

A DEFENDER PROVIDED AT GOD'S EXPENSE

Romans 8:34 | Ascension of Our Lord | May 13, 2018

Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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.

VIVIT!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you.

Nobody wants to hear those words. Those are the Miranda Rights that police officers read or recite to those they have arrested. They are intended to inform the arrestee of his or her rights under the Constitution of the United States, specifically the Fifth Amendment right to avoid self-incrimination. The last sentence is interesting. *If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you.* That is done at government expense. Our government actually pays to provide defenders for those who cannot pay for their own.

Our God does something similar for us and for all. Each of us has A DEFENDER PROVIDED AT GOD'S EXPENSE. Jesus Christ—our crucified, risen and ascended Savior—is that Defender. And what a defender! He himself paid the penalty for our crimes. And now he pleads our case at the right hand of our heavenly Father.

I. He paid for our crimes

Court is a scary place—even if you're just pulling jury duty or serving as a witness. But if you sit in the defendant's seat accused of a crime, it can be downright terrifying. Well, we do sit in the defendant's seat, and we are accused of a crime. We should be terrified.

We should be terrified because we are accused of every crime. We are accused of breaking every one of God's commandments many times over. We are accused failing to put God first. We are accused of using his name improperly. We are accused of despising his Word. We are accused of dishonoring those in authority. We are accused of hatred and murder. We are accused of impure thoughts, words and deeds. We are accused of having hearts full of greed. We are accused of speaking hurtful and harmful words, and failing to defend our neighbor's good name. We are accused of constantly looking over the fence and coveting what God has given to others. All false accusations, right? No, every one is true. Each one of us has a rap sheet a mile long. The case against us is rock-solid and iron-clad.

Paul asks an important question: **Who is**

the one that condemns? Who is the prosecuting attorney? Who is the one who brings these accusations against us? It's that old, evil foe—indeed the oldest and most evil foe—the devil. Boy, does he ever have a strong case against us! He doesn't need a team of investigators to build his case either. He doesn't have to dig very deep at all. Our crimes are right out there for everyone to see. **The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.** (Galatians 5:19-21). In case you didn't hear something that you can relate to on that list just remember the final phrase: "and the like." None of us can escape accusation. Every single one of us is guilty. We have done the crime. And so we deserve to do the time—an eternity of suffering in hell. In hell there is no hope of parole. In fact, there isn't even hope of hope.

But let's go back to that question again: **Who is the one that condemns?** Paul doesn't really ask that question to determine the identity of our accuser. We know our accuser is Satan. No, what Paul is asking is more like this: Of what consequence is the one who condemns us? How much weight do his accusations carry? Answer: He is of no consequence and his accusations carry no weight. They are completely meaningless. Why? Because **Christ Jesus ... died—more than that, [he] was raised to life.**

Martin Luther had a tender conscience. He had a deep sense of his own sinfulness. But when the devil would torment the great reformer with his accusations, Luther had a clever way of dealing with him. He would think this way: *Satan, you're right. The list of my sins is long. All your accusations are true. But you forgot a few sins. Be sure to put down all of them. And then take your list to Christ, my Savior. You can deal with him.*

My friends, we can do the same, for we have the same Savior. We did the crime, but Jesus did the time—in our place. He took our place in the defendant's chair. He took our place in hell. He paid the penalty for our crimes. Peter tells us: **Christ ... suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God** (1 Peter 3:18a).

We've all heard the term *whipping boy*, but did you know that whipping boy was an official position at the English court during the Tudor and Stuart monarchies of the 15th and 16th centuries? Princes were looked on as divinely appointed and so answerable to God alone. They could not be touched. Therefore, if the prince did wrong, the whipping boy was punished.

Jesus is our whipping boy. His back was torn by the scourge because of our sins. His brow was pierced by thorns because of our rebellion. His hands and feet were nailed to a Roman cross because of our offenses. His Father condemned him to die and damned him to hell because of our crimes. But note well: No one forced

him to be our whipping boy. He took our place and paid for our crimes willingly.

And the payment counted. How do we know? Because **[he] was raised to life**. The empty tomb is the Father's stamp of approval on Jesus' perfect life and innocent death in our place. **He was delivered over to death [because of] our sins and was raised to life [because of] our justification** (Romans 4:25). God raised Jesus because he had accomplished our justification. We are now innocent in the sight of our Judge, not guilty of all our crimes against him. Satan can accuse all he wants. But when the Judge brings down the gavel his verdict is clear: "Not guilty because of Jesus!"

My friends—as if all this wasn't comfort enough—the One who earned that not-guilty verdict for us is still pleading our case. He ascended to heaven for that very purpose.

II. He pleads our case

A little a while ago we listened to Luke's simple account of the ascension: **While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven** (Luke 24:51). What an awesome sight it must have been to watch Jesus ascend into heaven! To see the One who had been beaten and bloodied, bruised and buried, alive again and ascending in such glory. I bet the disciples could hardly breathe as they watched.

But even more awesome is the comfort his ascension gives us. We have the confidence that our ascended King is

ruling all things for our good. We have the certainty that he is preparing a place for us in heaven. We have the comfort that one day he will come back in the same way he left to take us to live with him forever. And we have the peace of knowing that right now he is pleading our case before his Father's throne.

He is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. To be at God's right hand is to be in the position of all power and authority. How does Jesus use his position of power? To serve himself? No! To serve us. Jesus uses that powerful position to intercede for us. What does that mean? John gives a wonderful answer to that question in his First Epistle: **We have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One** (1 John 2:1). Jesus is like our defense lawyer who pleads our case before our Judge. He continually defends us before his Father's heavenly throne.

What can Jesus possibly say in our defense? How can he defend our innocence? We're guilty! Again, he doesn't argue our innocence, but his own innocence in our place. We can imagine his defense sounding something like this: "Father, without question the accused is guilty as charged. His crimes are well documented. But I paid the full price for all of his sins, indeed for the world's sins, once and for all on the cross. **It is finished** (John 19:30). I suffered hell in his place. You accepted the payment when you raised me from the dead and exalted me to your right hand. As a just God you cannot demand payment for sin a second

time. In your great grace, you must pardon the accused.” After hearing such an argument the Father can do nothing but bring down his gavel and announce the verdict: “Not guilty!”

Have you ever seen the reaction from the accused when such a verdict is read? There is instant relief. Hugs and handshakes are shared by the defendant and his attorney and family members. Often there are tears of joy. And they can't wait to get out of that courtroom and start life over, to really live.

Isn't that our reaction to the verdict won for us by Jesus? Aren't we filled with relief to know that our sins are forgiven? Don't we want to embrace Jesus in thanks for his loving service to us? Are we not filled with the purest joy because of our salvation? And are we not moved to thank the One who lived and died, rose and ascended for us, by using all that we have and are to serve him and our neighbor? Yes, we are! **Christ's love compels us** (2 Corinthians 5:14).

My friends, I'd like to conclude by once again reading you your rights: You have the right to full and free forgiveness of your sins. You have the right to a new life of peace with God and power to live for him. You have the right to spend an eternity in heaven with him. These rights were secured for you at great expense. These rights are yours because Jesus won them for you at the cross. Enjoy your rights. Revel in them. Thank God for them. Thank God for your crucified, risen and ascended Defender, Jesus Christ. Amen.