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No Condemnation

Sermon preached by J w Walder at Galeed Chapel Brighton on 27th September 1995

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Romans 8:1

What a vital matter justification is, and how desperately we each stand in need of it! We only feel that need as and when the Holy Spirit is pleased to reveal to us, in a bearable measure, our solemn state and condition in the Adam fall. As our consciences are made tender in the fear of God, and we feel the condemnation that is due unto us for our sins, we shall wonder at the blessed and amazing truth that such sinners as we are, and feel to be, can be justified in the sight of a holy God, that not one single thing can be brought against us in a way of condemnation. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation.’ What is the ground and the foundation of the justification of the election of grace, the Church of God? Why, it is to be seen in the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ, that glorious, lovely and adorable person. It is to be seen in the work of him who has both fulfilled the law of God and suffered all that God demands, in a way of just punishment and condemnation, for those sins committed against his holy law, his glorious majesty and his precious gospel.

For those sinners, then, who know and feel that they are under condemnation because of all their sin against God (including impenitence and unbelief), the Holy Spirit here sets forth the only ground upon which they can know God’s deliverance from condemnation. It is alone upon the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ has finished the work that his Father gave him to do. He has brought in an everlasting righteousness for his people. He was made under the law, and the sins of the Church were imputed to him, and he made perfect and complete satisfaction by his one sacrifice for the sins of his people. But O, it is a matter that is not easily got at in experience; it is not something that we can obtain with little labour, but something which will cause such a constant and deep exercise in the heart of one convinced of sin—waiting, begging, praying and longing that they may see and know and feel their interest in this word: ‘No condemnation.’

This is the same thing as justification—that state, that precious state of being accepted by a holy God through the merit and worthiness of Jesus Christ, the surety, the substitute, the mediator, the glorious Saviour of the Church of God. This is indeed an eternal matter, for those who are in Christ are in him from all eternity. Therefore, in the decree, mind, purpose and grace of God, they are without condemnation from before the world began. But it is a very great and indeed a most needful matter for us to come into the blessed experience of it, and to enjoy that peace which ever accompanies the felt realisation of being made just through Christ, in the sight of a holy, just and righteous God.

Well now, just for a moment let us look at our desperate need of it, and that by which we are brought to feel and to stand in want of this great matter, ‘no condemnation,’ or justification. Everything will condemn us, when God is pleased to impart life to our souls and bring us under the power, influence and operation of the Spirit in the Word. And so will those who are suffered justly to accuse us and condemn us before God for our sin.

The first thing is this: we are condemned by God’s Word. O, I well remember, when I hope and trust God did bring me into concern and I was almost afraid to read my Bible. It did not matter where I looked or where I read; everything, every word, seemed to condemn me. I stood indeed before God verily guilty of transgressing every word of law and gospel. In those days I knew nothing else, and there was nothing other than this rankling in my spirit—condemnation. I was brought eventually, as the thief, to justify God in my condemnation. (Luke 23:41)

Now in these experiences, as well as that which follows in the experience of God’s people, conscience accuses and condemns. My friends, if conscience does its work under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we cannot stand before it. It condemns us and we cannot answer it. Neither can we make excuse or justify

ourselves. Conscience will accuse us. There is no possible remedy for this, but to experience and feel an interest in the blood and righteousness of Christ.

Satan condemns, and he may do so quite justly, tempting us and accusing us of those things which are inconsistent with the holy character, holy Word and holy gospel of the God of Israel.

Our accusers may bring many charges against us, so that we feel indeed to stand condemned upon every charge that is brought against us. This is a painful, grievous and solemn place to come into; to be under condemnation and to be caused to see that there is no possible way of relief, in and from ourselves.

*Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and thou alone.*

(Gadsby's 143)

O, thanks be unto God that there is a way whereby the worst of sinners may be freely and fully justified! That way is the substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ on the sinner's account and behalf. He stood surety and undertook so freely and readily to fulfil the whole law and bring in an everlasting righteousness, which it pleased God to impute unto his own people.

Now I will only just remind you of one or two happy and blessed characters in God's Word, who were blessed to enter by experience into the blessedness and sweetness of the glorious feeling of being made perfectly just in God's sight. Manasseh was a wicked man, he was a wicked king, but not more than you or I are by nature—we are no better. The things that we read concerning him, which he practiced in the days of his unregeneracy, are dreadful and awful things! But the Word of God testifies to this, that Manasseh was justified through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, that blood which is all-sufficient for:

*A Mary's or Manasseh's stains,
Or sins more vile than they.*

(Gadsby's 914)

There was also that woman the Pharisees brought to the Lord Jesus Christ and accused her of the sin that she was found committing. But there was no condemnation. The law condemned, doubtless her conscience condemned, and the Pharisees did. But the Lord Jesus Christ did not, and there is only one ground upon which a sinner can be thus justified by Christ Jesus—and that is through his own merit, blood-shedding and righteousness.

These things are left on record in God's Word for our encouragement, if so be that we are among those who have been filled with blackness, despair, gloom and distress on account of the felt burden of our sins and our transgressions. O, this, if experienced, will never make anybody lawless, it will never make anybody licentious, it will never make any one think lightly of sin. Rather it will cause us to detest, abhor, hate, loathe and grieve on account of what we are through the fall.

We must first then be brought to know, in some measure, that condemnation is our just portion and lot. Some more than others, but all in some measure, must know what it is to feel condemnation, before ever God will manifest or reveal his mercy in pardoning their sin and imputing Christ's righteousness. When he does so, he can look upon them and pronounce those blessed words in the Canticles: "Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee." (Song of Solomon 4:7)

Now we must try and look at the characters to whom these words do most blessedly apply, and who indeed shall come in due season into the experience of them. "There is therefore now no condemnation." It is a wonderful mercy if we can truly say that we have experienced that favour. We have looked for our sins and could not find them. Why? Because God has taken them away, he has cast them into the sea of the merits of Christ's blood, he has imputed them to his Son, and his Son has born them away. "There is therefore now"—present tense—now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.'

Well, who are these persons? In what way, in what manner, in what sense, are we to understand these words, 'to them which are in Christ Jesus'? They are one in him as the glorious Head of the Church, the covenant Head of the elect, just as we are one in Adam as our federal head, created in him as our representative: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22) All

are in Adam; few are in Christ. But those that are in him are in him as their covenant head. They are in him by the Father's choice, for God has chosen us in Christ from before the foundation of the world. So these people were always in him in the sight of God. They are in him also by virtue of that eternal and indissoluble covenant union, which exists between their souls and him, and between him and their souls.

But you say, 'How shall I know it? How can I be sure of my interest? How shall I know that I am in Christ? How can I be sure that this is my lot and my portion?' Well, you will know it and you will feel it only when the blessed Spirit of God is pleased to reveal this matter to your soul, to bear his own witness to the union and to give you blessedly and sweetly to feel it. We are one with Christ in blessed union and this is known and felt when God is pleased to grant to us precious love and faith in exercise. What a wonderful thing it is to feel that bond with Christ, in and under the blessed exercise of divine love in our hearts! Under the exercise of that sweet and blessed love, we feel a union and clinging unto this blessed person, embracing him, loving him and trusting him. This will answer the question, "Have I union to the church's living head?" (*Gadsby's* 698)

It will be put out of question, when and if we are favoured with that love which comes from Christ and returns to him, and the union is sweetly felt. Joseph Hart makes a fine distinction between the movements in the exercise of faith in the heart of a believer, and it will be a blessed thing if we know what it is to possess that precious faith. Hart speaks of *believing Christ*, he speaks of believing *on* Christ, and lastly he speaks of believing *into* Christ (*Gadsby's* 234). That is the thing which is desired, aimed for, prayed for and longed for in the hearts of the living family of God: they want to believe *into* Christ, for before this, as Hart says, "Though safe we are not sound." Believing *into* Christ is the precious fulfilment of the heart's desire, in regard to a personal and a felt union to the Son of God.

Now it is only by virtue of this felt union with Jesus Christ—and no other way—that we can have any interest in what he has done, and receive of the benefits and blessings of his life of obedience and his sin-atoning death. If we are in union with him, we are justified freely by his grace, as we have in another place of this most precious Epistle of Paul to the Romans: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand." (Romans 5:1-2) Precious words they are indeed! The blessing of this communion and union is to be received and enjoyed by simple faith alone; and that not in the doctrine, but faith in the precious power, prevalence, all-sufficiency and glorious blessedness of the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ. O what a wonderful thing for a poor, guilty, heart-broken, hell-deserving, fearing, distressed believer to be delivered from all his fears, and this precious grace communicated and brought powerfully into the heart! 'There is therefore now no condemnation.' It will make us cry out, 'What, me, Lord! Me a sinner above all other, so guilty of every transgression, of breaking all thy law's demands and commands?'

This is to be received also on account of the precious advocacy of Jesus Christ, who opens his mouth in the cause of all such as are condemned to death. He speaks at God's bar, on the account and behalf of poor sinners, as spoken by the hymn writer:

*But Jesus answered, 'Set them free,
And pardon them and punish me.'*

(Gadsby's 837)

O what a depth of blessed truth there is in those words! What glory is due to the Lord Jesus Christ for being so willing to bear the condemnation instead, and to be a substitute and to say, 'Pardon them and punish me!' 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.'

Well now, we have something further to consider: 'who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Now this, surely and truly, is that which the people of God find the hardest thing that exercises and concerns their hearts. It is one thing to believe the doctrine, it is one thing to preach, to read, to sing, to talk about it, but, O, my friends, it is a very different thing to walk it out in the pathway of experience. To have that root in us, which is the fruit and the effect of being justified through Christ, and this evidenced and manifested in our conduct and conversation.

"Who walk not after the flesh." Firstly then, what is it to walk after the flesh? Why, the Word of God tells us further down—"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh." (v. 5) There is that constant seeking to please, to satisfy, to gratify the flesh, both profane, worldly flesh, and religious

flesh. The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life are enmity to God. Now all the worldling does is to seek after those things which will satisfy his fleshly lusts. He will seek opportunity to satisfy his carnal mind, and all the vile and abominable and evil matters that are in him through the fall, the sins of his heart. He will do his best to gratify his pride and his ambitions and worldly lusts. The flesh will continually be saying, 'Give, give, give!' My friends, our wicked hearts will never be satisfied, because they cannot sin enough. They will ever be seeking better and greater opportunities to do worse things than they have done; the flesh is grieved that it cannot do more. By nature we only mind the things of the flesh and the carnal mind, and that is our life; we are utterly and completely involved in it.

But now, before I go any further to the next clause, is the language in the seventh chapter strange language to us? Is it something foreign, or do we understand it? Can we truly say that it exactly describes our feelings? The Apostle Paul, after God had called him by his grace, convinced him of his sin, brought him out of a false religion and granted him the Spirit and the grace of God, which caused that vital change, he still found sin to dwell in him as much as it ever did, and ever will do in us. Our old nature will never alter; it will be the same at the last as at the first. But you see, there is this vital change, as the apostle said: "That which I do I allow not." (Romans 7:15) Now can we say so? We are overcome temporarily by the power of indwelling sin; we lie, we deceive, we lust, we hate, we are angry, we are proud, we are self-conceited; but do we allow it? O, what a wonderful mercy if we can say: "Who shall deliver me?" There was such a conflict in the soul of the apostle against indwelling sin, that he was brought into a state of deep misery on account of it, and he said: "What I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I... When I would do good, evil is present with me." (Romans 7:15, 21) So then, "If then I do that which I would not ... it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." (Romans 7:16-17) My friends, it is one thing for sin to be in us, and another thing for us to live in sin. It is one thing for us to sin wilfully, and another thing to be sorely grieved and greatly distressed on account of the commission of sin all the day long. What we want and what we desire to feel, is justification in its power and unction, influence and savour, through the sufferings, death, blood and righteousness of Christ—such that we may be truly brought to love God and hate evil, to fear God and depart from iniquity. The apostle was sorely plagued, as all of God's people are, with the flesh and its lusts, the carnal mind and all that which the old man does continually demand of us. But he did not walk after the flesh, but rather fought against it and desired to be delivered from it.

Now then, they 'walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' The pathway of a true believer is an exceedingly difficult pathway, for he is truly on pilgrimage. He finds it as hard going as Bunyan's Christian, and at times even harder than when the good pilgrim came to the Hill Difficulty. You know, at the foot of the hill there were three ways. Only one of those three ways was the right way, and that was up the hill. Not the smooth, easy, level and plain way that is so pleasing to our nature. No, it is up-hill work. From running Christian came to walking, and from walking he came to crawling, and he was well-nigh beat out of breath on account of the fact that the flesh pulled so hard the opposite way, and the difficulties were so great on every hand. And so it was with much difficulty that he ascended the hill and reached the top.

Now this is walking after the Spirit and this is indeed a very large and comprehensive subject. Let me try and look very briefly for a moment at it. Are we ignorant of the restraints of the Holy Spirit upon our spirit? A mercy if we know it and can walk after it! O to be kept exceedingly tender in regard to grieving that blessed Spirit who is our Comforter, our helper; that glorious person who reveals to our hearts the things of God and of Christ! O, may we beware of grieving him, and may we not be disobedient to his gracious, kind and loving restraints! It is a good thing to be enabled to walk in love to God, and for that precious love to so influence our hearts. That, on more than one occasion I hope and trust, has been my experience when I have been in a certain place, or doing a certain thing. The question has arisen: Is this really in harmony with love to the dear Redeemer who died for sin? Would you really do this if you truly loved him? The best and the sweetest and the greatest influence I know to keep our hearts from sinning wilfully against him, is his love. The more we love him, the more we shall seek to do that which is pleasing in his sight. So, my friends, may we be caused to take close and due heed to the restraints of the Holy Spirit. Do we know his dictates and his promptings? Do we know what it is to hear that sweet, unctuous, powerful, effectual voice in our souls, the voice of the Holy Spirit? "Let thy good Spirit teach

me when to go and when to stay, when to act and when to refrain, when to speak and when to be silent.” Do we know anything of the gracious operations, and the sweet and powerful unction of the Holy Ghost, so that we may walk after the Spirit in that pathway which is consistent with the Word and will of God? “Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Colossians 3:1, 2) This is a gracious gospel injunction and precept, one which I for myself feel to come so exceedingly short of and yet so desire to be enabled to do. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33)

O that God would cause us to put first things first, to walk after the Spirit, to mind the things of the Spirit! That is, to look out for his prompting, his restraining, his unction and operation, and all those things which he has freely to communicate to the hearts of poor sinners who are seeking after salvation, after holiness, after righteousness, after heaven.

Those who walk after the flesh have no aim in life other than to heap to themselves the vanities of this world, like the man in Bunyan’s allegory with the muck rake in his hand, when there stood one with a crown in his hand to put upon those who were bound for heaven. O, my friends, we have some solemn characters in the Word of God, but may we be among those in our text who are in Christ Jesus: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” The Lord add his blessing.

Amen.

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