those who are not his people. He will be the one who will say to the “sheep” that they are to come and receive the inheritance that has been prepared for them since the creation of the world. He will be the one who will say to the “goats”, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”

We should note in passing that this is proof that Jesus is God. If Jesus were not God, he would never be qualified to judge people. No mere man could possibly pass judgement on another, and decide the eternal destiny of another. Only someone who is God can do this.

So we see that it is Jesus, and no-one else who will judge the world.

2. Things that Christ has done and is doing that make it impossible for him to condemn the person who trusts in him

I want us now to consider the things which the apostle says in this verse that Jesus has done, and is now doing, which make it impossible that he should condemn us.

1) Jesus died for us

The first thing that the apostle mentions is that Jesus died for us. The apostle says, “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died.” This Jesus, the Christ, the anointed King, the one who will judge the whole world, died. Why did he die? He died in order to make a full payment for all the sins of all those who trust in him.

This is made very clear in chapter 3 of this book, in verse 25. “God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.” Where our translation says “sacrifice of atonement” the literal translation is “propitiation”. What is a propitiation? A propitiation is a sacrifice which turns away wrath. God was full of wrath towards us because of our sin, but that wrath was turned away onto his own Son, as he hung there on the Cross. It was fully spent upon him, so that there is none left to be spent on the person who trusts in Jesus.

We see here the astonishing love of God, that he gave his own Son to be a sacrifice for our sins. The apostle says in chapter 5, and verses 6 to 8,

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus died as our substitute, in our place. He was condemned instead of us. Who are the “us” of this verse? The answer is, those who belong to Christ; those whom the Father gave to his Son before the foundation of the world, and who were called by God and put their trust in Christ. It is recorded in John’s Gospel chapter 10 and verses 14 and 15 that Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep.” Jesus knows the sheep who have been given to him, and he laid down his life specifically for them.

Jesus was condemned by the Father for the sins of his sheep, because their sins were laid on him. The apostle says in chapter 8 and verse 3 of this letter, “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.” God condemned Jesus for the sin that is in us. That sin, having been condemned 2,000 years ago when Jesus, cannot be condemned again. Hence the justice of God demands that we must not be condemned. If we were to be condemned for our sin, God would be guilty of punishing the same sins twice, once when Jesus died on the Cross, and a second time at the final judgement. That cannot be!

The fact that the one who will be the judge is the very same one who made the payment for our sins upon the Cross means that he cannot possibly condemn us. How could Jesus possibly condemn to hell the very same people whom he has redeemed with his own blood? It is impossible.

2) Jesus was raised from the dead in order to prove that God had accepted his sacrifice.

The apostle says, “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life.”

It is a fact of history that Jesus was raised from the dead. The only explanation of the events that happened following Jesus’s death – the empty tomb, the appearances of Jesus to his followers, the change in the apostles from fear and dejection to making bold testimony, the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the growth of the church in spite of severe persecution – the only possible explanation of these events is that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead.

By raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father was saying that he accepted his sacrifice. If he had left him in the grave, it would have been saying, in effect, that Jesus was still under God's curse. There would be no way of knowing if what he did on the Cross had been accepted by the Father, or was sufficient to pay for our sins. But by raising Jesus from the dead, the Father vindicated Christ, and said the Son is his true servant, and that what he did on the Cross was enough to pay for our sins in full. God was saying, in other words, that he was satisfied with the sacrifice that Jesus had made on our behalf on the Cross.

This is why the apostle says in chapter 4 and verse 25 of this book, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." Jesus was given over to death for our sins. The word "given over" here is the same word as we had in verse 32, where the apostle says that God "gave him up for us all". Jesus was given over to the power of death for our sins. But then he was raised from the dead for our justification. It is because he was raised from the dead that we are justified, declared to be righteous in God's sight. If he was never raised from the dead, we would not be able to be justified.

This is also the point that the apostle makes in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, a chapter which is devoted to the resurrection of Christ and its consequences. He says in verse 17, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." If it were to be the case that Christ had not been raised from the dead, then we would still be in our sins. There would be no salvation. But the reality is that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and we who believe are therefore no longer in our sins.

So, we who believe cannot be condemned because the one who will judge, Jesus, was raised from the dead to show that God the Father has accepted his sacrifice.

3) Jesus is now at the right hand of God

The apostle says, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God".

Jesus was not just raised from the dead, he also ascended to heaven. He sat down at God's right hand in the heavenly places. There he has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. From there he is masterminding the glorious extension of his kingdom. From heaven he has poured out his Spirit on all who believe.

The tremendous thing is that we who believe have been united with Christ. We have been raised up with him. We are now seated with him in the heavenly places. The apostle says in Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 4 to 7,

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

We who are believers are with Christ, in the heavenly places! Spiritually we are in heaven now, even though our bodies are on earth. How can those who have been united with Christ, who are with him in the heavenly places, possibly be condemned and excluded from heaven on the final day? It is impossible. It cannot happen.

4) Jesus is now interceding for those who trust in him

Hear our text again: "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Having ascended to the Father's side, Jesus is now interceding for us in heaven. In Old Testament times, the High Priest would not only make a sacrifice for sins, but he would go into the Most Holy Place, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on his clothing, and also bearing the blood of the sacrifice that he had made. He would plead, on behalf of the people, for God to show mercy to them.

This was a foreshadowing of the work of Christ. Jesus not only made a sacrifice for sins upon the Cross, but he has also entered heaven on our behalf, bearing his own blood, and presents us, with his blood, to God the Father. In the book of Hebrews chapter 9 and verses 11 and 12, the writer says,

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Having gone into heaven on our behalf, bearing his own blood, he is constantly pointing to what he has done on the Cross, and demonstrating to God the Father, and to the whole of heaven, that a satisfaction has been made for sins.

There are three great differences between the work of the High priest of the Old Testament times and the work of Jesus. The first is the High Priest would enter a tabernacle that was on earth, whereas Jesus has entered the heavenly tabernacle for us. The second is that in the Old Testament times the High Priest of Old Testament times had only a temporary office, which lasted only as long as he lived, and would pass to a successor when the High Priest died, whereas Jesus, having died on the Cross, lives for ever. The third is that the High Priest brought as a sacrifice the blood of mere animals which, cannot pay for sins. But Jesus has sacrificed his own life and bears his own precious blood, the blood of the eternal Son of God. Therefore Jesus has an altogether superior priesthood to that of the Old Testament High Priests.

This is something that is spoken of in the book of Hebrews in chapter 7. The writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 110, where God promises the Christ, "You are a priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek". He is a permanent priest. Because he is a permanent priest, he is able to save for ever those who trust in him. The writer to the Hebrews says in verse 25 of that chapter, "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

John also speaks about the intercession of Christ in his first letter, chapter 2 and verse 1, where he says, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." Jesus is our advocate in heaven. He points to his blood, and his perfect sacrifice. Where Satan would seek to accuse, Jesus points to his great sacrifice that makes us acceptable to the Father.

Does this mean that Jesus is actually praying with words for us in heaven, or that he is presenting his blood before the Father? We cannot say for certain. At the very least, his blood speaks to the Father

on our behalf. Hebrews 12 verse 24 says that Jesus's blood "speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

This intercession of Christ is spoken of in some hymns. For example, the hymn, "Arise my soul arise" says, in verses 2 and 3,

He ever lives above,
For me to intercede,
His all-redeeming love,
His precious blood to plead;
His blood atoned for every race
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

The father hears him pray
His dear anointed one
He cannot turn away
The presence of his Son
His Spirit answers to the blood
And tells me I am born of God

And also the hymn "Before the throne of God above" says in the first verse,

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong a perfect plea
A great high priest, whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is written on his hands,
My name is hidden in his heart
I know that while in heaven he stands
No power can force me to depart

We should not understand from these hymns that the Father is in any way reluctant to forgive us, or that Jesus has to somehow persuade the Father to extend forgiveness to us. The whole plan of salvation was initiated by the Father. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son..." "God did not spare his Son, but gave him up for us all." Some people have in their minds the notion that God is an unloving angry God who has to be persuaded by his more gentle and loving Son to forgive us. Nothing could be further from the truth! The Father dearly loves those whom he has chosen to save, and sent his Son as the means to save us. But, in order for the justice of God to be satisfied, the Son had to die on the Cross and then go into heaven and present his sacrifice to the Father. What he did is permanently speaking to the Father, so that even though we sin as believers, Christ is there in

heaven as our advocate and intercessor, pointing to what he did on the Cross to pay for our sins.

Conclusion

Paul asks the question “Who is he that condemns?” Is there anyone who has the power to condemn you, if you have trusted Christ to be your Saviour? The answer is, no-one. The only person who could condemn you is Jesus, because he is the one to whom the Father has entrusted the judgement of the world. But if you have trusted Christ as your Saviour, Jesus the one who will judge the world, is the one who died for your sins. He is the one who was raised to life for your justification. He has gone into heaven, and you are united with him in the heavenly places. He is now constantly interceding for you before the Father, pointing to his great sacrifice on your behalf. Because of these things, if you are trusting Christ as your Saviour, there is absolutely no possibility that you will be condemned. All your sins, past, present and future, are fully paid for. Even your failure to believe Christ properly and to obey him fully is paid for. You can be absolutely certain that you have a place in the new heavens and the new earth that God is going to bring in. You can be fully confident that you will share in the glory of Christ. Just a little while, and the suffering of this life will be over, and you will be with the Lord. Then you will have a wonderful new body. God will wipe away every tear from your eyes. “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, because the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21.4). You do not need to worry if others mistreat you. You do not need to get up tight about wrongs that have been done. You do not need to stress about making a great career for yourself. You do not need to worry about making your home beautiful. You have glory coming to you! You can confidently serve God, and make sacrifices for him, knowing that he will abundantly repay you for all your efforts. You do not need to be anxious that somehow you might miss out on glory because of some sin or lapse of faith in the future. Christ has paid for all your failings.

However, I must stress that this is only for those who believe. For those who refuse to believe, Jesus is not the gentle Saviour but the terrifying Judge. Hear the warning that is given to those who hear and understand the Gospel but who keep on sinning and refuse to believe in Christ, as found in Hebrews chapter 10 and verses 26 and 27, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

Have you come to Christ for salvation? If your answer to that question is “No” or “I am not sure”, then do not delay any longer. Come to Christ. Wash your sins away in his blood. Be saved.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=101517451585>

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