

Romans 8:31-39

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[0:00] I hope that the study of Romans has been encouraging to you. I hope especially chapter 8.! It's been such a joy for myself to sit and rest in this chapter.

We normally preach the Advent themes and just thought this year it would be great to press on through. And today's Advent theme is the Advent theme of love.

And this text helps us fix our gaze on that very thing. So I'm grateful for the way this is timed out as we approach Christmas Day tomorrow. So let me just begin by reading the text.

Before I do, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Romans 8, beginning in verse 31. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

[0:58] 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? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. 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.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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.

Paul begins this part of Romans 8 with a question. What then shall we say to these things? And what things is Paul referring to?

[2:14] Well, he's referring directly to chapter 8 verses 28 through 30, where Paul speaks of the unstoppable plan of God to pursue his people to the end.

In this text is contained a brief order of salvation, the main point of which is that God acts, God accomplishes, and God maintains.

Oh, recall, beloved, that these three verses are meant to be comfort to the weary soul. Since the end of chapter 7, Paul has expressed the challenge of living in our corrupted flesh and living in a corrupted world.

And then he says, beginning in verse 28, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of a son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called.

[3:19] And those whom he called, he also justifies. And those whom he justified, he also glorified. And last week we considered these verses in terms of the confidence that is ours in this life.

Paul says, and we know. And we considered it in three points. First, our confidence in God's providence. So providence is God's purposeful sovereignty.

It's him working in his power to accomplish purpose for us. And if you are a Christian, then anything and everything that happens in your life is being used of God for your good.

We saw, secondly, that we have a confidence in God's purpose. What is that purpose? What is it that he is working providentially to accomplish in our lives?

We saw that we would look more and more like Christ to the praise of Christ. And we saw, thirdly, our confidence in God's plan.

[4:27] If we are to have the confidence that Paul here states we are to have, then we must be confident in God's plan. You will not weather well the storms this life will assail you with apart from an anchored confidence in all that God has guaranteed for you in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And verse 31 is an elaboration of the very point that Paul has been making concerning our confidence. So he asks a question, What then shall we say to these things?

And he answers that question, If God is for us, who can be against us? This is an answer worth settling into.

If God is for us, who can be against us? When life is full of trouble, if God is for us, who can be against us?

When you feel like an outsider at work or with your family because you're trying to live a holy life, if God is for us, who can be against us?

[5:39] When it seems that we live in an age that has abandoned all truth and reasonableness, if God is for us, who can be against us? When the American church appears to be crumbling down around us, if God is for us, who can be against us?

When you or someone you love dearly receives a tragic diagnosis, if God is for us, who can be against us? When you struggle against your flesh and it falters and it fails, if God is for us, who can be against us?

Let this answer framed as a question, a response to God's providence and purpose and plan, be emblazoned across your mind.

Have it be your ruling thought, despite how desperate you may feel in any given moment, if God is for us, who can be against us?

No one and nothing. Because we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. Every bit of trouble in this life, if God is for us, we know that God is working it for the great good that we would look like Christ for Christ.

[7:08] So, who can be against us? Paul then asks and answers four follow-up questions that are meant to help us consider this reality that if God is for us, no one can be against us.

Before we look at those four questions and answers, I want us to notice the qualifying factor in all that Paul is saying.

He says, if God is for us. It is also possible that God is not for you, and the basis of this being, for or not for, is whether or not you are in Christ.

Let's not neglect the context of Paul's phrase here. Paul is speaking directly to Christians in this letter. Those who are professing faith in Jesus Christ.

Remember in Romans chapter 8 and verse 1, he says, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Every person, he has said, Romans chapter 3, has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

[8:26] We deserve condemnation, but for those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8, 1 says, there is no condemnation.

He goes on to say in chapter 8, verse 5, Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

So, there's two categories of people, right? Those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ. Those who have the Spirit and therefore set their minds on the things of the Spirit and those who do not have the Spirit and do not set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Those who for there is no condemnation and those who there is condemnation. Those that God is for and those that God is not for.

Romans 8, 9 says, You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

[9:36] And so Paul expresses some concern here that perhaps those who are professing faith in Christ are not actually in Christ and therefore Christ is not in them by the Spirit.

And then he says, Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. And so we just must ask the question, as Paul is making this case to us, that if we are in Christ, then Christ is in us by the Spirit and we will be setting our minds on the things of the Spirit, namely His Word, that we would be affectionate toward and have the ruling thoughts in our life be those things that are of God.

And so, what most occupies your mind? What do you think about when you seem to be thinking about nothing at all? Is your general disposition bent Godward or not?

These are important things for us to consider and to think about. How do our affections for the things of God stir us to the activity of God?

Elsewhere, Paul says, this is Galatians 5, verse 22 and 23, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[11:14] God works things into us that He works then out of us by the power of the Spirit. And if we are in Christ, if God is for us, then He is also in us working on our behalf.

And so, consider carefully this morning, is God for you? Do you fit in this category as an adopted Son of God?

And I do hope that you can join us this morning in confidently saying, and we know. Because if you can then, if God is for you, no one can be against you.

If you are in Christ Jesus, then this reality includes you. You are safe because you are saved by God. God is for you.

So, now that we've dealt with the qualifying factor, let's look at Paul's follow-up questions and answers. Number one, verse 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?

[12:31] God's commitment to us is most readily seen at the cross. He gave His very own Son to ransom us from the clutches of our sin and to bring us to Himself.

What clear picture do we need of God's concern for us? John 3, 16. John writes, For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

The prophet Isaiah records in Isaiah 53, this is verses 4-6, and then verse 10. Surely, Christ has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities.

Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to His own way.

[13:48] And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him. He has put Him to grief. When His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring.

He shall prolong His days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. God the Father gave to us God the Son that we might be brought back into relationship with Him.

So Paul reasons if God the Father was willing to give up for us God the Son, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?

That is, how could it be possible that having started with the greatest of gifts, will He not complete His plan of spiritual blessing for us? Again, don't forget the context.

Just a few verses ago, Paul said in verse 16 and 17, the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

[15:00] and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

So Paul goes on to talk about how the suffering of this world isn't even worth comparing to the glory that's being revealed to us and how the creation and we and the Spirit within us all groan for this future glory.

glory. So what are all the things that God has promised to give to us? It's all of the spiritual blessing that He's mentioned in verse 28 through 30 that culminates finally in our glorification.

Right? How could it be possible that Him who gave us His very Son will not also give us all things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

The second question that He asks we find in verse 33. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? And He answers it, it is God who justifies.

[16:11] God is the judge and the justifier. We have been declared righteous in His court. We stand before God guilty of our own accord and we have no defense.

When entering our plea, our plea can only be guilty when charged with our crimes. But another, the Lord Jesus Christ, just before our sentencing, declares mine.

Mine. This one belongs to me and I have paid the penalty for his sin and I have given him my righteousness.

He accomplishes this on our behalf in the courtroom of God. John MacArthur wrote of this text, God conceived the law, revealed the law, interprets the law, and applies the law.

And through the sacrifice of His Son, all the demands of the law have been met for those who trust in Him. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

[17:23] It is God who justifies, declares righteous. Our punishment taken from us, eternal reward given to us because of Jesus' perfect law-keeping.

We find another qualifier in this text. Paul says, who shall bring any charge against God's elect? And once again, Paul is not trying to pick a theological fight.

Not at all what he is doing here. He's going to launch into some future chapters of working out all of the implications of the glories he states at the end of chapter 8.

He here is just teaching Christians that their confidence is not in their works, but in God's working on their behalf.

This should do nothing but comfort us. This truth is complex, I will admit. God's sovereignty in our salvation is complex.

[18:29] The doctrine of election gives us much to think about, but let us not miss that it is good. You were loved by God long before you did anything, good or bad, anything.

Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1 verse 3 and following, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved. Beloved, if you do not like the doctrine of election, then you cannot love the doctrine of eternal security. They are cause and effect.

And this doctrine is always taught to us for this great end, that we would know that if we belong to God, that he will keep us to the end.

[19:52] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. God is for us. Who can be against us?

The third question he asks, verse 34, who is to condemn? Similar to the question he asked previously in verse 33.

And he answers it, Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us.

Jesus Christ was condemned in our place and paid the penalty for our sin. He bore the eternal wrath that was justly due to us.

This is the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement and is central to the good news. We deserved a punishment and he took it on himself in our place.

[20:53] He atoned for the wrath of God that was due us. We will celebrate Christmas tomorrow. And while as we think about the incarnation, it is important to reflect upon the humility of the second part of the Godhead in the form of a baby lying in a feed trough.

We ought not forget why, though, he was incarnate. It is good to think about him humbly coming as a baby, but he came for a purpose.

A baby born as a king to rule and to reign. Sometimes I think our focus gets a little shifted too heavily in one direction.

Remember Jesus said in Mark 10, verse 45, the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus' focus was fixed on the purpose for which he came, to die in our place. Jesus Christ is the one who died.

[22:04] However, his work did not end there. He is risen and interceding or praying for us. The text says, verse 34, that Jesus is at the right hand of God and interceding for us.

Hebrews 8, 1 states that we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven. So we pick up the detail that not only is Jesus at the right hand of the Father, the place of honor, the place of esteem, but also that he is seated there.

Jesus declared in his dying breath, it is finished. He has no need like the earthly priest to continually make sacrifice because he himself was that sacrifice and he died once for all.

The work is completed. All that he was sent to accomplish is guaranteed by his death and resurrection. It is a sure thing that all that he purchased in his death will come to believe in him and will persist to the end.

2 Corinthians chapter 1 the first part of verse 20 says for all the promises of God find their yes in Christ. Finished work.

[23:37] Guaranteed result. And Paul tells us as we live in this age of already and not yet that Jesus is praying for us.

This is just an unfathomable depth. I don't have much to say about it. He's told us previously in this chapter that the Spirit intercedes for us and now that Christ Jesus intercedes for us.

What glorious truths these are. As we walk in this difficult life and it is surely difficult we should be comforted that the Godhead prays for us works on our behalf for what purpose that our holiness would bring about the praise of Christ.

He is with us and he is for us. If God is for us who could be against us? The fourth and last question that he asks verse 35 who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Paul's answer to this question also implies or what shall separate us from the love of Christ? And his emphatic answer is nothing.

[25:00] Nothing. Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Shall all of the trouble that this world can throw at us separate us from the love of Christ?

And he does this very interesting thing in verse 36. He cites Psalm 44 and verse 22. And it feels upon first reading it like an unnecessary assertion.

It feels as if Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit feels like he needs to prove himself from the Old Testament as we often do in our preaching. We draw on text to say this thing I'm saying to you is not a crazy thing.

Look here it is in the Bible. I think Paul felt the need to do that to prove himself from the Old Testament text. So he must be doing something more interesting than that.

[26:09] So join me if you will in Psalm 44. While you're getting there I'm just going to tell you that in verses 1-8 the psalmist recounts the past glories of Israel's history.

The way that God had worked on behalf of Israel. Verse 1 says O God we have heard with our ears our fathers have told us what deeds you performed in their days in the days of old.

He reaches back the psalmist does to the history of the way that God had worked amongst his people but then beginning in verse 9 he laments Israel's present state and declares that Israel God's people had not forgotten God or turned away from him.

And then he says in verse 22 this is what Paul cites in Romans 8 yet for your sake we are killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

we have been faithful to you and yet it seems that you have forgotten us because we are being killed like sheep. You see Paul cites this verse to explain the present state of the faithful.

[27:29] Those who were familiar with Psalm 44 would have understood the lament of the psalmist. We will experience tribulation and distress and persecution and possibly famine or destitution or danger or sword.

But then the psalmist in Psalm 44 goes on. Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself. Do not reject us forever.

Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bound down to the dust. Our belly clings to the ground.

Rise up. Come to our help. redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. Now we probably, when we read Romans chapter 8, and Paul cites Psalm 44 verse 22, don't have our minds drawn to the context the way his original readers were.

We've got to do a little more work, and I'm doing that work for you at the moment this morning. Do you see what Paul is doing by citing Psalm 44 22.

[28:45] Paul is stating, under the inspiration of the Spirit, that God has come to our help. He has redeemed us, and he has done so because of his steadfast love.

See that connection there? So you find yourself in a moment in your life feeling as the psalmist of Psalm 44 feels. Why are you sleeping, O Lord?

Where are you? Have you rejected me? What's going on? You feel like you're a sheep to be slaughtered. You feel like you've been separated from the love of God.

Paul says, no. Our circumstances may not be temporally pleasant, but we are eternally blessed.

Verse 37, no, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Despite everything going on in the already and the not yet, we are more than conquerors.

[30:00] It is a guaranteed thing. That we will receive the blessing that awaits us. This glory that we groan for because if God is for us, who can be against us?

Verse 38, for I am sure, and I just love these sweeping comments. That's what Paul is doing here. He is just trying to encapsulate every possible thing that might come into your mind, that might separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He says, I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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.

So good. Charles Spurgeon once said, God's children are God's children anywhere and everywhere and shall be even unto the end.

Nothing can sever that sacred tie or divide us from his heart. If God is for us, who can be against us?

[31:20] Romans 8 is such a precious chapter in the Bible. Some have argued the book of Romans is the most important book of the Bible.

That it's the hinge on which all of the truths of Scripture swing and that Romans chapter 8 is the spindle, which is that little thing that goes down the middle of a hinge that holds it all together.

I hope you don't underestimate the significance of Romans chapter 8, especially what Paul is arguing from verse 28 and to the end of the chapter.

It's core to what he's teaching us in this book and we're going to work on unpacking it further in the next year. Before I conclude today and pray for us, I just want to read the end of the chapter again.

It brings me such joy to read it. I'm going to start in verse 28, read to the end, and pray on our behalf. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

[32:33] For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, in order that he might be the first born among many brothers. And those whom he predestined, he also called.

And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

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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? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake were you being killed all the day long, were you regarded as sheep to be slaughtered?

[33:38] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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.