

You know, the world at large, does not like you. That's something of a disturbing thought. We like to be liked. Life is easier when we are on amicable terms with everyone around us. Conflict isn't fun. But that's not the way of the world. Some people, trapped in the irrational grips of sin, just don't like other people and you can't get along with them. But for the majority, it's about what you are, it's about what you believe. Their song starts pleasantly enough. They are willing to be friendly, to be nice, provided you meet them where they are standing. Provided you accept what they believe and think about the world. But once it becomes clear you won't change, it's conflict and trial against you from that point on.

After all, the world hates God. Hates anything to do with him. And it will hate you for being associated with him. It will try to force you away from him. First by subtle coercion, by trying to make their side seem more appealing, and if that doesn't work by threats and intimidation or even outright violence. The worst part of it is the times that it has worked on us. There are the times that we have given in and gone with the crowd or even just the other person because we didn't think whatever it was was really a "big deal". Or because we were afraid of the reaction we would get if we stood up for our God. We didn't think it was worth the effort to cause a conflict, so we were quiet. Or, just as bad, when the world treated us poorly for demonstrating our faith, we reacted in anger and aggression.

It's when those moments happen, when we realize what we've done, that the accuser starts to breathe down the back of our necks, starts to whisper in your ear what you don't want to hear. "How shallow your devotion to God is. How quickly you set him aside for some little convenience. How ungrateful you are that you should love a moment of peace instead of the God who made you and gave you everything. You don't deserve anything good from him. God may save some people, but that's for people who try. Not you. Not. You."

These are the thoughts that haunt us after our sins. These are the accusations that can make us lose sleep. I did wrong. I knew better. I knew the temptation was coming. I knew what I should have done. But I didn't. I did the wrong thing anyway. And the fear of the consequences starts to creep up in our thoughts until we no longer can find any peace. We know what God does to those who sin. We know what the punishment we deserve is. When Satan stands before God and accuses us in God's court, he's right. We did those things. We deserve what's coming.

All this fear, all this disquiet, because we are looking in the wrong direction, focusing on the wrong person, which is exactly the trick the devil wants. He wants us to forget what Paul writes here, **"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"**

Yes, you and I have failed to live up to the perfect law of God. We have denied God regularly, we have set him aside when we found it convenient, and we have not shown love to our neighbor when it was needed. We have not done what we ought and for that we ought to be condemned. We ought to stand before the judgment seat and hear the proclamation "guilty!" and the sentence "eternal death!" This is just. This is the law. But it is not what God wants for you.

But God cannot simply dismiss your charges. He can't wave his hand and say, "Oh those don't really matter," like we might like to. No. Crimes have been committed. Whether it fits our sense of justice or not, every denial of God, ever selfish act carries with it the penalty of eternal separation from God and his grace. Each one deserves hell. That cannot just be forgotten or excused simply because we consider them "minor" (that attitude alone could be held as another charge against us). But again, God did not want you to bear this punishment. He loves you. So he punished someone else. His own son.

The only way this was going to work is if the Son of God stepped completely into your place. For all intents and purposes he had to *be* you. And so like you, he was born of a human mother. Made flesh and blood like us, and more importantly, under the same law of God as us. He grew and lived as a human being, but unlike us, kept the law with every thought, word and action. As we saw in our gospel today, he was tempted, same as us, but he did not give in. He upheld the law and he used the power of God's word as his ally to do so.

That life completed, the demands of God satisfied there, having done everything right, he stepped forward and stepped under the wrath of God for all that we had done wrong. Through the actions of sinful men, he allowed himself to be beaten, tortured and executed. And as he hung in the air, God abandoned him. Jesus suffered hell because that was the penalty for sin. He made a payment toward justice with his blood. A ransom amount that could never be spent up because the price was the innocent blood of God. At that time, Jesus declared that it was finished. Complete.

Brought to perfection. Paid in full. Every sin, every crime, every tear in God's perfect law was paid for and forgiven at that moment.

All sin of all time. The ones you committed yesterday. The ones you will commit tomorrow. The one you did again even though you swore you were done with that. All of them were paid for on the cross. There is no end to that payment, no sin so tragic that it is not forgiven. They were all paid together at once on the cross. The proof is in the tomb on the third day. Or rather the proof isn't in the tomb. Christ's resurrection declares with power that he truly was the Son of God and that his sacrifice was accepted by his Father.

The charges against you do not hold. The guilt has been paid for. The court must declare, "not guilty". The court has accepted the substitute. And while he stood in place to bear your punishment, you stand in his place and accept his reward for a life lived in perfect obedience to God. The stain of your sin is taken away and you are wrapped up in a new robe, brighter and cleaner than we have ever seen or known. The robe of Christ's life, the robe of righteousness. And with this garment firmly around us we are worthy to enter eternal life with our God. He stood in your place, you stand in his.

And now as Paul continues, **"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."**

And so this is how we stand! Justified. Declared right, declared innocent. The accuser can bring every charge he likes, he can drag up every dark secret out of your past and present it to the court, but it makes no difference. To every charge the Substitute Jesus intercedes, reminding and declaring to the court that this too was already punished and paid for. God has chosen you and through his Son has justified you. Let me say that again just to make sure we don't lose the impact; it is God who has done this. If God does something, he does it right. He does it perfectly. There aren't any loopholes, there isn't a chance for this decision to be reversed. No one can bring a charge against you that Jesus cannot answer for you. This is perfect assurance that brings perfect confidence.

And knowing that matters are settled in the eternal court gives us the comfort and confidence we need to face the accusations of the world. As Paul concludes our section, **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

The difficulty of being a Christian in a world that hates us is not going to go away. Paul makes that very clear. They will hate us, they will continue to entice us or attack us to take us away from our God. It will continue. But it doesn't matter. Whatever they try, they cannot force us apart from our God. Nothing can forcefully separate us from the love of God. Our eternity cannot be snatched away from us, no matter what they try. The only way we lose our victory in the court is if we personally reject Jesus' intercession and insist on defending ourselves.

And so to all those who would try to attack us, to all the difficulty that may arise, we say, "Let it come." We face death all day. We can stand like sheep ready to be slaughtered and it doesn't matter. They can have the appearance of victory now. They can feel like they are beating us down and crushing us under without resistance. It doesn't matter. Let them attack. We've already won. We are more than conquerors because of Christ. Our Substitute earned the victory and that victory is ours. It is done, it is completed and it cannot be taken away.

Keep your eyes on the one who did that for you. Keep your focus on him. Let him be the heart of your life now because he is your life, in more ways than one. Because he lived your life for you perfectly, you will live forever. That cannot be taken from you. Come what may in this life, the eternal victory is already yours. Amen.