

## **A Bold Challenge, but a Complete Answer**

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Morning, July 15, 1866

"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 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. 8:33, 34

You find me again in the Epistles. I cannot say that as a minister I should wish to be always found in the epistles; but I can say that as a Christian I never wish to be found out of them. Let me explain my meaning. I should be very unwilling so to tie up my ministry with my own hands as to confine myself to any one portion of God's word, however precious; yet, when I consider the glorious doctrines, heavenly truths, encouraging promises, and holy precepts which shine forth so clearly and so conspicuously in the epistles, I could wish ever to live and at last to die in the enjoyment of them. Not but what other parts of God's word contain the same truths; but they are not developed with that clearness, nor set forth in that full and bright light which is shed over them as from a heavenly sun in the epistles of the New Testament. Indeed it could not be well otherwise. They are, excepting the Apocalypse, which is a prophetic book, the last revelation which God has given to the Church, much of which could not have been afforded to it at an earlier period. The gospels give us the miracles, parables, closing scenes of the life, the suffering death, and glorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. There they stop. As historical records, inspired accounts of the days of our blessed Lord upon earth, and containing the only authentic testimony of his gracious words and actions when here below, they have a place in the word

of unspeakable value and preciousness. But the epistles, as a fuller revelation of the truth of God, bring before us the blessings and benefits which are consequent upon his life, death, and resurrection. These blessings demanded a special revelation which was committed to the epistles as written by inspired apostles to the churches and individuals; and when there were gradually collected together into one volume, they assumed their present shape as an integral portion of the New Testament. As such how blessed they are as containing every thing which can serve to build up the Church on her most holy faith. Where else do we find such glorious truths as salvation by free, sovereign, superabounding grace, justification by an imputed righteousness, pardon through atoning blood, sanctification by the operations and influences, work and witness of the blessed Spirit, full liberty of access to the throne of God through the Mediator at his own right hand, and a certain assurance that at the great day this corruptible body shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality? It is true that we have the elements and rudiments of all these glorious truths in the gospels; but all rudiments are necessarily imperfect; and therefore if I prefer the fuller to the scanty, the bright and clear to the comparatively dim and faint revelation, who shall blame me? We may love the epistles without ceasing to love the gospels. Both have an equal place in our heart. Do we love John 14 less because we love Rom. 8? Is there any rivalry between the teaching of the Lord and the teaching of Paul; between the parable of the prodigal son and the doctrine of superabounding grace? In the gospels we have the doctrines of grace in the bud, in the epistles in the bloom; but as the rosebud is the same flower and grows on the same branch as the full-blown rose, so truth in the gospels is the same as truth in the epistles, and falls little short of it in either beauty or fragrance.

But there is another reason why I speak much from the epistles. Ministers usually are most at home in those parts of God's word into which they have been specially led. That is the circle in which they range with the greatest ease and comfort to themselves, and generally speaking with the largest amount of profit to their hearers. Now if there be any part of God's word into which I have been specially led, and which I have chiefly read and studied, it is the epistles. There are three things in them which have made them my favourite study. First, I find that in them which so *satisfies my intellect*. I hope the Lord has enlightened the eyes of my understanding by his grace, and has thus given me a spiritual intellect; and having cultivated it for many years by reading, prayer, study, and meditation, I want something in the word of God to satisfy my intellect thus graciously given. Do not misunderstand me. I mean my sanctified intellect, my spiritual understanding, for I am not speaking of my natural intellect, which can understand only natural things but cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, but of that wisdom which cometh from above, that anointing which teacheth of all things, and is truth, and is no lie. Now I find in the epistles that which abundantly satisfies and feeds my sanctified intellect, and fully and graciously commends itself to my enlightened understanding. What a fund of instruction is therein for a mind enlightened from above. Take, for instance, the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. With what force of gracious reasoning, with what strength of clear and scriptural, and one might almost say cogent logical argument, has the apostle opened up the counsel of God in the free and full justification of a sinner by an imputed righteousness, and proved every point in a manner so masterly in itself, from its harmony with the Scriptures which he has advanced, and so satisfactory to an enlightened understanding, that sometimes as we follow his arguments, every word seems to carry with it the demonstration of the

Spirit and of power. Few persons, even ministers, speaking comparatively, *study* the epistles. They read them and doubtless get benefit from them; but they do not see the clear, connected arrangement of every link in one chain of sustained argument, and that the doctrinal portion of the epistle to the Romans is not only a most blessed revelation of heavenly truth, but even, viewed intellectually, is one of the greatest and most masterly compositions which were ever penned by the hand of man.

But secondly, I find in the epistles, that which approves itself in the highest degree to my *conscience*. There I find the blood of Christ held forth most clearly to my faith, as cleansing from all sin; there I find the way whereby God justifies a sinner set forth in the fullest and brightest light, so as to bring peace to the soul; there I see the love of God in the gift of his Son gloriously exalted and magnified; and there I behold, set before my eyes, the "new and living way which the Lord Jesus has consecrated through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." These blessed truths approve themselves to my conscience, as obtaining no relief but by being sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb.

And I find in them, thirdly, that which approves itself to my *spiritual affections*. I love the epistles because I love the truths contained and revealed in them; and as I receive the love of the truth set forth in them, it draws up my affections to where Jesus sits at the right hand of God. I must therefore speak well of that part of God's word, though not to the exclusion of other parts equally precious, equally inspired, which so specially commends itself to my sanctified intellect, to my approving conscience, and to my renewed and heavenly affections.

But I have another reason still why I preach so often to you

from the epistles. In speaking to you, I address myself to a people who are, or should be, an established people. It is about twenty-three years since I first came amongst you, in my annual visit to the metropolis. Many of you have been a considerable number of years in the way, and therefore you do not stand in a position requiring the mere elements of truth. The epistles were written to churches, to those who were established in the faith. They are therefore a part of God's word which is especially suitable to a church and congregation not made up of novices, weaklings, and beginners, but of those who are in some degree matured and established in the faith as it is in Jesus.

But in fact my preaching so much from the epistles, either here or elsewhere, needs no apology. I merely explain why it is, that this morning, as on other occasions, I come before you with a portion out of the epistles of the New Testament. Let the words of our text speak for themselves. They want no apology, though they may want a little explanation.

What, then, do I see in them, just to lead my own mind into an orderly consideration of the subject, and to assist your memory? I think I see these three things in them: An inquiry, an answer, and a climax.

I.—*First*, I see an *inquiry*, double in form, though but one in substance. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" "Who is he that condemneth?"

II.—*Secondly*, I see an *answer* to that inquiry; like the inquiry double in form, but double also in substance. "It is God that justifieth;" "It is Christ that died."

III.—*Thirdly*, I see a *climax*, or a rising up, as the word means, like a ladder, from one grand truth to another: "Yea,

rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

I.—It seems almost as if the apostle in our text took his stand upon a kind of spiritual Pisgah. As Moses stood on Pisgah's top, and thence surveyed the whole length and breadth of the land which God gave the children of Israel for an inheritance, so Paul seems here to stand upon a spiritual Pisgah, and takes a survey of the goodly inheritance with which God has blessed his people. Like Balaam, though not a Balaam, for that false prophet loved the wages of unrighteousness—but as Balaam stood upon the high places of Baal, and thence surveying the tents of Israel, cried out in a prophetic rapture, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel;" so Paul standing, as the man of God, where Balaam stood the man of the devil, sees the family of God as Balaam saw the tents of the children of Israel; and holding up his hand and opening his mouth that all might hear, cries aloud, as with trumpet tongue, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" A bold challenge, and yet a challenge which he can meet at every point; a war note, a trumpet of defiance, a glove thrown down by the king's champion, and yet one for which he will do battle even unto death, being assured of perfect victory for the cause which he so boldly undertakes to maintain, were he even to die in its behalf.

Let us then examine this inquiry: let us see how the king's champion approves himself in this combat. You and I, and all who love the truth are ranged upon the same side; and though we doubt not the issue, yet we will watch every turn of the fight.

i. But what word meets us at the outset of this inquiry? A word very offensive to some, but a word very precious to

others; a note of war to enemies, a note of peace to friends. The word "elect" meets us at the very gate, and stands on the threshold of the inquiry. We cannot, then, pass it by, ignore it, smother it up, evade it, or beat it down. With what holy boldness the apostle holds it when he cries aloud, almost with a defiant voice, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" But why should men's bristles rise, why should men's nostrils dilate with anger, why should men's eyes almost flash fire when the word "elect" or "election" sounds in their ears? Is it so dreadful a word—so terrible a term? Why should a man be a marked man who uses the word and boldly proclaims his belief in the doctrine which it enforces? Why is the doctrine itself so much objected to, for after all it is the doctrine not the word which is so particularly obnoxious? The main ground of objection is, that it is unjust that God should have chosen some unto eternal life and passed by others, thus leaving them to eternal woe. Now let us look a little at this formidable objection, for time will not admit of my noticing others which make, as some think, an equally forcible array against the doctrine of election, especially as they may be easily disposed of by the same answer.

I will assume, then, that you are an opponent to the doctrine of election. Now let me ask you the following questions:— May you choose your own house, or must another choose it for you? "Well," you say, "I certainly think I have a right to choose my own house: nobody can know what sort of a house I want so well as myself." Do you think that anybody may choose for you your friends, associates, and companions? "No," you answer; "I think I ought to have liberty to choose my own friends and companions, or those chosen for me might be very disagreeable or unsuitable associates." Do you think that anybody has a right, if you are unmarried, to fix upon a wife for you and say, "You must

take this woman for your partner in life, whether you like her or not?" "No," you say; "I think it is part of our liberty as men to choose our own wives." Now apply my figures to the point in hand. May not God upon similar grounds choose his own house? Is not the Church God's house—the temple in which he dwells; and has he not a perfect right to choose his own habitation? Do we not read, "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation?" Had he not a right to choose Zion rather than Sinai, and inhabit Jerusalem rather than Samaria? Had not Christ a right to choose his friends and companions for all eternity? Had he a right, for instance, to choose his own disciples? Should you think it right to have let Judas choose them for him? that our Lord should not have had any will in the matter to choose Peter, John, and James, but that Judas should choose such men as he pleased, men of the same stamp as himself, and say to the Lord, "These men must be your disciples, friends, and associates on earth?" Does not the very idea shock your mind and chill your blood? Yet you are not shocked nor does your blood run cold when you would choose this or that man to be the companion of Christ to all eternity, and say it is unjust if the Lord has a choice of his own, and does not accept yours. And had not the Lord a perfect right to choose his own bride, his own spouse? Was any spouse to be put upon him, and he accused of injustice if he would not take her for time and eternity? So if you as a man are at liberty to choose your own house, your own associates, your own wife, do allow the Lord as much liberty in eternal matters as you claim for yourself in temporal.

But you say, "Those are mere temporal matters, and do not involve such important consequences. I must say still, it seems to me unjust to take some to heaven and let others go to hell." But by so speaking, you seem altogether to lose sight of the broad fact that all men are criminals and justly



condemned already by their own deeds, and that there is no injustice in punishing the guilty. Take the case, for instance, of a pirate crew, like the old West Indian buccaneers, of whom we have read such tales of bloodshed and massacre in the days of our boyhood, which has been committing unheard-of atrocities, wading in blood up to the knees, and ravaging the sea in all directions. At last, after a bloody combat, the ship is captured by an English frigate. Now every one of these pirates, with the captain at their head, deserves to be at once strung up at the yard arm. But suppose that only half of them are hung, or they are what is called decimated, that is, every tenth man executed. It may seem to fall very hard upon the victims; but is it an unjust sentence when all equally deserve to be hung? Is it unjust to spare some and hang others? So none can complain of God's injustice if all were sent to perdition. Those who are spared are spared by grace, and those who perish perish by justice. "The Judge of all the earth must do right," as much when he burns up a guilty Sodom as when he rescues a righteous Lot from the overthrow, or freely justifies a believing though once idolatrous Abraham.

But I need not take up time and attention by dwelling upon points so obvious to a spiritual mind. As to convincing those who set themselves obstinately against the doctrine, it is, for the most part, labour in vain to make even the attempt. But whether men believe it or disbelieve it, one thing is certain, that the word of God which has declared it will stand for ever, and that as no opposition to it can disannul, so no adherence can make it more certain.

But there is one important consideration, both for those who receive God's word as he has revealed it and those who oppose it, that the word "elect," according to our text, embraces and comprehends all whom God justifies, all for

whom Christ died and rose again. It will, therefore, be our wisdom and mercy not to cavil at and criticise the doctrine of election, nor mutter and murmur against God's sovereignty in choosing some and passing by others, but rather to ask ourselves this one simple question, "Am I one of the elect? Have I any good ground to believe that God has justified me freely by his grace, and that for me Christ died and rose again?"

ii. But the apostle takes a prominent stand when he asks so boldly the question, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" What then? Does no one lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Yes, certainly, many do. That is an every-day fact. Publicly and privately many things are laid to their charge. The apostle, therefore, does not mean that nothing is laid to their charge, but that no charge shall so stand against them as to be eventually their downfall. These charges we may briefly class under two heads—false and true.

There are then *false charges* laid to the account of God's elect, and these have to be fully met and answered that their state and standing, honour and reputation may be clearly and fully established. I doubt not that many, if not most of you, at some time or other of your life have been subject to *false charges*. Few things are more galling indeed to our feelings or more mortifying to our mind than to be subjected to false accusations, for though we know them to be false, yet many will believe them to be true; and thus we may deeply suffer in our reputation, or a wound may be inflicted through our side upon the cause of God. But what a mercy it is when they are false; when before the face of God you stand clear of the charge, and whatever may be laid against you, you have the verdict of a good conscience that of that accusation you are innocent. So in the things of God there

are false charges brought against his living family, not merely as regards their personal character and reputation but simply because they believe and receive God's truth.

1. How often, for instance, it is charged against God's people that the doctrines which they profess to believe are *dangerous* and lead to licentiousness. This is a false charge, and one which can be met by them without fear. They know perfectly, from the testimony of the word of truth and the approving verdict of their own conscience, that the doctrines of grace lead to exactly contrary effects, and that so far from leading to licentiousness, they have, when spiritually received and experimentally enjoyed, a most blessed and sanctifying influence upon their hearts, their lips, and their lives.

2. Again, it is frequently laid to their charge that what they call their *experience is visionary*, enthusiastic, comes from a brain-sick imagination, or is but the sporting and wandering of a deluded mind. How often relations bring such charges against members of their own family, where the work of grace, to them unknown, is going on in any one who comes under their daily observation. How frequent is the insinuation that it springs from a degree of insanity, or is some strange hallucination or delusive idea which has possessed their mind. *That* is a false charge, because we, who have experienced a work of grace on the heart, know that the mind is never really sane or sober until enlightened from above; that until we have some experience of the life, power, and presence of God in our own souls we are madmen, and that it is by the grace of God we have become sound and sane. Does not the apostle expressly say, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind?" (2 Tim. 1:7.) Festus said to Paul, "Thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." But

what was the noble answer of the apostle, though in bonds before his tribunal? "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." (Acts 26:25.) Thus we may turn the tables upon our accusers. It is we who are of sound mind, and they insane; theirs is the hallucination, theirs the enthusiasm, theirs the fanaticism, to dream of going to heaven without a change of heart or life. We see them maddened by the love of sin and the world, and feel for ourselves that we, as taught of God, for the first time in our lives, have right views, right thoughts, right intentions, right words, and right actions.

3. Another false charge laid to God's elect is that they *abstain from open sin* just to get a name or for fear of disgrace, yet love to walk *privately* in all ungodliness; that if they can only just keep a fair outside they think very little of the inside, whether it be clean or unclean. This is a false charge. The Lord's people desire to live free from all sin, secret as well as open, because they carry daily and hourly in their bosom a conscience which testifies against all ungodliness, private or public, open or secret, committed in thought, committed in word, or committed in action.

4. Another false charge is that they are a poor, *moping, miserable race*, who know nothing of happiness, put away from them all cheerfulness, mirth, and gladness, hang their heads down all their days like a bulrush, are full of groundless fears, and nurse the gloomiest thoughts in a kind of musing melancholy, grudging all around them the least enjoyment of pleasure and happiness, and trying to make everybody as dull and as miserable as their dull and miserable selves. Is not this a false charge? Do you not know that you never had any real happiness in the things of time and sense, that under all your assumed gaiety there was real gloom, that every sweet was drenched with bitterness, and

vexation and mortification stamped upon all that is called pleasure and enjoyment; and that you never knew what real happiness was until you knew the Lord, and were blessed with his presence and some manifestation of his goodness and mercy?

But then there are *true* charges; and true charges cut very deep. If you were guilty of anything naturally that was laid to your charge, if you had committed some crime or done something manifestly wrong, your head must droop, your countenance fall, and you feel full of inward confusion and shame. So, distinct and apart from false accusations, there are true charges brought against the elect of God in the court of conscience.

1. *Moses*, for instance, brings true charges. He says, "You have not kept my law in thought, word, or deed; you have broken every commandment, and brought yourself under its curse." Now what can we say in answer to this charge? Have we kept the law or have we not kept it? Have we loved God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and our neighbour as ourself, or have we not? Let conscience give the verdict, guilty or not guilty? What does conscience say? "Guilty, my Lord: I have not loved the Lord my God with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength; I have not loved my neighbour as myself; I have sinned in thought, in word, in action; I have brought myself under the stroke of God's law; I am justly condemned by its curse." Here, then, is a true charge, and one which must be met and answered, or we shall perish without hope under the curse and condemnation of the Law.

2. Sometimes *conscience* also will bring a true charge. And, O, who can stand before the charges of a guilty conscience when it must own that the accusation is true? You may stand

before a false charge and lift up your head boldly before the face of the greatest accuser if his accusation be groundless; but when your own conscience bears its inward testimony to the truth of any charge against you, at once you drop. Now conscience must register many things against us: mine does, I am sure, and that almost continually. Can you pass a single day of your life without conscience registering some sin against you? You are kept, I trust, from open evil; you are preserved, as I hope I am preserved, from doing anything outwardly of which you are ashamed, or that will bring reproach upon the cause of God; but the inward workings of your depraved heart, the bubbling, springing up, and oozing forth of that corruption which is innate in us,—who can stand against the verdict of his own conscience when it testifies against the inward evil that is ever discovering itself? We must fall under that charge and acknowledge it is true.

3. *Satan* also will often accuse us, for he is called "the accuser of the brethren." And O what charges Satan can bring against us; what a memory the prince of darkness has. How he will take his stand, as Bunyan represents Apollyon straddling across the whole way, with his fiery darts, and bring to mind this or that sin committed, this or that slip or fall, this or that backsliding; and each fiery dart would strike through your liver had you no shield of faith wherewith you could quench it. Some of his charges are false, and some of his charges are true; but so confused often is our mind, that we often cannot distinguish the true from the false. Has he never represented to you that your sins were unpardonable, or that you have committed the unpardonable sin itself? Has he never told you that your backslidings are too great to be forgiven, that no partaker of the grace of God ever sinned like you, and that though there might be hope for others who had not sinned so desperately and with so high a hand, there could be no mercy for you? Has he not stirred up your mind

by every vile suggestion, and then tried to persuade you that all these base and vile thoughts were your own, and that by them you have provoked God beyond all patience and endurance? He thus so mixes together true charges and false, that we scarcely know what to say, think, or do.

But I must not dwell farther on this part of our subject. Take all these charges in the aggregate: charges false, charges true, what shall we say to them? We cannot fully answer them; we therefore fall down before them; we dare not a word to say in our own defence; like the woman taken in adultery, we have not a plea with which to silence our accusers.

II.—Now God steps forth. The apostle, as his mouthpiece and ambassador, speaks in behalf of the guilty criminal in those magnificent words, those heart-thrilling accents which have sounded with the sweetest melody to thousands of troubled hearts and afflicted consciences: *"It is God that justifieth."*

i. What charge need we then apprehend if it is God that justifieth? What has filled you, what may even now fill you with guilty dread? Not your sins against man, but your sins against God. Against his dread majesty, before his heart-searching eye you have sinned; his law you have broken; his commandments you have trampled under foot; his revealed will you have slighted: his precepts you have neglected; the sins of your heart, of your lips, of your life, have all been personal sins against a holy, pure, and righteous God. We may have sinned, and doubtless have done, against our fellow creatures, and would, if we could, repair any damage which they may have sustained at our hand. Some, perhaps, are dead whom we may have wronged, and others may have forgiven or forgotten what we have done or said against them. If we have wronged them in money, that we have

repaired, or can repair; and for other offences, which can not be well repaired, we have felt inward grief, and confessed them before the Lord. If, then, God, against whom we have so sinned, come forward and himself freely and fully justify us, that is a full answer to the inquiry, to the bold challenge: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" That is a full reply to every accusation, a full indemnification for every demand, and a full receipt for every debt. But it must be God that justifies us—not we justify ourselves. Only he against whom we have sinned can justify us from our sins.

But I wish you to observe the scriptural meaning for it is full of blessedness, of the word, "justify." To justify is not simply to pardon or acquit. It is something far more than to acquit, for it gives me a righteousness which I could not have by simple acquittal. To explain this a little more clearly, let us just cast a simple glance at the proceedings of our law courts. Look at a criminal arraigned for an imputed crime. Some years ago there was in Scotland a remarkable poisoning case, and the jury returned what is called a Scotch verdict: "not proven." They did not say the person charged was not suspiciously guilty; they did not say there was not a measure of proof against the criminal, but they held that the whole amount of proof brought forward was not sufficient to justify them in bringing in a clear verdict of guilty. The alleged crime was "not proven;" or, as we say, proved. I have often thought that it would be good if in our law courts it is permissible to return the same verdict, for it would often more satisfy the public mind, and relieve the conscience of the jury. "Not proven," therefore, is only just an escape from "guilty," and is the very lowest form of acquittal. But there is a step, what I may perhaps call a rise from this, as in our courts of justice, where the criminal, when acquitted, is said to be "not guilty," the jury declaring their belief that he has not been guilty of the crime laid to his charge. But in some



courts, as in a court martial, there is another rise: "honourably acquitted," where the accused is not only acquitted, but acquitted in a honourable manner; or as we sometimes read, even in a criminal report, "he leaves the court without a stain upon his character." Thus you see in earthly courts there may be several degrees from "not proven" to "honourably acquitted;" but even that falls short of justification. A judge does not say, "Take that man and put a royal robe upon him." The Queen does not bid her prime minister honour him, as King Ahasuerus bade Haman honour Mordecai: "Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the royal crown which is set upon his head." (Esther 6:8.) No man, however honourably acquitted, was ever thought worthy of an honour like that. But when God justifies a man, he not only acquits him, and honourably acquits him, but puts on him a robe of righteousness, a royal robe, in which he stands before God as holy as an angel of light, spotless in the obedience, the glorious obedience of God's own dear Son. Nor will even the royal crown be withheld; for for him is prepared "a crown of righteousness," and like the four-and-twenty elders whom John saw sitting, he will be clothed, not only in white raiment, but have on his head a crown of gold, for the Lamb has made him a king and a priest by redeeming him to God by his blood. (Rev. 4:4; 5:9, 10.) O, what glory there is in this heavenly truth, that you and I, if we believe in the Son of God, though in ourselves poor, guilty criminals, are not only "not guilty" in God's sight, are not only "honourably acquitted," but are freely and fully justified by the imputation of Christ's own glorious, immaculate righteousness, and so stand before the eye of God without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. Such a stupendous mystery may well fill our minds with holy wonder, and as it surpasses all creature thought may seem too great to be true. But nothing else could satisfy God, and, I may add,

nothing less than this could satisfy our own conscience. I should think that a criminal who went out of court with a verdict of "not proven" against him rather than for him, must hang his head down somewhat before the gazing multitude, nor would he like to meet afterwards in the street any of the jurors. Even when the verdict is "not guilty," he must go out of court with some degree of shame if the evidence bear strongly against him. Nay even if "honourably acquitted," there might be still some suspicion left in the mind of persons that there was some evidence kept back which might have been brought forward, and he himself might have felt stung with some part of the accusation as more than half true. But to be covered with a robe of righteousness and stand before a holy God as his dear Son stood, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, how this surpasses all thought of men or conception of angels; yet, I repeat it, nothing but this can satisfy God, and nothing but this can satisfy conscience. Were there a wrinkle in our person you could not stand accepted before God; His holy eye would rest on that wrinkle as an imperfection, and you could not be admitted to his glorious presence while that spot was upon you. Nor can conscience be satisfied with anything short of that which fully satisfies God, for it is his vicegerent and speaks in his name.

ii. But the apostle asks also another question, which I shall answer at the same time with the present part of my subject. He had asked, "*Who is he that condemneth?*" Now to condemn is to go a step further than to lay a charge; for to condemn implies an actual bringing in of the criminal as guilty. A charge might have been laid, but not sustained; but a sustained charge brings him in condemned, and if a murderer, shuts him up in the condemned cell, there to abide till brought forward for execution. Now God's people not only have charges laid against them, some false and some true, but they are condemned, and justly condemned, by the

verdict of the law and by the verdict of their own conscience. Still the apostle, unmoved, unshaken, stands upon the same glorious height, and cries aloud, "Who is he that condemneth? Look around, find the man if you can who can justly condemn, effectually condemn, eternally condemn, in God's sight condemn so that there shall be no reverse, any one of God's elect." Men may condemn their, as they consider, dangerous doctrines, men may condemn their experience, men may condemn their bigoted views, men may condemn their uncharitable ways, men may condemn their gloomy lives, and even condemn their very souls to perdition, as our Christian poet said of Whitefield:

"The world's best comfort was, his doom was passed;  
Die when he might, he must be damned at last."

But the question after all is, Does God condemn them? Does he condemn the doctrines which he has himself revealed, condemn the experience which his Spirit has wrought, condemn the life which they live as a life of faith in the Son of God, condemn them for walking in his way, and preferring his will to the will of man or to their own, and will he in the end adjudge their souls to hell? Or if they be justly condemned, as they are condemned by a holy law and a guilty conscience, even that shall not stand. Why not? Because Christ died. That is the answer, and the all-sufficient answer. The apostle, you see, never lays the least stress upon works, beginning or end. He has but two answers. To those who lay anything to the charge of God's elect his answer is, "It is God that justifieth." To those who condemn, his answer is, "It is Christ that died."

But O how much is involved in this simple answer. How it meets every charge, and if it cannot silence every accuser it effectually quashes in the court of God every accusation.

III.—But this brings us to what I have called the *climax*. The term climax is a Greek word, which literally means a ladder, and it is used to signify that peculiar feature and striking figure in oratory whereby the speaker keeps gradually rising in ideas and language, mounting as it were from one summit to another in sublimity of thought and expression, and carrying his audience with him. Now Paul, who was by natural endowment a man of consummate ability, of highly cultivated mind, as well as eminently taught of God and writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, has given us in his epistles some beautiful instances of this figure of oratory. The end of this chapter is a noble instance of the power and beauty of climax. "I am persuaded"—see how he rises—for to be persuaded is a step above simple belief—"I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers"—how he keeps rising from one point to another; first, "death," then "life," then "angels," then "principalities," then "powers," each one stronger than the other, "nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature"—how he mounts! how he takes us to the top of the ladder, the summit of the climax, "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So in our text we have a climax, a spiritual ladder rising higher and higher, its foot placed on the ground, but its top lost amidst a blaze of heavenly glory. What are the steps? The first step is "Christ that died;" the second is, "That is risen again;" the third is, "Who is even at the right hand of God;" and the fourth is, "Who also maketh intercession for us." It is as if he would crown the whole of his argument with this beautiful climax—to give our conscience thorough peace, and impart to us the blessed assurance that whoever shall lay a charge, no charge shall be sustained; whoever shall condemn, that condemnation shall fall to the ground, and not for a moment

be listened to in the courts of heaven.

i. He begins, "It is Christ *that died*," as if that were enough to answer every charge and silence every condemning tongue. For what does the death of Christ imply? It implies a sacrifice; and a sacrifice implies that the victim stands in the place of the person who offers the victim. Blood-shedding and death were integral parts of a sacrifice. "Without shedding of blood is no remission;" without the death of the victim the sacrifice would not be complete. Thus the words, "It is Christ that died," carry with them these two things: 1, The shedding of his blood to put away sins; and, 2, the laying down of his precious life, that by one offering he might perfect for ever them that are sanctified. The Holy Ghost expressly declares that "Christ once in the end of the world hath appeared to put away sins by the sacrifice of himself." There was no other way whereby sin could be put away. Nothing short of the blood-shedding, sufferings, and death of the Son of God could be such a propitiation for sin as God could accept. He came to do the will of God; and that will was that he should offer up his body and soul as a sacrifice for sin. He finished the work which his Father gave him to do; nor did he bow his sacred head in death until he could say with expiring breath, "It is finished." There is no other relief but this for a guilty conscience; no other answer but this to the condemning sentence of a holy law, or the accusations of the accuser of the brethren. Now, if the sacrifice is complete, that is a sufficient answer to the inquiry, "Who is he that condemneth?" Moses condemns; but now Moses, viewing the dying Son of God, says, "I am satisfied; I required a perfect, unwavering obedience: it has been paid. To my law was attached a solemn and tremendous curse; the Son of God has borne that curse. I am satisfied; I have all that I called for. I have now no charge to lay; I have now no condemnation to bring; I am

thoroughly and fully satisfied." Justice is next asked, "What say you, Justice? Are you content?" "Yes; I am fully satisfied," answers Justice. "How so?" "All has been rendered that I could claim. An obedience was necessary, an active obedience and a passive obedience, that my demands should be fully satisfied. I have got both in the Person of the Son of God, as suffering, bleeding, and dying. His merits are infinite, for his Person is infinite as the Son of God. I am, therefore, well satisfied, and I have no further charge to bring." "Now, Conscience, what say you?" Are you at peace; are you at rest; have you felt the application of atoning blood, and received it as from God as cleansing from all sin?" Conscience answers. "I am satisfied: all guilt is taken away; it is removed by the blood of the Lamb: I have no charge now to bring." "Satan, what say you?" But he does not wait to answer. He has skulked off long ago. The prince of darkness slinked away directly the question was put, and has not a word to mutter from his infernal den. Ask, therefore, Moses, ask justice, ask conscience, ask Satan; all are mute before a dying Christ, a bleeding Lamb, all are silenced by a finished work, an atoning blood, and an accepted sacrifice.

ii. But the apostle does not leave us there: he goes on with the climax, steps up another round of the ladder. "*That is risen again.*"

Christ's resurrection was God's attesting seal to the truth and certainty of Christ's mission and to his divine Sonship. If Christ had not risen, there would have been no external, visible, manifested proof that he was the Son of God. The apostle therefore testifies that he was "declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." This, therefore, has made Christ's resurrection to be such a grand cardinal feature of our most holy faith; for upon it rests the grand and glorious fact, that Jesus of Nazareth was

the Son of God. And if he was the Son of God, all that he did he did as the Son of God; all that he suffered he suffered as the Son of God. His blood is the blood of the Son of God; his obedience that of the Son of God; his work the work of the Son of God; and all that he now is, and all that he now does, he is and does as the Son of God. But how do we know this? How can we prove it? What is our evidence? It is all proved to a demonstration by his resurrection from the dead. If it be blessed to view a dying Christ, it is also blessed to view a risen Christ. "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." This secures our own spiritual and eternal life, as the apostle beautifully argues: "Knowing that Christ being risen from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." (Rom. 6:9, 10.) Highly do we prize, closely do we cling to the cross of Christ. As we view him by the eye of faith bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, we gather up the sweet persuasion that those sins will not be laid to our charge. But when we view him rising from the dead as a mighty conqueror over sin, death, and hell, then our faith embraces him in the power of his resurrection as justifying as well as in the meritorious efficacy of his death as atoning.

iii. But the apostle goes on to rise another step in the spiritual climax; he would take our thoughts one flight higher still: "Who is *even at the right hand of God.*" He takes us from earth to heaven, lands us within the veil where our great and glorious High Priest entered by virtue of his own blood, and shows us the glorious Son of God at the right hand of the Father. The right hand of God means the right hand of power, of dominion, of authority, and of acceptance. When our blessed Lord went back to the courts of bliss, and the gates of heaven lifted up their heads, and the everlasting doors were lifted up, and the King of glory went in, he sat

down at once at the right hand of the Majesty on high. But what did this place of preeminence imply? It certified to principalities and powers, and the whole bright and glorious throng of angelic hosts, that God had accepted his work and given him for his reward that exalted place of power, of honour, and of dignity. For remember this, that our gracious Lord went up to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God in his human nature. He did not go up to heaven as he came down from heaven only as the Son of God. He went up to heaven as the Son of Man as well as the Son of God. He went up to heaven in a human nature united to the divine, and therefore entered the courts of bliss as the God-Man, Immanuel, God with us. It is a point of the greatest importance, and to be ever borne in mind by every spiritual worshipper and by every true believer in the Son of God, that our blessed Lord sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high in the same human body which he wore upon earth—glorified indeed beyond all thought or utterance, but the same pure, spotless, holy, and immortal humanity which he assumed in the womb of the Virgin, and which he offered as a sacrifice upon the cross. To this point the apostle would specially direct our thoughts, and bring it before us as the object and food of our faith. And what an object of faith it is, for, as viewing Jesus at the right hand of God, we see there a mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; we see an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; we see a brother, a friend, a husband enthroned in glory, there ever living, ever reigning, ever ruling, until God shall have put all enemies under his feet. He would thus encourage us if we feel guilty of charges brought against us and the stings of a condemning conscience, to look out of them all and beyond them all, and say to all our accusers, "It is Christ that died; what have I to do with your accusations, your charges, your condemnation? I have got one who will answer you.



'Does conscience lay a guilty charge  
And Moses much condemn,  
And bring in bills exceeding large?  
Let Jesus answer them.'

I have one who can answer for me: it is he who died. But this is not all; it is he who is risen again; nay, more, it is he who is even at the right hand of God to plead my cause, to take my case in hand, to meet my accusers, to sprinkle my conscience with his blood, to shed abroad his love in my heart, to assure me that none of these charges shall stand against me, and none of these accusations shall ever be sustained for my full and final overthrow." O, it is a faith in these divine realities which brings us into immediate contact, into some sweet communion with this glorious Mediator at the right hand of the Father. This brings us out of ourselves with all our miseries to look to him with all his mercies, and gives us to see there is more in Christ to save than there can be in sin to condemn.

But for whom is all this? For believers. "For by him all who believe are justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses." I shall have occasion, I hope, in the evening to speak from a text which has some reference to the intercession of Christ, and I shall therefore not detain you longer this morning by dwelling upon the last step of the ladder. It is equally beautiful and equally blessed; but I shall defer the consideration of it to the next assembling of ourselves together in the name of the Lord.