

## *Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 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 (Rom. 8:33-34).*

I would like to have a few words with you on a very important subject. I'm addressing true believers – those who know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They have trusted him, relied upon him, called upon him for salvation. He has forgiven their sins, washed them in his blood, and they have peace with God. I'm speaking to you, my friend, if you're in that condition; you're a believer.

May I ask you how it is with your soul at this time?

I'm afraid that many believers, if they were honest, would have to say something along the lines that as they look at their own spiritual condition, as they measure their own spiritual state, and then they look at the Scriptures, they see a large gap between what the New Testament believers seemed to enjoy and what they themselves are enjoying – or lacking in enjoyment – in their own personal experience at this time!

What do I mean? In the New Testament, they see believers who can speak in terms like this: having joy inexpressible and full of glory. They read of believers, of whom it's said that they have glory, a sense of glory, and *ever-increasing* glory. They read of believers of whom it's said that they have *liberty*, and this sense of liberty, and they rejoice in this with joy inexpressible, hope, confidence, glory, liberty. I am, of course, referring to texts such as 1 Peter 1, 2 Corinthians 3, Galatians 5; and so on, and so on, and so on. And I'm sure that many believers, reading such texts of Scripture as this, such passages, they say to themselves: 'Well, I'm not having that! In fact, I feel that my experience is dry, barren, arid! I seem to be going through the Christian life by rote, as it were, by rule, and regulation, and form. It doesn't seem to be a living, vital, joyous, triumphant experience. And yet I see in the New Testament, quite clearly, that the early

## *Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

believers had *this* sense of liberty, and confidence and assurance. And I don't have it! I'm afraid, I feel I'm in some sort of bondage. And yet I read that we're not given the spirit of bondage! We don't have a spirit of fear. And yet I do!

Can I say something to help you my friend? Well, not me! I can't say it! I can mouth the words, but I'm going to say all I say from a passage of Scripture. And my passage that I've chosen to speak to you about is Romans chapter 8. And I want to raise two points with you from verses 33 and 34; Romans chapter 8, and verses 33 and 34. It's two questions. The apostle asks two questions here. If you look at Paul, you will see that, well in company with Christ and many other teachers and preachers in the Bible, they use the more powerful way of teaching: that is, by questions, and not simply by statements. Statements – which we get a lot of today in preaching – is a very bland way of teaching. The apostle's way is very often to raise questions. And not closed questions – with the answer 'Yes!' or 'No!' But with open answers, open questions – and you have to fill in the details. And he does it here – verse 33: 'Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?' And in verse 34: 'Who is he that condemns?'

Now these questions are rhetorical; that is to say, the answer is completely understood. The truth is, in a very real and fundamental sense, *nobody* can lay *any* charge or make *any* condemnation against any child of God! That is true! But the way the apostle goes on, and the whole context of these two questions, shows that he knows that believers *do* have this sense of condemnation, and *do* have this sense of criticism and accusation against them! And they do have a sense, therefore, of lacking joy, and happiness, and assurance, and freedom which the believer should have. And that's why he asks these questions.

You may say: 'Well these are not my questions!'

You wait! Perhaps I can say something that might help you here. I will tell you who might accuse you, who might criticise you, who might point the finger at you.

*Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

Well, I will tell you one for start: Satan! Satan knows where you live, my brother and sister! He knows your weak points. Above all, he knows your strong points! And he knows how to tempt you, and twist arguments, and point the finger at you, especially – if you know anything of this – in the small hours! He knows how to open up your conscience, and remind you of your sins, and accuse you. And this can send you into a spiral, downward, a vortex, where you feel that you have failed, and you have to confess it. And you begin to feel the shame of it, the embarrassment of it. And you begin to lose your joy. Satan has gained a victory over you.

The world can do it! It's very prone to do it – calling us hypocrites. And, of course, my friends, I have to admit, with you, we're all sinners, and the world can find places where they can touch us, and point the finger at us. But this sometimes goes home, and pierces us, and gives us a sense of fear, and doubt, lack of assurance. And we have to admit the force of what the world is saying against us. And so we get again into this spiral downwards!

Our own conscience, our own flesh, can rise against us, and remind us of how we've fallen, how we've failed, how we've stumbled, how we've sinned, how we've come short! The weakness of our service! The coldness of our hearts! And again we go down into this spiral, and this treadmill of never breaking free of worry and anxiety, and lack of joy. And we come into fear, and timidity, and dryness, and darkness.

And, of course, the church can do it! Our teachers can do it! The books we read can do it! They tell us these – certain – things, and we feel the guilt of it; and so on. Again we get into the state of bondage!

Now, what does Paul mean (teach) here? What can I say from this – Romans chapter 8 verses 33 and 34? You must remember that these verses just don't appear out of a blue sky! They've come in chapter 8, which follows on from chapter 7, and 6, and so on. So let's just remind ourselves of where we've reached in this letter so far, what Paul has established. Has he not proved to

## *Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

us – as we’ve read it, if you read it through, if you’ve not read it lately, read it again – has he not proved to us, that though we are sinners under the wrath of God – chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 – Christ has died for us, propitiated the wrath of God, appeased the wrath of God, borne it for us, and we are washed from our sins? Have we not read, in chapter 5, that he has made us completely righteous and justified in (God’s) Son? In chapters 6 and 7, has he not reminded us, and taught us, and explained to us, that when we came to Christ, we were united to him, we died with him, and we rose with him? We are no longer under the law, the law is no longer our slave master, the law is no longer our husband? We are under a new slave master Christ, and we are married to a new husband – Christ – that we might bear fruit for him?

So we’ve come to chapter 8, verse 1: ‘Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man’ and ‘to be a sin offering’ – an offering for sin, to be made sin for us ‘in order’ – and he condemns sin in man – ‘in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us’; and so on, and so on. And yet, having said all that – and we go on in chapter 8, about verse 16, for example: ‘The Spirit himself’ bears witness – ‘testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children’ – are children of God. And yet, even so, we have fear! As he says in verse 15: ‘You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship’. And yet we have to confess, very often, many of us, that we *do* have a spirit of fear! We *do* have a spirit of bondage! And we *don’t* have this sense of assurance, and this sense of confidence!

What’s happened?

Well, we’ve fixed our eyes on the wrong object!

It could be that we’ve fixed our eyes upon our works, instead of Christ, over the matter of justification. Have you done that, my

## *Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

friend? Has the devil told you about your sins, and you begin to think: Well, I'm not right with God, then? You're right with God by your works? You're right with God by Christ's works, and your trust in Christ! Christ has perfected you forever, Hebrews 10! The blood of Christ has washed you from *all* sin! You're without spot, or wrinkle, or stain, or any such thing! I'm quoting various Scriptures to you. And I remind you again of Romans 8:1: 'There is no condemnation to you'. Now, stop looking at your works! Stop looking at the law, and saying: Now if I try and keep that, I'll be right! The devil's taking you to look at the law instead of Christ! Look to Christ for your justification, again! Remind yourself: 'It is Christ who died – yea, rather who risen again! And I'm justified! There is no condemnation to me!' This is what Paul says in our verses: 'Who will bring any charges against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies'. Your works didn't justify you in the beginning! They won't justify you now! You're justified, anyway! Perfectly, forever! Remind yourself of it! It is Christ Jesus who died!

But I more particularly want to home in on this: I feel that many believers have gone wrong in this matter, and got a lack of assurance and come into fear and bondage, because of the second aspect of this work – they have got it wrong on the teaching of Romans 6 and 7. They have been taught by their teachers that they are to go back under the law for sanctification. Now is this *your* problem, my friend? Are you looking at your works for sanctification? Are you looking to see what you're doing, how far you've attained? Are you looking at the law, the rules and regulations, the commandments – thou shall not do this! – and you're striving to do it, you're tightening your belt? And what do you see? You see you're failing. And what does this do for you? It gets you into a spiral – downward – of fear, and bondage, trying harder, and failing all the time. You lack assurance. And all the sense of joy – an inexpressible joy and glory – it's just gone out of the window, hasn't it?

Well, your teachers were wrong when they told you to go under law for sanctification! Read again Romans 6 and 7. Read it out

## *Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

loud, slowly! Read it in other versions to the one you're used to! Read it out loud, slowly, I say again. Let the argument sink in! Don't put any glosses on the words! You're not under the law! You're free! You're not sanctified by the law! You're sanctified by Christ! Read it and see! You're married to Christ! You've died to the law – don't go back to your old marriage with the law! Don't go back to the law for justification! And certainly – Romans 6 and 7 – don't go back to it for sanctification!

'The law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law sin and death'! In Christ Jesus, God has set me free from the law of sin and death for justification, *and for sanctification!* And he is talking about sanctification when he gets there into Romans 8:1 and on! As he says: 'In order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'.

So where does all this fear come from? And all this doubt? It's because you're looking at your works for assurance, you're looking at your works for sanctification! You're looking at law keeping!

What is the answer that Paul has to these criticisms and accusations?

My text again! Verses 33 and 34 of Romans 8: 'Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?' Will you do it yourself? Will your teachers do it? Will the devil do it? Will the church do it? 'Who is he that condemns?' Now what is his answer? 'Christ Jesus'! Notice the dramatic Greek there. You can't see the Greek, but the English is: 'Christ Jesus'! It is dramatic like that: 'Christ Jesus, who died'! He doesn't say: 'It is Christ Jesus'. He says just: 'Christ Jesus'! Christ is the answer!

So what should you be doing, my friend? Stop looking at the law for assurance! Stop looking at the law and your works for sanctification! Of course, there is a place for this – 1 John, and so on – but where should your eye primarily be fixed? Fix your eyes on Jesus! I'm not making it up! 'Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of

*Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

God and is also interceding for us'. Set your mind, set your affection, upon Christ! Look to him! 'Come unto me', he says, 'and I will give you rest'. Don't go to the law! Come to me, he says. Don't go to the law for justification.

'Well', the teachers say, 'that's right!' 'But', they say, 'you must go to the law for sanctification'. No! 'Come to *me*', says Jesus. Come to *me* – for sanctification as well as justification! And that's what Paul says here: 'It is God who justifies. It is Christ who died, who is raised, living, praying for me, interceding'. Are you fearful that you will fall, stumble and fall away? Christ will intercede for you! Christ will keep you! Christ is coming again! Christ died for you! Look to Christ! And this is the way of sanctification – not to the law! Look to Christ! Christ is your deliver! Do you want this liberty and joy? Then set your affection, your mind, and your heart upon Christ!

Of course your sanctification is feeble. Of course your sanctification is below standard. We confess it. Let's confess it! I'm not belittling it! It's true! But look at Christ! Never man spoke like this man! Never man lived like this man! There is no Saviour like Christ! Look to Christ! This is the answer to all fear! This is the answer to lack of assurance! This is the answer to doubts! This is the answer to all questions! I can't answer the questions – Christ can! I have my doubts – there is no doubt with Christ! My works are feeble – Christ's are perfect! Look to Jesus! That is what Paul is saying here!

Let me take just one more moment or two to prove it to you.

Whatever you make of Romans 7, the last part of it – and we all have difficulties with Romans 7, the last part, and I'm not going to get involved in those difficulties here – I just want to pick on verses 24 and 25. Now, whatever interpretation or understanding you have of this passage, these words resonate, don't they? They ring a bell, don't they? They're chiming in exactly with what I've just said. What have I just said? Do you lack assurance? Look to Christ! Do you want to be sanctified? Look to Christ! Law? Law? No! Christ! Christ!

## *Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

What does Paul say in Romans 7:24 and 25? ‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?’ Do you sympathise with him? Do you empathise with him? Do you know what he’s talking about? Do you feel at the moment – believer, I’m talking to you – do you feel wretched, depressed, low, doubting, fearful, questioning all these things? You lack the joy you should have? What does Paul say? ‘What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me?’

What is his answer? Verse 25! ‘Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!’

Can you see that is the truth? It’s not *my* counsel! It’s not *my* teaching! I know I’m going against the Reformed teaching and the evangelical teaching, the great mass of the teachers, I know I’m going against them! But is it not true what I’ve just said to you? Is it not scriptural? Is it not what Paul said? What’s the answer to all his fears, all his doubts, all his sins, all his sorrows? What’s the answer to the question: How can I be assured? How can I be sanctified? Is the answer not always: ‘Christ, Christ Jesus our Lord’?

If there’s an unbeliever listening to me or reading this, the answer is the same for you. We came this way when we were justified. We looked to Christ. If you look to Christ, you will be saved. If you look at sacraments, or ceremonies, priests, or church, or pastors, or parents, or whatever it might be, you will fail, miserably! But – if you look to Jesus Christ, you will be saved. Now, and forever!

But I come back to you, believer. I set out in this little talk to help you, to help myself, to get to this assurance, an unspeakable joy, full of glory, ever-increasing glory, this sense of liberty. And you won’t find that by looking at the law! You won’t find that by looking at yourself! You will find it only by looking to Christ! But if you look to Christ, and take him to be all in all, all these other things will fall into place. Your doubts and fears will melt away. They’ll never be gone completely in this life, I know – that will have to wait to eternal glory – but as

*Christ, Not Law, Banishes Fear*

you look to Christ, you will grow increasingly in this unspeakable joy and full of glory, here and now.

So, look to Jesus Christ our Lord!