

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Mercies of God and Christ's Resurrection (Part III)

POENA DAMNI is the theological Latin expression that refers to the loss of God's favor, presence and glory. The fate of those who are designated in Scripture as "lost" is one of banishment to a place of torment (Matthew 25:41; Luke 16:24-29). Here they experience POENA SENSUS--punishment in what is described as everlasting fire (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5; Revelation 20:14,15).¹ This is *Damnation*.² Sin must be judged by God. Try as we might to minimize the seriousness of our sin or to try and excuse or rationalize our sin away, we are still left standing before God guilty. Our own conscience reminds us of our guilt and where there is real guilt there is condemnation.³ This is deserved because of original sin (Romans 5:18) and our actual sins (Romans 6:23). Our guilt produces fear and this is founded, not, as so much popular psychology would have us believe, in a misguided religious upbringing or a culturally conditioned lack of self-esteem, but in the lingering but gripping sense of God's holiness. "It is a natural truth," wrote Thomas Manton, "that sin is displeasing to God, and maketh the sinner hateful and loathsome to Him, and worthy to be cast off and punished by Him. God's holiness is at the bottom of all our fears."⁴ Sin affects all of us in two regards. One has to do with sin's guilt and condemnation. Secondly, it has to do with sin's pollution and defilement. No amount of repentance on our part can remove sin's guilt and stain. No amount of effort on our part to try and earn righteousness can remove sin's guilt and stain. Ezekiel Hopkins long ago penned these words: "Either presumptuous conceits of God's mercy, or proud conceits of their own merits, or some such rotten principle or other: and, because, with these, they have worn out many storms of conscience and many powerful convictions, they will not forsake their hopes, nor let go their vain confidence; but cry out peace, peace to themselves, till they and their hopes perish together."⁵ Only the blood of Christ can cleanse the guilt and stain of sin (1 John 1:7). Paul's language in Romans 8:31-39 speaks to this same effect. Note carefully in 8:34 how the Apostle links the death of Christ with His resurrection.

I. PAUL'S CHALLENGE

The language at the beginning of verse 33 is similar to that in verse 34. "Who will bring any charge against God's elect?" means to bring an accusation that will result in condemnation. Thus it is a *legal* challenge like that brought by a chief prosecutor in a court of law.⁶

A. God's Elect. The NIV Bible translates 8:33 as "those whom God has chosen." The exact language is *God's elect*, as in the ESV. Why this emphasis? The Apostle does *not* say "who shall bring any charge against those who believe in Jesus Christ." No, he underscores the fact of God's sovereignty in election. People do not elect themselves because of their belief. Rather, their faith is the result of their election. "If you are one of God's chosen people, then, because God is God, no one can ever rob you of your position."⁷

B. God's Justification. Justification by faith alone is one of Paul's major themes, especially in this epistle (1:1-5:11). To attack or accuse the elect is to go up against God. He is the One who justifies. To attack the great Judge is pure folly (cf. Isaiah 50:8, 9).

NOTE: The language of justification is also that of the law courts. Man's relationship to God is always a legal one. Either he stands condemned the Law of God for having transgressed the Law or he stands

acquitted or declared justified before the Law of God through the merits of Christ. To justify means to pardon, forgive, acquit. It is a judicial declaration and God *always* justifies in a strict legal manner. He always acts in terms of His Law and justice (cf. Romans 3:24-26). Justification also includes the imputation or reckoning of Christ's righteousness to the account of those who are forgiven. This is the positive aspect of justification.

II. PAUL'S PIVOTAL ARGUMENT

The Apostle moves from the Father's electing love to the Son's redeeming work. Four specific points are made to demonstrate the truth that nothing can separate the elect from their security in Christ.

A. Christ's Death. The terseness of Paul's language here draws attention to the significance of Christ's death as redemptive. Note the context. Christ's death removes the possibility of condemnation.

NOTE: Many Christians believe that Christ died for all (universal) and that the atonement is unlimited in scope and design. However, Paul's language in Romans 8:31-39 cannot be harmonized with that line of thought. It is the elect *alone* who actually benefit from the saving work of Christ. They and they alone are rescued from wrath.

B. Christ's Resurrection. It is the risen Lord who insures the security of His own. Furthermore, it is only in the light of Christ's resurrection that we properly see the nature of His redemptive death. Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 15:17 makes this same point. If Christ is not risen then "we are still in our sins," i.e. under condemnation. The resurrection is *proof* to us that we have been justified by Christ's death (Romans 4:25).

C. Christ's Exaltation. He is exalted to the right hand of God the Father Almighty. This indicates that He is invested with sovereignty and dominion (cf. Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3). Since He has all authority in heaven and on earth He is Lord of all.

D. Christ's Intercession. He ever lives to make intercession for those who come to God through His mediation (cf. Hebrews 7:25). As their great High Priest, He stands also as their advocate (1 John 2:1). Christ's presence at the right hand of God assures His own that Christ, the One who died and rose again on their behalf, has pledged Himself to them forever.

CONCLUSION: God the Father is well pleased with the work of God the Son. It was a perfect work and complete in every way. This is precisely what the Apostle wanted to convey to his readers in Romans 8:31-39. "The Father," wrote Lloyd-Jones, "looks upon the Son and He sees us in Him. He sees our needs. The Father looks upon Him as our representative, as the One who has done all this for us, the One who is concerned about us; He gives Him everything, and He gives Him everything *for us*."⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ This punishment is also GRADUS POENARUM INFERNALIIUM, that is according to the quality and measure of sins committed (Revelation 21:12). There are degrees of punishment.

² The curse word *Damn* (commonly heard today) comes from the Latin DAMNĀRE, "to condemn," and DAMNUM, "loss, fine, penalty." DAMNATIO is the theological expression for the consignment to eternal punishment which takes place at the final judgment. People are judged for their sins (unforgiven). All who stand outside of Christ are so judged (2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9; Acts 4:12).

³ REATUS POENAE refers to the liability to punishment because we have incurred guilt by transgressing the Law of God. We are *culpable* (from the Latin CULPA, "guilt, fault, crime"). Sinners are subject to both guilt and punishment.

⁴ *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* XII (rpt. Maranatha, 1973), p. 360.

⁵ *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins* II (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), p. 387.

⁶ The word translated "bring any charge" in both the NIV and ESV is EGKALEŌ and was used in the Greek courts of the day. It is a forensic term (the Latin source for our English word is FORENS, literally "belonging to the forums or courts"). It is used in this exact sense in Acts 19:40; 23:29; 26:2.

⁷ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:17-39* (Zondervan, 1976), p. 405.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 438.