

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 (*Psalms 32:1-2*). Fix your eye on the fact that you have a substitute who has borne divine wrath on your account, and fear of condemnation will flee.

*"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 believer, 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 propitiation for sin unless you hold that Christ was God. 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 for ever" (*Rom 9:5*); because he who allowed 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" (*John 1:1*); 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.

This is a truth we can rest in. 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? 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 look. 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 God" (*Psalms 40:7-8*). He came by the Father's power, for "him hath God set forth to be a propitiation for our sins" (*Rom 3:25*). He came with the Father's anointing, saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (*Isaiah 61:1; Luke 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 vicarious work. If the divine sovereignty and wisdom elected such an one as Christ to bear our sin, we may well be 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 the transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness" (*Daniel 9:24*). 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, in all the pain and suffering; but 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."

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. 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 tittle will the intent of Christ's death be frustrated. Jesus "shall see his seed...He shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (*Isaiah 53:10-11*). That which he meant to do by dying is done. 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 you shall live also" (*John 14:19*).

2. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

"Yea rather, 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*." 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." 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 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 to 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.

Further, 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 re-established. 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 nearly two thousand years had passed, and 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 would have 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. 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 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.

3. THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST "Who is even at the right hand of God"

Thirdly, bear in mind 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." 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, and acceptance, and honour, and power at the right hand of God. See you the force, then, of the interrogation, "Who is he that condemneth?"

This may be shown in a twofold 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, "He 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?

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 condemn those white-robed hosts who for ever 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 any believer in Christ.

4. THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST "Who also maketh intercession for us"

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" (John 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. Christ asks not in vain. He is no humble petitioner at a distance who, with moan and sigh, asks for what he deserves not; but with the breastplate 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.

How safe then is the Christian since Jesus "ever liveth to make intercession for him" (Heb 7:25). 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" (John 3:18); 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 (2 Thess 1:7-9). The hour hastens on. Come, poor soul, come and trust the crucified One, and you shall live, and with us you shall rejoice that none can condemn you. ■

—Adapted from a sermon by Charles Spurgeon

JESUS, The Substitute For His People

"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"—Rom 8:34

True children of God must not live under fear of condemnation, for "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and God would not have us fear that which can never come to us. 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 refresh your memory with those precious truths concerning Christ, which show that believers are clear before God.

1. THE DEATH OF CHRIST "It is Christ that died"

True believers, first of all, 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 laid on him the iniquity of us all...For the transgression of my people was he stricken...He bare the sin of many" (Isaiah 53:6,8,12). 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.