

Sermon 92: Romans 8:33-34: Uncondemnable

OUTLINE

God's irreversible verdict

God's sufficient Son

INTRODUCTION

One of the main differences between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation was its view of justification. The Reformers believed that a person was justified once and the verdict of righteous is irreversible. The Roman Catholic Church believed differently. They held that a Christian can commit mortal sins and lose their justification, by these sins they were in danger of hell and had to renew their justification through penance. The Reformers taught that someone who has trusted in Christ and been declared righteous by the imputation of His righteousness to their account, that these can have assurance. The Catholics saw the doctrine of assurance as a heresy, for one cannot have assurance if justification can be lost by mortal sins. We come to some verses where Paul's argument is that justification is irreversible—we are uncondemnable. This word uncondemnable is not in my Word dictionary but it should be a word that every Christian has in their dictionary.

Paul is in the middle of further establishing the amazing power of God to save. Having reached the pinnacle of his argument in the unbreakable chain of redemption, Paul now goes about driving his point home. He uses a number of questions to help the doubting Christian process that our hope of glory is certain not shaky, that God is a saviour who ensures our salvation. He began with the question, 'If God be for us who can be against us?' This question reminded us that God is our friend and not our enemy and there is no one stronger than Him to steal us from Him or pry us out of His hand. His second question related to the love of God in v32, '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?' We have looked at this question and saw that our salvation is established by a God whose love for us will never change, a love that has been proven by the giving of His most precious Son for enemies to be saved. Paul continues asking questions anticipating some possible objections that we would raise. We might want to say things like, 'God is for me and He loves me, but if it is my sin that made Him my enemy and I continue to sin, will I not make an enemy of God again and be unjustified/recondemned?' It is this issue that Paul addresses in v33-34. 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 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.'

Paul draws our attention to two realities with two questions. Firstly, he draws our attention to the fact that God is the one who pronounced His verdict over us. Secondly, he reminds us that Jesus Christ is the one who died in payment of our sins, and who was raised and intercedes for us. He expects these two self-evident facts to silence to silence our fears.

God's irreversible verdict

As we begin with v33 we find ourselves in a courtroom setting. The language Paul uses relates to the courtroom, 'charge', 'justifies' and 'condemn' are all legal words relating to our legal standing before God. V33 is intended to be a rhetorical self-answering question, 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.' In other words, if God who one day will be the one who ultimately judges who will enter eternity to be with Him or who will go to the lake of fire has declared you righteous, then who else that matters can lay a charge against you? No one can bring a charge that can stick.

Who might charge us? The devil who is the accuser of the brethren would be someone who would want to bring a charge against us. He hates us and God and wants nothing more than to see God destroy His own handiwork. No doubt our own consciences remind us that we are sinners every day. And the law is also a constant reminder of our failings. Let's remind ourselves how God has answered these accusers.

Zechariah 3:1-5 has an amazing picture of Joshua a sinner being made righteous before the satan. 'Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 2 And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. 4 And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." 5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.' God provides clean garments for us to wear to silence the accuser and fit us for service in His presence. We are dressed in the righteousness of Christ's holiness and He took our filthy garments. In this way the devil is silenced.

Another powerful picture of the silencing of satan's accusations is found in a striking symbolic way in Rev. 12:7-10. In verse 6 we see Jesus ascending to heaven after his cross work, and then we see the consequences of Christ's death for our sin portrayed as a war in the heavens, 'Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world---he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 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.' Here we have a graphic portrayal that the devil has been thrown out of court and banned from returning and God will no longer hear his accusations against us.

Next we have the law that accuses us. When we sin we often feel like Paul in Romans 7:14-25. We feel like a wretched man who is afflicted with guilt because we know the right and desire the right but still do the wrong and the law magnifies our condition. Can any of us deny that we continue to break the law, that we are sinless? None of us can, even as Christians we still sin. So how do we escape the accusation of the law if we still sin against it? Was it not our breaking of the law that was our original problem, that made us enemies of God, and how are we not simply returned to enemies when we break it again? Some might answer that we live in a different dispensation and since Christ the law no longer applies. Some might want to redefine the law to accommodate our actions, making the demands less stringent. These attempts are wrong, we escape the accusation of the law not by dismissing it, or redefining it but by fulfilling it and moving out from under it into the realm of grace. We can only fulfil the law and be brought out from under the law into grace through Christ. The law demands that satisfaction be made for our violation of it, the wages of sin is death and so a perfect sinless death must be offered to satisfy the demands of justice. Christ died a perfect human death as our substitute paying in full all the debt that our sins incurred against the law. Not only that, Christ also lived a perfect law fulfilling life. The law not only demands that death pay for broken law but that a human being fulfil it jot and tittle. Christ fulfilled the law perfectly, He loved God and His neighbour with no faults, and it is this record of obedience that is seen as ours and credited to us when we put our trust in Christ. The law has been satisfied in both its negative and positive demands by Christ whose death and life stand for us to fulfil it. We now no longer stand in a relationship to law where it has any legal demands upon us, but only moral ones. We no longer need to obey it to find life, nor do we need to die in order to pay for broken laws, but we are still obliged to follow its moral teaching as an outline of a God pleasing life for image bearers to live. And any time we fail to fulfil one of God's commands, the life and death of Christ answer the law for us saving us from its condemnation. When the law comes looking for you to accuse you of breaking it and demanding your death, or having failed to fulfil it in full, we point the law to our representative Christ whose death and life satisfy all the law's demands. The grounds for any charge against us would be God's law but we have died to the law in Christ and it is fully satisfied therefore it can no longer accuse us and demand our death, Christ has paid it in full.

The last accuser is our consciences. Our consciences only accuse us if they are misinformed. We listen to conscience when it tells us that we have violated God's standard, but we silence our consciences when they tell a justified believer that they are going to hell. We inform our consciences that Christ has died any death the law demands and fulfilled any righteousness it could demand. The law has no claim upon me and I do not have to die, Christ died that I might not die. It is a knee jerk reaction of an awakened conscience to feel that we are condemned, but we need to remind our consciences that our sins have been paid in full by Christ's death. We can confess our sins to God as a child to a Father with the confidence that Christ's death has paid for them and they will be forgiven. We pray for forgiveness not to rejustify ourselves but to heal any breach in the relationship between God and myself as His child.

Paul not only reminds us of our possible accusers but also of the fact that we are God's elect. 'Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?' Here is a reminder of God's eternal purpose concerning you, that God has had a plan and a purpose from eternity and there is nothing that has been overlooked that God has not considered. All those whom He has foreloved, He predestines, then He calls and He justifies them in not that they will be saved for a while, or in part, but in order that they might also be glorified.

Paul answers his own question in the second part of v33, 'It is God who justifies.' Justification we have said is a courtroom word, it is the word that we would find on the judge's lips when he declares the accused to be righteous. The judge here is God and He is the one to whom any charges must be brought because He is the one who will judge and determine anyone's eternal destinies. It is this judge who pronounces us to be righteous who cares what anyone else says. God's verdict is irreversible. There is no court of appeals because of some wrong procedure that was followed when God saved us. There is no new evidence that can be brought to light that God's omniscience has not anticipated. There is no sin that Christ's death has not paid for. God has pronounced His verdict over us and it is irreversible.

God's sufficient Son

Staying in the courtroom in v34 Paul asks a second question in order to set us up to see the sufficient Christ that God has provided for our justification. '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.' The word condemn we know is the opposite of justify. Paul asks this question not so much focusing our attention on the work of the Father in pronouncing our justification, but the basis of the Father's verdict, the offering of the Son. Paul is informing us that there are no grounds for our condemnation because Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to cover our sins, this is further ratified by the resurrection and the intercession of Christ.

'Christ Jesus is the one who died.' Paul expects that this answer will be self-evident. The very fact that Jesus is the one who died should silence any possibility of our being condemned. What is Paul's rationale? Firstly, we should not ignore the reference to Jesus as the Christ, 'Christ Jesus.' The Christ is the OT Messiah who was promised by God who would deliver His people. Isaiah 53 and many other texts foretell of God's saviour who would come and crush the head of the serpent, bless the nations, crush all of God's enemies and ensure a worldwide peace. Paul is reminding us that the Messiah has come and has done His work, the promised one has come and it was His very job to save.

Secondly, it is Jesus Christ who has died. Remember that every time you sinned in the OT as well as in the many different sacrifices that would be offered under Moses thousands upon thousands of animals would have to be offered because they never finally paid up in full all that our sins needed to be paid for. The blood of goats and bulls was never enough to pay for the sin debt of a human being. Jesus who was 100% man came as our substitute to stand in the stead of a human beings to pay for our sin debt. The offering of goats and

bulls was never enough. Imagine all that was needed was the death of an animal in our place, hell would be an unfair overkill punishment if all it took was an animal's death to pay our sin debt. But animals were never enough, they were only ever intended to be a shadow anticipating the death of Christ in our place.

Let us remember that it was the individual Jesus Christ and not just any other human being who died. If a human death and not an animal death is required to pay a human's sin debt, can any human die to pay for my sins? If I want my child to go to heaven can I offer my life for them? No! If I offered my life to try and get forgiveness of my sins my offering would not be acceptable to God. It must be the offering of a sinless life by sinless hands, I can only offer my sinful life by sinful hands. However, Christ was perfectly innocent and sinless, and He was ordained and appointed by God to represent His church in the work of salvation. Christ was both the offerer and the offering, the priest and the sacrifice and by the once off offering of Himself all my sins have been paid in full. And as we stated earlier all that the law required for the full payment of our sin debt and to declare us righteous was accomplished by Christ.

But how do we know that Christ's death is enough to pay for my sins, how do I know that God has received Christ's sacrifice as an acceptable sacrifice for sin? Paul reminds us that Christ was raised from the dead, 'more than that, who was raised.' How does the resurrection of Christ support the argument that I cannot be condemned? The very fact that Jesus was raised from the dead proves that I cannot be condemned. His resurrection proves that God has accepted the sacrifice of His life in my place and that it was sufficient. You see Jesus took the guilt for our sins upon Himself, God dealt with Him as if He were dealing with us in our sins. God forsook Christ, and poured out all of His undiluted wrath, all that our sins deserved upon Him. He died as the payment for the guilt of our sins. He was placed under the curse of the law, and suffered its condemnation—death. How do we know that God accepted the payment of His life? Christ's imputed guilt was paid in full leaving His own perfect righteousness. And because our sin was fully paid for and He was perfectly righteous death had no right to keep Him. Christ's resurrection proves at least two things firstly, that He no longer bore any of guilt indicating that He had paid for it in full, secondly, it proves that He was a sinless offering and fully qualified to be the one who could represent us.

If Christ's righteousness was sufficient that death had no right to hold Him once our sin which were the cause of His death were paid for, then we can be confident that our sins have been paid in full and the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to us will likewise bring us through death. Christ's resurrection proves that the words 'it is finished' were true, our sins have been paid in full. All of God's wrath towards our sin was poured out upon and suffered by Christ. He was an effective propitiation, a sacrifice that removes God's wrath from us.

How do I know that my sins have been paid for, how do I know that my ongoing sins cannot recondemn me, how do I know that there are not still grounds to raise an accusation against me, how do I answer the accusations of the devil, the law and conscience? The

answer to all of these questions is Romans 8:33-34, Paul lays out in two points a comprehensive argument that covers every possible legal question you could raise. God's verdict of justified is irreversible and Christ's offering is sufficient and is proven to be so by the resurrection.