

## We Can Have Assurance

Romans 8:1

Why We're Protestant #05

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ONE seventeenth-century preacher called this chapter “the grand charter of believers” or in our terms, it is like a Bill of Rights; but it’s not rights that it expresses, but all the blessings that are ours because of Jesus Christ. That’s why it has also been called “the chapter of chapters” in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Notice how it begins in verse 1 with that assuring declaration of **no condemnation** and then ends in verse 39 with that glorious declaration of “no separation.”

What does God want us to see here? He teaches us that we are accepted by God and that we can be assured of that fact. In Adam we’re condemned, but in Christ we’re justified. In Adam we’re declared guilty and are punished. In Christ we’re declared righteous and are accepted. As we conclude our series celebrating the Protestant Reformation, I want to end on this high note that we’re Protestant because we can have assurance.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Jacomb, *Sermons on the Eighth Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1996), 12 col. 1

## The Doctrine of Rome

Let me first state *the doctrine of Rome* that we protest. To state it again, it's not enough to be against the Roman Catholic Church. We have to know what we believe and why we believe it. But to do that we have to be aware of Rome's doctrine. I've put a lengthy quote in your sermon notes pages from the Roman Catholic Council of Trent that responded to our forefathers. When they spoke of assurance they began, as we do, to state that forgiveness of sins only comes "*gratuitously by the mercy of God for Christ's sake.*" But then they said this forgiveness was not given "*to any one who boasts of his confidence and certainty of the remission of his sins*" then here's the key phrase "*and rests on that alone.*" This is a caricature of our position as we don't rest in our confidence, but in Christ. Another misrepresentation is in the next paragraph where they said we believe that to be justified you "*must needs, without any doubting whatever, settle within themselves that they are justified, and that no one is absolved from sins and justified, but he that believes for certain that he is absolved and justified.*" The conclusion is similar to what we say again: that while we do not doubt the objective promises and work of Christ, we oftentimes subjectively doubt when we look to ourselves. The

difference between Rome and us, though, is they say this because “*no one can know with a certainty of faith, which can not be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.*”<sup>2</sup>

In a marriage or in a business transaction or in a friendship you can know what the other person has said: “I’ll be faithful, I’ll finish the job by this time for this much, whenever you need me, I’ll be there.” But inwardly you can never feel secure. That’s what Rome says. In response, we believe we can feel assured and have a sense of certainty in this life.

### **Assurance is for Sinners: “Therefore”**

We believe this because Paul says *assurance is for sinners*. Whenever you see a **therefore** in Scripture do you remember what you have to ask? What is it “there for?” Romans 8:1 takes us back to Romans 7. The essence of chapter 7 is that sinners who are declared righteous and acceptable to God are still sinners. We are saints and sinners, sinners and saints. This causes great spiritual struggle. Imagine being at a company that comes under new management, with new purpose and plans. Yet the old workers remain who often frustrate this. This is what it is like to be a

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<sup>2</sup> Sixth Session, January 13, 1547.

Christian: “So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (7:25).

What is the **therefore** there for? It’s there precisely for us who are under new management but we’re still old workers! We are not under the condemnation the guilt of our sin deserves (3:21 5:21) or that the practical power of sin makes us feel (6:1 7:25).<sup>3</sup> **Therefore** you sinner can have the assurance that you’ve been accepted by God into his own presence.

### **Assurance is a Present Reality “Now”**

And here’s the amazing thing: this *assurance is a present reality*.

**There is therefore *now* no condemnation.** Did you hear that? *Now*! One little word shakes the foundation of all man-made religion. All religions base acceptance with their deities on the efforts or partial efforts of man. Islam is a religion of giving oneself to the will of Allah, who may or may not accept you into paradise when you die. Rome says, “no one can know

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<sup>3</sup> Hendricksen, 245. For the view that the “therefore” is referencing the entire epistle previous, see Charles Hodge, 248–249, and Leon Morris, 300; for the view that it is referencing the previous chapter, see John Murray, *Romans*, 274–275.

with a certainty of faith...that he has obtained the grace of God.”<sup>4</sup> Having assurance *now* is what makes biblical Christianity unique!

What does it mean that *now there is therefore...no condemnation?*

Paul is using **condemnation** here to mean the final judgment that awaits all mankind on the last day of human history when Jesus “shall come again to judge the living and the dead.” To say **there is therefore now no condemnation** is to say that final judgment has already been executed.<sup>5</sup>

How? Look at 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.” Notice that list: death, resurrection, ascension. Why is there **no condemnation now**? Because Jesus died a death of condemnation for me. Why is there **no condemnation now**?

Because Jesus rose again, leaving my condemnation behind in the tomb.

Why is there **no condemnation now**? Because Jesus’ sitting at the right hand of God is his intercession perpetually reminding God, as it were, that I am his! And “who is to condemn” with him there? As Jesus said,

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<sup>4</sup> Council of Trent, Sixth Session, chapter 9 as cited in Schaff, *Creeds*, 2:99.

<sup>5</sup> Hodge, 249; Schreiner, *Romans*, 398–399.

“Whoever believes in [the Son] is not condemned” (John 3:18). *Now* means not only **no condemnation** in this life, but **no condemnation** ever.<sup>6</sup>

Children, when you know you’re accepted by your mom and dad, how does that make you feel? Does it make you uncaring towards them? Does it make you lazy when they ask you to do something? Does it make you bored with your life? No! Knowing and feeling their acceptance is amazing, isn’t it? In the same way when you know that *now* right now you have peace with God you love him and obey him back. When you know God the Judge’s judgment has already been rendered against you on the cross, you find true intimacy with God as Father.

### **Assurance is through Faith: “Those Who are in Christ Jesus”**

“Okay, so assurance is for sinners now in this life, but how do I, as a sinner in the here and now, find this assurance?” We move from the objective to our own subjective here. It’s like there’s a will with your name in it listing your inheritance of an untold fortune. But as you know, it’s one thing to hear this, but quite another to get your hands on it. Paul says **there is therefore now no condemnation *for those who are in***

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<sup>6</sup> Morris, 300.

*Christ Jesus. Assurance is through faith.* To say *in Christ* is to say we are in him legally. Just as we are in Adam by nature, Paul says we are also in Christ by grace. To say *in Christ* is also to say we are in him vitally. He is the vine, we are the branches (John 15:1-7); he is the head, we are the parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:23). Being *in Christ* is for those who are united to Jesus by the bond of faith. He dwells in our hearts “through faith” (Eph. 3:17). Through faith we receive Jesus, who is committed to us believing sinners.

So faith is the means by which you and I receive acceptance with God and the assurance of this reality. I want you to notice two things about the phrase, **those who are in Christ Jesus**:

*First, this is a limiting phrase.* Only those with faith **in Christ Jesus** enjoy justification. If you don't believe then none of this is yours.

*Second, this is an indiscriminate phrase.* All **those** who believe have everything Jesus has to give! As far as Jesus is concerned, if you believe in him your ethnicity is no barrier, the color of your skin is no barrier, your sex is no barrier, your bank account is no barrier. As far as Jesus is concerned, if you're a sinner with faith you can have the assurance of

being accepted by God right here, right now! Amen?

### **Assurance is in Christ: “In Christ Jesus”**

It’s not faith itself, though, or faith in faith, or even the quantity of faith, but faith just in Jesus that justifies and assures. *Assurance is in Christ:*

**for those who are in Christ Jesus.** What is it about Jesus that my faith in him grants acceptance with Almighty God and assurance of that fact?

Look at verse 3: “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.” Faith **in Christ Jesus**, not your

obedience to God’s own laws, brings this acceptance. This means:

- Jesus is the one who takes the sinful and makes them righteous.
- Jesus is the one who takes the unclean and makes them clean.
- Jesus is the one who takes the orphaned and makes them sons and daughters.
- Jesus is the one who takes the naked and ashamed and gives them clothes and dignity.
- Jesus is the one who takes the enemy and makes them friends.
- Jesus is the one who takes the condemned and makes them innocent.
- Jesus is the one who takes the dead and makes them alive.
- Jesus is the one who finds the lost and makes them found.

Do you believe in Jesus? Then **there is now no condemnation** for you!

I began by saying there once was a preacher in the seventeenth century who called Romans 8 “the grand charter of believers.” Let me conclude by saying there once was a young man who came to realize that there was a God. He came to realize that he had sinned against God. He came to realize that he was under God’s just condemnation. He came to realize and to feel his guilt more and more, until, he heard the glorious news that there was one — only one — who ever lived up to what God required and who gave himself to be condemned in the place of sinners, so that sinners could be accepted by God. And a couple of years later when that young man was disillusioned and full of spiritual doubts, he heard Romans 8:1: **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** This promise opened up to him that grand charter and began to assure him more and more that God already accepted him. You don’t know that seventeenth century man; you know that that once young man. He stands before you today declaring that we’re Protestant because God says you and I can have assurance. Let’s pray...