



*31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I appreciated the good discussion that we had last Sunday regarding the proposed changes to our church's Constitution and By-laws. Our by-laws did not mandate that we have this extra meeting for discussion before we made any changes to it, but the committee thought it would be a good idea to have an extra opportunity for questions and discussion. Since this is the guiding document of our church, this should be taken very seriously.

Changing the Constitution of our church takes care and attention to detail, but it's a piece of cake compared to changing the constitutions of the United States or state Wisconsin. For example, look how long and how much effort was expended to add this "marriage amendment".

"Only a marriage between one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in this state. A legal status identical or substantially similar to that of marriage for unmarried individuals shall not be valid or recognized in this state." (Article 13, Section 13)<sup>1</sup>

The process took two and a half years. First, the State Assembly and Senate both had to pass the amendment.

1. March 5, 2004: Approved by Wisconsin State Assembly by a vote of 68-27.
2. March 12, 2004: Approved by Wisconsin State Senate by a vote of 20-13

Amendments require a second vote by both legislative branches.

3. December 6, 2005: Approved by the State Senate a second time, by a vote of 19-14.
4. February 28, 2006: Approved by the State Assembly a second time.

Finally, the amendment was put before the people of Wisconsin who overwhelmingly approved it

5. November 7, 2006: Approved by referendum, by a margin of 59-41%

Two and a half years of effort. And that's just the voting part. The planning and behind the scenes efforts took several more years. But despite those years of efforts at following our Wisconsin Constitution and adhering strictly to the letter of the law, in a single day, it was all undone.

6. June 6, 2014: U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb unilaterally declared the Wisconsin Constitutional Amendment to be "unconstitutional."

And then because her ruling was challenged by our state district attorney, J.B. Van Hollen, exactly one week later she put her own ruling on hold.

7. June 13, 2014: U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb put her own ruling "on hold"

I raise this issue, not only because it is likely to cause fellow believers more grief in the coming years than any other issue, but primarily because our text in Romans 8 this morning takes place in the courtroom. Paul's third question in this section comes at verse 33.

### **Q. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?**

This is courtroom language. Charges are brought within the judicial system. Going back to our first example, the Wisconsin Legislature proceeded properly in the passing of the marriage amendment. But Judge Crabb, working from within the Judicial branch of the government, brought a "charge" against the State. Her charge was the marriage amendment was "unconstitutional." If it weren't so sad and frustrating, the whole thing would be laughable. How can a duly amended portion of the State Constitution possibly be "unconstitutional"? I could see if the governor had enforced some unilateral decision about this without any input from the legislature or from the people of Wisconsin. But this is infuriating.

But for this morning, my point is to illustrate the charge that Judge Crabb brought forth. Understand that she is not just challenging the law, she has brought a charge against the people of Wisconsin. If you voted for this amendment, the charge she has brought forth is that you and I are not capable of understanding the law. We are too stupid to make decisions about important topics such as this. The only person qualified to make such a call is someone sitting behind an

elevated, mahogany desk wearing a black robe. So she has brought forth a charge against you and me.

By comparison, Paul's question- *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?*- doesn't seem as urgent, but it is far more important. You understand the difference between urgent and important, don't you? The failure to make this distinction gets us into all kinds of trouble. For example, this week Ryan called to me from the kitchen saying that the dishwasher was leaking all over the kitchen floor. By the time he discovered it, there was already a two foot wide puddle forming. Now i could have been doing all kinds of important things at that very moment. I could have been working on my sermon. I could have been counseling someone over the phone. Many things are more important than a dishwasher, but at that moment, the urgent issue was to stop the leak. We tend to schedule our time around urgent things to the detriment of important things. I do this as well and it messes with my time.

The urgent question seems to be what will happen to the marriage amendment? The outcome of this decision will have far reaching implications. For most of us, this feels like a more pressing issue than the heavenly courtroom where someone could bring a charge against God's elect? Some of you are thinking, "I don't even know what that means, so why should I be concerned about it?" But since this question is a salvation question, then do you see that it is far more important than our state's marriage amendment.

So who might bring a charge against us, "God's elect"? This is very similar to the question we looked at last Sunday-"who can be against us"? We spent the bulk of our time last week working through a long list of people, organizations and movements who are actively "against us." The same list could be applied here. If people are against us, in some sense they are bringing a charge against us. However, I think Paul primarily had Satan in mind here.

The clearest text is Revelation 12:10 *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. Did you notice the courtroom setting in this verse? Satan accuses us "before our God." This is the courtroom in heaven. And our enemy is quite active, isn't he? He accuses us "day and night." Now does this mean that Satan never sleeps? He is a spiritual being so he would not need to eat or sleep, so it is possible that he is truly active twenty four hours a day in his charges against us.*

But we also have to keep in mind that the word devil literally means accuser. Take a look at this definition of the Greek word *diabolos* (διάβολος).

prone to slander, slanderous, accusing falsely; a false accuser, slanderer<sup>2</sup>

The very name and the very essence of Satan is an accuser. Satan is the name assigned to the devil but the devil is not really his name, per se. The word *diabolos* is always preceded by the definite article "the." It is always "the devil." So every time you see the phrase "the devil" in Scripture, you could rightly substitute it with "the accuser." In reality, every time you see "the devil," the translators have simply left the word untranslated. In some respects, that is not the

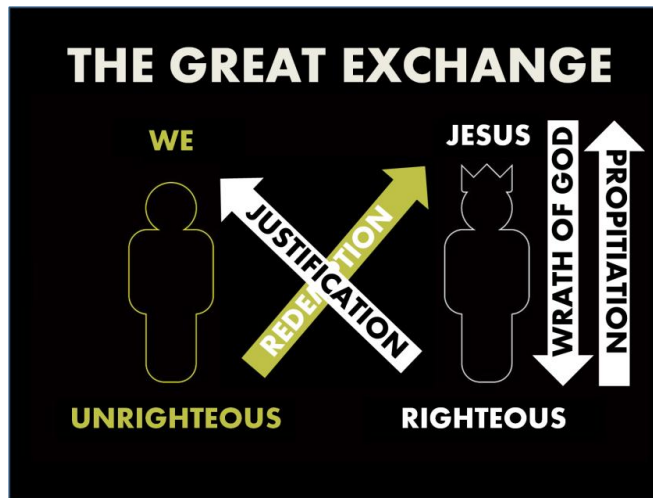
right thing to do, is it. Nevertheless, from now on, every time you see or hear the word 'devil', immediately think 'accuser'.

So what kind of charges do you think the accuser brings against us? I think there are general areas and specific areas to you as an individual, but they all relate in one way or another to our salvation. This is why Paul asked the question that he did. *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?* The charges will relate to our election and this is backed up by the answer to the question. *It is God who justifies.* Satan's point of attack will always be related to our standing before the Lord. He wants us to feel defeated. He wants us to doubt our salvation. He wants to drag us down into the gutter where he is.

When was the last time you felt a charge of condemnation? How long has it been since you felt less than a child of God? Do you feel like God is your Father and Jesus is your friend, or do you feel, even at some level, a lack of full acceptance from them? Do you feel unworthy? Do you struggle with feelings of inadequacy? Because of your personal history and the kind of teaching you have received over the years, each of you will have a different struggle in this area, but each of us is attacked right here. Your accuser is active night and day, arguing his case in the courtroom of heaven. It's no wonder we have these doubts and struggles.

But listen to the answer. *It is God who justifies.* Do you see that the emphasis is on God, not only on the fact that we have been justified. Paul could have said, "You have been justified." That would have been sufficient--to remind us that we are in a standing of righteousness before the Lord. Do I need to remind you again of the Great Exchange? We were unrighteous and God alone was righteous.

Let me stop there for a moment and show you something I saw posted on facebook a few weeks



ago. "God never stops seeing us as valuable and precious; worthy to die for and worthy to live for." Can you see what's wrong with this statement? I am sure the person meant well, but is it true that God counted as "worthy to die for"? If we were worthy, why did Jesus need to die? If we were worthy, why was there a need for a great exchange?

It's a sugary sentiment--Jesus died for you because you were worthy, but it's completely the opposite of what the Bible teaches. Jesus alone is righteous and we were utterly and hopelessly unrighteous. Which is why

through redemption, our sin was credited to Jesus' account.

Sorry that was a side note, but an important one. Getting back to our accuser and Paul's answer to thoughts and feeling of condemnation. His emphasis is not just on the fact that you were justified but the emphasis is on God himself--God is the one who justifies. Remember--the big picture being painted here is of a courtroom in the heavenlies. On one end we have the accuser

who is accusing believers night and day. But on the other side of the courtroom we have God. The God who justifies. How is the accuser going to win this argument? The Father need only to show the accuser the blood of his son Jesus.

So why would the accuser continue his accusations in the face of such overwhelming odds as these? What keeps him going? The answer is given in Rev. 12:12. *But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!* He fights even though he is a defeated foe. He is powerless to change our status as a justified saint but that does not stop him from attempting to discourage us.

But there's even more encouragement for us in Paul's next question. ***Who is to condemn?*** This is similar to the last question--*who will bring any charge against God's elect?* We already know that the accuser does bring charges against us. He demands that we be judged along with him. But whether he brings charges or not, the key question is *who is to condemn?* Anyone can bring a charge against us, but will it stick? We will be accused but will we be condemned?

As always, Paul answered his own question. *Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* So who can condemn? The answer is not "no one." That's the answer to last week's question: If God is for us, who can be against us? Though many are against us, if God is for us, it's as if *no one* is against us. But the answer to this question is not "no one." Who possesses the power to condemn? We know that the devil--the accuser can bring charges against us. He is torn apart with anger and rage. He brings charges, but can he condemn?

This question is answered by a single verse spoken by Jesus. *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell* (Matt 10:28). This is at the same time a frightening and a comforting verse. Should I fear the someone who is about to kill me? Basic human nature tells me that some level of fear would be normal. I know there have been saints throughout the ages who seemed to have a supernatural absence of fear.

In AD 155, Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna was burned at the stake. Polycarp was actually a disciple of none other than John the apostle. John himself probably lived into his nineties, so he was an old man when he was imprisoned on the island of Patmos and wrote down the revelation which we call the book of Revelation. Polycarp seemed to be free of all fear moments before his execution.

The Roman proconsul said to him, "Swear, reproach Christ, and I will set you free." "86 years have I have served him," Polycarp declared, "and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

"I have wild animals here," the Proconsul said. "I will throw you to them if you do not repent." "Call them," Polycarp replied. "It is unthinkable for me to repent from what is good to turn to what is evil." "If you despise the animals, I will have you burned." "You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and is then extinguished, but you know nothing of the fire of the

coming judgment and eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. Why are you waiting? Bring on whatever you want.”

He even made a sort of joke during his trial. Polycarp was 86 years old at the time, so the proconsul said to him, “Have respect for your old age, swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent, and say, ‘Down with the Atheists!’” To a Roman, Christians were the atheists because they did not believe in the Greek pantheon of gods. So the proconsul wanted Polycarp to condemn all Christians. Instead, Polycarp gestured to the mass of Greeks and Romans who were watching in the arena and declared, “Down with the Atheists!”

Now normally when people were to be burned alive at the stake, they were nailed or tied to a wood pillar so they would not run from the fire. But Polycarp refused to be nailed. “Leave me as I am, for he that gives me strength to endure the fire, will enable me not to struggle, without the help of your nails.”

Polycarp is one of those people to whom God gave supernatural grace in the hour of his death. He seemed to have little to no fear of death. As I said before, basic human nature tells me that some level of fear would be normal. But Jesus said, don't be afraid of someone who can only take your life. *Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* What this tells us is that only God can condemn. Judgment is and always will be exclusively God's domain.

But will he? This gets to the question of whether or not you can lose your salvation. Why do some churches teach that a believer can lose their salvation? I think they do it because they think that if you tell someone there is no possible way that they can lose their salvation, they will live like the devil. You know, if you've got fire insurance against the flames of hell, why should you be concerned about playing with fire? There's probably some truth to that. Let's say I was guaranteed an indestructible body. I could jump out of an airplane without a parachute and not only would I not die, I wouldn't even be hurt. In that case, I probably would jump out of an airplane without a parachute.

"Once saved, always saved" is like having an indestructible soul. Therefore, some might think that I can do whatever I want and not have any worries. But in the realm of salvation, this kind of thinking can only come about through a twisted presentation of the gospel. When the gospel is presented as easy-believism, it can lead to a false assurance. If I am told that all I need to do is raise my hand or walk forward during an altar call, then I am set for life. I have purchased my fire insurance. From that point forward, it doesn't matter how I live my life.

Now don't misunderstand. It is that simple to believe. This past Thursday we had dinner with the youth pastor from our former church and his wife. This past year has been brutal for them. Jane had invited an unbeliever to church but the morning she visited, after the service Jane was sitting in the pew with her head down and bawling. This woman asked her if she was OK and Jane replied, "I am struggling with my faith." The woman responded by saying, "I'm trying to find my faith." So Jane dutifully gave her a quickie gospel presentation. As Jane tells, she wiped away her tears and gave her a dry, dull, short gospel presentation. They agreed to meet for breakfast that week and the woman prayed to receive Christ in the parking lot after breakfast. And now she is growing like crazy in her faith. I love this story because Jane made what we often think are

two fatal errors in our witnessing: she was struggling herself--and she *admitted* it AND she gave a weak, passion-less gospel presentation. Despite that, God reached down and saved this woman., So the gospel really is that simple. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

But some are afraid that if you give too much assurance you will end up with unsaved people who have a false assurance of salvation. But here's the difference. If a person is truly saved, they will want to live for the Lord. You will begin to see a life change that continues throughout their lifetime.

So back to our question. *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died.* If Jesus died so that we would not be condemned, then it is impossible to ever be condemned? Moreover, if we were to be condemned, and only God could do this, he would be saying that Jesus' work on the cross was insufficient. He would be saying that the Great Exchange could be overturn and reversed. In order to condemn us, God would have to remove the righteousness of Christ. He would have to reverse redemption and return our sins to us.

But not only will that *not* happen, but we are encouraged with the promise that Jesus has an active, ongoing ministry of intercession for us. *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* Jesus died, was raised to life and is continually interceding for us. Who is to condemn? No one.

I don't ever want to give an unbeliever false assurance of their salvation. However, Romans chapter eight is all about radical assurance. So here's what you can do in the coming days and weeks. When--not if, but when the accuser brings a charge against you. And he will, because his name means accuser and he is active 24/7 in his evil accusations. He whispers to us, "You disappointed God...again. You failed six times in one week!" He's gonna attack you at your point of greatest weakness and vulnerability. What is your answer to these accusations? It is God who justifies. yes, confess your sins. Admit you did wrong but remind yourself that God is the one who justifies. You are not resting in the strength of your own faith but in the fact that God did the work of justification in your life.

And then when the accuser brings thoughts of condemnation against you: "How could God accept you; you can't really be a Christian; God will never allow you into heaven", you answer with verse 34. *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/constitution/wi/XIII/13>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/lexicons/greek/gwview.cgi?n=1228>