

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 18
“There is No Condemnation”
Romans 8:31-34
Pastor Charles Price

Now, Romans 8 and I'm going to read from Romans 8:31-34.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who 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.”

And that's as far as I'm going to read, and those of you who have been with us on previous weeks will know that we have been looking through this book of Romans and spending a little more time in Romans 8 than I had originally anticipated. But it's a rich chapter and it would be amiss if we were to move quickly over some of the important issues that arise in this chapter. And I point out last week that at the end of the chapter, Paul asks a series of questions and I am addressing three of them. One we looked at last week, which is in Romans 8:31, ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ And we talked about that in its context last week.

But today I want to talk about a second key question, which is in Romans 8:33. And it's a question which will be a relevant question to many lives here this morning. Of that, I am

convinced. And here's the question he asks, 'Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?' Well, who is going to bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? And he follows it up in the middle of Romans 8:34, the next verse by saying, 'Who is he that condemns?' And he talks about charges being brought against God's people — that is Christians — and he talks about condemnation that is brought against the people of God.

And the reality is that there may be many of us here this morning and you are a Christian — you know that — but you live with a sense of being charged and condemned. Now, before I talk about this, let me remind you of the context of what Paul is writing in the whole of this book, the Book of Romans.

I explained right back in the beginning, that Romans is the most comprehensive statement of what it means to be a Christian, the most comprehensive statement of salvation in the whole of the New Testament. And Paul describes early how that we are separated from God and under the wrath of God, and then how that we have been reconciled to God through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we have been justified. That's a key word earlier in the book, and the word justified is a legal term that means that justice has been satisfied. It's justified. It's about justice.

When I was in Sunday school many years ago, my Sunday school teachers taught me that to be justified means it is just as if I'd never sinned. Great way to learn it as a kid, just as if I'd never sinned. That's what it means to be justified. I think I explained this some weeks ago that when capital punishment used to be carried out in Scotland after a convicted person was hanged that

put up a notice outside the prison that would say on such and such a day at Market Cross in Edinburgh, so and so was justified.

That was the word they used. Now they didn't mean he didn't do it, he's not guilty because of course the criminal that's been executed has been so because of his guilt. But when they say he was justified, what they mean is that the case is closed. There is no more charges, the issue is over. It can be removed from the courts now because he is justified. It's paid for in full.

And this is the marvellous fact that belongs to those who come to Christ, though when Jesus Christ died as a substitute on the cross, as a consequence, we're not just forgiven, we are justified. The case is closed as standing before God is restored, so much so in Romans 8:1 we get to this chapter, he begins by saying "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

And that's what Paul has been teaching so far. But if that is true, why then does the issue of condemnation come up again at the end of this chapter? Why does he ask the question who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? Who is going to charge them now? Who is he that condemns? What does he ask these questions? I'll tell you why he asks these questions. Because there are many Christians who although they've come across and have confessed their sins and they've sought his forgiveness, they still live with a sense of being condemned and they still live under a sense of guilt. And let me tell you, it cripples your growth as a Christian. It cripples your ability to move on.

Let me illustrate this from a letter I received in the mail ten days ago from one of our television viewers, and this person says, "I have one question to ask you, which may seem silly." By the way, no question is silly if it's a question, "I struggle with the fact that our sins before we become Christians are forgiven because of what Christ did, but what about the sins we commit after we become Christians?"

"You see, long ago, I heard God's loving voice tell me not to do something. And I went ahead, and I did it and oh, have I lived to regret it? My disobedience has caused me so much pain, and for the last 36 years, the consequences of that decision have given me continuous pain. I know that one day he'll wipe away the tears." Now, as I pondered that letter, I recognized there were two areas of confidence in that letter and one area of condemnation, the confidence is this I quote "I know that our sins before we became Christians are forgiven."

So, this person is quite confident about that fact. Second thing they're confident about, "I know that one day he'll wipe away the tears." So, the confidence that this particular person has read to the past and to the future. My sin has gone before I became a Christian — I know that. And my tears will go, one day he'll wipe away my tears, she says, or he says. So, what's the problem? But the problem is the area where many of us probably have the problem, it's in the present.

What about the sins we commit after we become Christians? Now, I don't know what particular sin this person is referring to 36 years ago? Because they do not elaborate, they don't need to. What they're saying is this, for 36 years, because of what was a real disobedience, I have never been free from a sense of guilt and condemnation. And so, I asked the question that Paul asks,

because it's a relevant question, a question that will apply to many of us here this morning — I am sure of that — who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

What kind of charges are being brought against us as Christians and who is it who condemns. And I'm going to ask three questions. The first question is, who is our accuser? Second question, who is a defender? And the third question, who is our judge? In other words, who has the final call in all of this? And before we look at those three things, let me say that at the conclusion of our service this morning, I'm going to ask you to respond to God if God speaks to you very clearly this morning about your need to settle this issue with him. And one of the biggest needs that people have is the need to be forgiven. One of the biggest causes I understand of breakdown — mental breakdown, psychiatric breakdown — is carrying guilt. And I want you to know this morning there's a way out of guilt.

Who is Our Accuser?

You can be forgiven and cleansed and be brought under no condemnation. Well, the first question: who is our accuser? Because it's interesting that Paul personalizes this question, who will bring any charge against those God has chosen? Who is he that condemns?

In other words, he said, this is not just a feeling of guilt that somebody might have. There is behind it someone he describes it as, who is it that is our accuser? Well, let me turn you to a verse in the Book of Revelation, the Last Book of the Bible Revelation 12:10. And John, one of

the disciples of Jesus who had this vision on the Isle of Patmos, is looking into heaven and his vision. And I want to read you what it says in Revelation 12:10.

“Then I heard a loud voice and heaven say, ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ.’ Listen to this bit, “...for the accuser of our brothers who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down.”

Now who's he talking about? He talks about this accuser of our brothers, and by the way, that is not a sexist term. It's the literal translation of an inclusive term in the original, but it's translated brothers, but it is inclusive in its intent. This is, brothers and sisters, who's the accuser of people? Well, Romans 12:12, two verses later says, “Rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them, but woe to the Earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you. He is filled with fury. He knows his time is short.” He says this accuser, our brothers, has been held down and he says, who is it that's been held down - the devil has gone down to you. And he identifies very clearly that the accuser of the brothers, meaning the Christians in this case, is the devil.

See one of the strategies of Satan, one of his works, one of his most effective tactics is that of accusing, charging and condemning. And most of us, if not all of us, probably if we're conscientious all of us are vulnerable to that because there's plenty of ammunition in your life, as there is in my life, which you can do that. You see, the Bible tells us that both the Holy Spirit and the devil talk to us about our sins, but their voice is a very different voice. When God speaks to us about our sin he convicts.

We are told that Jesus said that in John 16:8, “when the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” So when God speaks about our sin, he convicts. When the devil speaks about our sin, he condemns. He's the accuser of the brethren. I'll tell you the difference. Condemnation is like a wet blanket that sits on you, and you can't move from under it. Conviction, which makes us aware of our sin always at the same time makes us aware of the way out.

You see, the Holy Spirit has no interest in exposing our sin simply in order to condemn us. Or in order to humiliate us or in order to rub our nose in our own dirt. The only reason the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin is in order to take us out of it and liberate us. And with the conviction of sin, which comes from the Holy Spirit, is always the awareness of the Cross of Christ the way out of our sin. But when the devil speaks about our sin, there is no way out.

He simply heaps a sense of guilt and condemnation. Let me give you an illustration of this from the Old Testament, the Book of Zachariah 3:1-5. Now, Zachariah is the second to last book of the Old Testament. If you're not sure how to find it, find Matthew turn left at second along Zachariah 3. And we have an interesting story here, which is being played out again and again and again and again. Let me read you the story, Zachariah, 3:1-5 says.

“Then he showed me Joshua, the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.”

Notice that this man, Joshua, — not the famous Joshua, who was the leader of Israel earlier in their history — this is another man who is a priest and he's standing before God. And Satan is at his right side, accusing him and -

“The Lord said to Satan, ‘the Lord rebuke Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man of burning sticks snatched from the fire?’ Now, Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.’ Then I said, ‘Put a clean turban on his head.’ So, they put a clean turban on his head and they clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.”

This graphic picture of this man, Joshua, standing before God and he is dressed in filthy clothes. That is how he feels about himself. By the way, how you feel about yourself is how you see yourself. My wife, Hillary is quoted a statement from a book by Ben Curtis and John Eldridge called *The Sacred Romance*, it's a great statement.

“They say there is no escaping your identity, you will not live beyond how you see yourself.”

And Joshua sees himself dressed in filthy clothes, and it says “the angel of the Lord stands before him and says, “Take off those filthy clothes.”

Now, by the way, when you find in scripture the ‘Angel of the Lord’ that term, it's important to understand who it is. That term occurs about 50 times in the Old Testament and several times in the New Testament.

And it is normally referring to, what we may call a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, God appearing in a human form. And the reason why we can say that, is for example, when Moses met the Angel of the Lord at the burning bush, he said, “What is your name?”

And the Angel of the Lord replied, “I am who I am” and the name Jehovah — one of the key names about God comes from that — It means I am. When Gideon met the Angel of the Lord, he called him Sovereign Lord. When Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, was struck down by a bright light, you remember, and the Angel of the Lord appeared to him and he said, “Who are you, Lord?” He answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’ So, when you read the ‘Angel of the Lord’, this is an appearance of God in human form, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

Theologians call this appearance a Theophany or a Christophany, and this is Christ himself here in the story. And it is the angel, it is the Lord himself who says, “take off his filthy clothes[...].” “I have taken away your sin, I will put rich garments on you.” And he strips this man, Joshua, of all the filthy clothes that Satan has been putting on him and accusing him before God. And instead reclothes sin in rich garments assassin and puts a new turban on his head and he becomes the new man.

And this is a particular occurrence that detailed in Zachariah 3, but I'll tell you the same thing has gone on probably in the lives of many of us here this morning as well. Because you see the accuser of the brethren, the accuser of the people of God is the devil who comes along to you and says,

“You dirty, filthy, rotten, miserable hypocrite, you're in church this morning, but I know what you did last week and I know what you did and years ago, and I know what you did 36 years ago.” And although the devil is a liar, Jesus tells us he's a liar. This is the one, a case he doesn't need to lie because the truth has done enough for most of us. So, he's the accuser.

Who is Our Defender?

Second question is, ‘Who is our defender?’ And this passage in Romans 8 explains Romans 8:33, “who bring any charge against those whom God has chosen. It is God who justifies, who is he that condemns” — listen to this — “Christ Jesus who died more than that, who is raised to life is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” Now you ask the question: does anyone bring a charge against God's people? The answer is you bet he will. The accuser will. Will anyone condemn? The answer is you bet he will. But his response is? But Jesus Christ, who died, that is who met the demands of our sin, who was raised to life, that is who has been victorious over our sin, is that the right hand of God interceding for us.

Now what does that mean? We normally connect the word interceding with praying, but that is an association of ideas, not the definition of the word. We have missed the point, if we just think of this as Jesus praying for us. “I'm in trouble, the Devil is accusing me” and Jesus saying, “Oh, I'm praying for you.” We are missing the point. If we see it just as that. It is a wonderful thought that Jesus prays for us. But the word ‘intercede’ according to my dictionary, it says, to intercede is to intervene on behalf of another.

It is to plead their case. That's why we speak of prayer as intercession, because when we pray and we're praying for others, we do plead their case and intervene on behalf of another. But the point of this here in this context is something much more than just Jesus praying for us but is intervening on our behalf where we're being accused and condemned in order to plead our case for us.

Let me read another verse, which ties in with this 1 John 2:1-2, and John says “that my dear children, I write this to you who will 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.” Now, says John, “if we sin,” — it's best if we don't — “but if we sin, we have someone who speaks to the father in our defence.”

Some translations translate that if any man sinned, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one. Now we are more familiar with the idea of an advocate in our modern-day language. We would use the term a lawyer. In other words, he says that Jesus Christ is a lawyer representing us.

And I want you to imagine in your mind's eye a court scene, if you would. And in this court scene, God is the judge. You or I stand in the place of the accused. The devil is the prosecutor in the court. And Jesus Christ is the defence lawyer. God is the judge I stand in the place of the accused. The devil is the prosecutor. And Jesus Christ is the defence lawyer.

And the devil is asked about the charges against the accused, you and me. And he begins to talk about your sin. And it can go way, way, way, way back. He talks about those little dishonesties that we call white lies; we mean they won't have any big impact on anybody and make life easier for me. And he talks about how that they begin to darken and darken and darken until they are outright lies that you've told. He itemizes instances of greed, of selfishness. He puts his finger on pride and identifies it in your life. He talks about jealousy. He talks about your marriage and he's got stacks of ammunition to bring up about that. And for some of us whose marriages have broken up, he has a field day here. He can really superimpose your failure and your unfaithfulness.

Talks about things that have gone wrong with your children if you have children. And he accuses you of neglect. He digs up some shady dealings in your business life, he reveals secrets sins you thought you'd covered the tracks and they would never be known, but with great delight he brings them out into the daylight.

He talks about your thought life, he reminds the court it was the defendant, Jesus Christ himself, who said that to hate is to be guilty of murder. And to lust is to be guilty of adultery. And it begins to reveal your thought life, your anger, your lusting, your fantasies. He speaks freely about your sex life. And he talks about your motives - the real reasons why you do what you do and did what you did, the real ambitions that lie behind your activities.

And as he presents his case, you are standing there in the courtroom and you are closed in filthy rags and you feel it. You're embarrassed because he's told things, you know, true. And you

accuser rests his case. And then your defence lawyer, your advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ rises to speak on your behalf, and you think to yourself, what can he possibly say to excuse all of this? How can he explain me well with this background? How can he justify this kind of behaviour? How can he do anything but join in the condemnation and reaffirm the condemnation that's already been heaped upon me? And as he begins to speak, you realize he's not talking about you at all. He doesn't explain you. He actually agrees with the accuser. Yes, this person, this woman, this man is guilty. Nothing about the accusations have surprised him nor shocked him, nor already been unaware to him. But he says to the judge,

‘I want you to look away to a cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem, and on that cross is a man, the form of a man. You see that man, judge, you see that man hanging on that cross. He is a sinless man. He is a perfect man. He bears no guilt of his own. So, judge, why is he there? He's a substitute of the accused.’ “The Judge”, says the advocate. “I am the man on the cross and on that cross, the transaction took place where his sin became my sin. My death became his death. And my death as a substitute was accepted in the courts of heaven because my father raised me from the dead and demonstration of his acceptance and in vindication of its sufficiency. And you see Judge in the courtroom of heaven, this is not only the Cross of Christ, this is the cross of the accused.’

You see Charles Price; he was crucified with Christ. That's his legal position. In the person of a substitute taking the full consequences that were deserved. So, Judge, the charges are real, the sin is real, the guilt is real, but it has been paid in full, in full.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, he cut out those words, 'it is finished.' The Hebrew words 'tetelestai' is a word that today in Israel you'll find stamped on a receipt. The bill is paid tetelestai, It is finished. And if ever the charge comes back again, the bill comes back a second time, you take the bill that has the tetelestai stamp, it says, look, it's paid.

On the cross, Jesus cried, 'it is finished', 'tetelestai'. He was saying, the bill is paid. The judge responds. All the guilt of this person is transferred to the Cross of Christ. And all the righteousness of Christ is transferred to this person. She, he is forgiven, declared not guilty, justified. There is no condemnation to those who in Christ, Jesus, God holds nothing against him or her anymore. That's why Paul says in Romans 8:34, "Who is he that condemns?" That's this question. Now here's his answer. Not who condemns, but why there is no basis for it. 'Jesus Christ, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God.' He is interceding for us. He is acting as our lawyer. He is our representative. He is intervening on our behalf.

Who is Our Judge?

That's the standing that is true for you if you're in Christ this morning. And so, who's the judge? Who has the final call, the final say in this matter, whose final word is final, no matter how you feel. Well, of course it is God himself who is the judge. And his final word is there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, they're in Romans 8:1. You see, we're here to deal with this on the basis of our behaviour we would have no hope. Were he to deal with us on the basis of our performance, we would have no hope. That's why the Christian life is not a

performance related event. Because we can never perform adequately, it has come with empty hands coming, recognizing our poverty, recognizing our need and with empty hands, opening them to a God of love who has dealt with the need and instead transfers to us what was transferred to Joshua in that story in Zachariah, a robe of righteousness and covers us and cleanses us.

You know, there have often been times in my experience when I've been maybe about to preach. I've been sitting in the service before I'm going to preach, and several years ago, I went through a period like this when time and again I would hear the whisper in my ear and I know its source now. I was not sure of its origin then. Who in the world do you think you are? How can God possibly use you? Look at what you've done. Look at the hurtful way you spoke to your wife this week. Look at the things that have captivated your mind. And you think you can stand up there and preach about righteousness and godliness? You big hypocrite. I remember one day sitting before a service, and I was aware of this and I thought, how in the world do I have any right to stand and speak to these people?

It's as though I heard the whisper in my ear again, certainly into my consciousness came this awareness, and I'm sure without doubt it came from the Lord Jesus Christ. This has nothing at all to do with your righteousness. All your righteousness, no matter how well you may have attained to it, is like filthy rags. The righteousness in which you stand is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You see in Isaiah 64:6, it says "all our righteousness is like filthy rags", and Isaiah 61:10, he says, "for he has clothed me" -this is a similar imagery to what we saw in Zachariah - "for has

clothed me with garments of salvation and [He's] arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and like a bride adorns herself with jewels.”

As the day a man is the best dressed day of his life is his wedding day. The best dressed day of her life for the bride is her wedding day, so he dresses me. In what? In a robe of righteousness, he arrays me is his word, arrays me. He throws righteousness all over me. You see, your righteousness is not the issue anymore, because until the day that you die you'll have a heart that's corrupt. You see we are living in the righteousness of Christ.

You see, Paul talked about this extensively in the Book of Romans. He talked about it in Romans 3, he taught it in Romans 4, very specifically Romans 5, he talked about it in Romans 6. And then he begins Romans 8, ‘There's no condemnation of those who are in Christ.’ So why does he come to the end of this chapter and ask a question he has answered again and again and again and again and again earlier already in the book about being justified? Why does he ask the question? Who will bring any charge against us who are God's chosen? Who is it that he condemns? I'll tell you why, because Paul knows as he writes this letter, there are some people who still do not get it. They still go out thinking of their own behaviour, their own performance, their own ability. Rather than realizing that all that's been traded our failure for his victory as sin, for his righteousness, our defeat for his overcoming.

And maybe many here this morning, some of you watching on television and you may be a Christian, but you still haven't got this because you still live with a sense of being condemned. And may tell you that such a thing is guilt and that such a thing is false guilt. There's real guilt.

Let's not allow ourselves to be told at all guilt is false guilt because that is one notion that some people have. There is real guilt because there is real failure. There's real sin. There's real evil. But you see there is false guilt when you come to Christ and you're being cleansed and forgiven. The devil's job then is to superimpose this false sense of guilt on us. And you see, some of us still haven't got it, maybe. And although you've been a Christian, you don't live as one because you still live with a sense of, I'm such a failure.

Do remember that woman caught in adultery in John 8? The crowds loved that because they caught this woman in the act of adultery, that was fun for them. And then they're horribly prejudiced response, they dragged the woman, but left the man. And they brought her to Jesus for condemnation. And they had chapter and verse about how the scriptures requires a person caught in the act of adultery to be stoned, and they manifest what I can only describe as this wicked religious spirit, that glorious in its self-righteousness and glories in the condemnation of others. It's a wicked self-righteousness that does that. And Jesus, knowing their hypocrisy, said, "He is without sin cast the first stone and the stones" were already in the hands of the men because they were ready to do the job. And as they began to look around, that's my neighbor over there, he knows me I better not throw the stone. There's my work colleague, that's somebody in our streets. My wife is at the back of the crowd, she knows all about me. My kids are hanging around out there, they know me. And one by one, of course, they slunk away.

Jesus knelt and wrote in the sand. I don't know what he wrote. It's very tantalizing what he wrote in the sand and tell us what he wrote. We can speculate and I won't, but I'm tempted to. 'I'm your sin bearer, I'm taking this to the cross.' It is the only way sin is dealt with. He said, "Woman,

where are they? Has no one condemned you?" The Greek uses the words, man has no man condemned you. These men who have brought you here. "No, sir" she said. "Neither do I condemn you." Said Jesus. "Go and leave your life of sin." You say, wow, he let her off lightly. I'm very thankful he did, because I need letting off lightly to.

And so do you. But it's not just letting us off. It's taking all the force of that guilt and nailing it to his cross. Not just forgiving us because he's merciful towards us, that because the just demand of our sin has been met - that's why the cross was necessary. And there are many of you who are Christian, some you're listening on television, some of you here this morning and you've been a Christian for a long time, but you've been crippled in your growth and crippled in your progress and crippled in your ability to move on with God and go deeper in your knowledge of God because you stand on the periphery dressed in dirty clothes and you feel that way.

You've never accepted that you're forgiven. You've never learned to resist the devil and silence the mass of the accuser. We are told to resist him not to give the devil a foothold. I would suggest one of the biggest footholds he gets is this foothold of superimposing guilt that has been cleansed and forgiven. Remember that quotation? There's no escaping your identity. How you you'll never live beyond how you see yourself, and if you see yourself still closed in that filthy clothes like that writer of the letter for 36 years, I've been dressed in filthy clothes. There's no progress. What a joy to write to that person and tell them what I've told you this morning. And you can dress in clean clothes, a robe of righteousness.

I'm going to ask you this morning first, if you're Christian, but this is the one area where you're being held back and you listen with sympathy to the accusation of the devil because you know you're guilty, you know you've messed up, you know, you've done things that are wrong.

But turn your attention to the cross, we don't deserve it, he paid for it. Tetelestai, the debt is over and you're forgiven. You can come and accept that this morning and there that some of you and you're not yet a Christian, you're here because God is drawing you, you're aware of that, you're aware of that inner draw. Because nobody can come to Christ unless the Holy Spirit draws them. And I can never persuade you to become a Christian. And if I were to try to do so, you would fall back out again within a few minutes.

It's the work of the spirit of God, but some of you are very conscious of that. God is drawing you, you've never given your life to Christ. You've never come in genuine repentance. And Lord, I realize that I am guilty before you, but I thank you for the Cross of Christ.

Please forgive me, cleanse me and come to live in me by the Holy Spirit to re-impart to me a new life that is holy, righteous, the life of Jesus. It's a gift you must accept and close the mouth of the accuser and listen to the mouth of the defender, our advocate interceding on our behalf presenting our case. And the Father says she's free, he's free. Would you like to know that? Well allow this issue to be settled fully and for all.