

## The First Challenge

### Romans 8: 31

**Romans 8: 31 – 39** What then shall we say to these things? 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 with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> 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.

- In this concluding paragraph of his theology, Paul asks a series of questions that are designed to draw us into the discussion, to make us think about what this theology means for our lives.
  - In chapters 12 and following Paul will delve into specific applications of all of this theology, but here at the end of Romans 8, before the excursus of 9 – 11, Paul gives us general applications by asking a series of rhetorical questions. That is questions that don't need an answer because the answer is obvious.
- But before he asks his rhetorical questions, he asks a question that does demand an answer. “What shall we say in response to these things?” How does this soaring doctrine affect the way you think and the way you live? Because if this doctrine doesn't change how you live, then this doctrine, no matter how true it is, is meaningless for you.
  - If we believe in God, if we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sin and then rose again, but that belief doesn't change how we think and live, then even though the doctrine is true what good does it do us?
    - You see mere belief is not enough. It is not enough to simply believe in God; believe in Jesus; or even believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. It is not enough to merely believe that Jesus died for your sin. If that belief doesn't make you fall at Jesus' feet and call him Lord and master.
      - Faith is not just belief.
      - Faith is trust that springs out of belief.
      - Faith is a willingness to put what you say you believe to the test.
      - Each day we are called to prove our belief in how we live our lives. Are we merely believing the gospel or are we, in trust, which is true faith, living it out in our lives?

**1 Peter 2:6** For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

- The one who trusts will never be put to shame. Are we really trusting in these precious promises of the Gospel that Paul has been laying out for us so carefully here in the Book of Romans, or do we merely believe them?
  - This is the point that Paul wants to bring us to, as he closes chapter 8. What do we say and what we do in response to all of this?
- To help us draw out what we say in response to these things Paul asks:
  - If God is for us who can be against us?
  - How will He not also graciously give us all things?
  - Who will bring any charge against God's elect?
  - Who is He who condemns?
  - Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
    - Those are the rhetorical questions here in the text. Questions that don't need an answer but do demand a response.
- As we think about these five questions what I would like to do is to look at these five questions as four challenges to the theology that Paul has been teaching here in the book of Romans.
  - The first challenge is in verse 31 and it is the one we will look at today: Is there any conceivable power that might rob us of our glorification?
  - The second challenge is in verse 32: Is there any danger of God's love to us undergoing a change or lessening? We'll take that challenge up next week.
  - The third challenge is in the two questions Paul poses in verses 33 and 34: Might not someone finally convict of sin and yet bring us to a state of final condemnation?
  - And the fourth and final challenge is in verses 35 – 37: May we not fail or falter owing to our weakness and the troubles of life?
    - The purpose of the questions and challenges is to beat us out of us any inclination we may have to disbelief that we really are saved by the power and grace of God alone through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, and as a result are therefore completely safe to face life without fear—without worry.
- Now before we dig into the first challenge: "Is there any conceivable power that might rob us of our glorification?" Let's first make sure we understand the primary question that does demand an answer: What shall we say in response to these things?
  - What are these things?
    - One can easily and rightly argue that these things refer to everything that Paul has been teaching us from Romans 1: 16 to the end of chapter 8.
    - The these things that Paul is referring to is God's way of salvation for us. So, these things all have to do with the power of the Gospel, with our justification, and union with Christ that Paul has spelled out so clearly for us in these 8 chapters.
    - These things are summarized in the verses we spent our last several weeks together talking about.

**Romans 8: 28 – 30** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- As Paul makes clear here our salvation from beginning to end is a work of God based on the love and power of God. It is God who predestines, God who calls, God who justifies, God who glorifies.
- Can anything undo that? Can any power undo it? Can anything change God's love for us? Can any accusation be made against us that would undo our justification? Can any weakness in our self or any power in this life undo our future glorification?
- Now, I just need to point out one more thing before I really dig in. The word if (If God is for us) is not an if of doubt. Remember this a rhetorical question that Paul is asking. Paul is not asking us this to debate whether or not God is for us.
  - That is something we will touch on next week as we look at verse 32 and talk about: Is there anything that could make God not love us, or not be for us?
  - But Paul's real intent in asking this is to make us think about what it means for us that God is for us.
    - If Paul wanted to, rather than putting it in the form of a rhetorical question for us to think about, Paul could have made a statement of fact, "Since God is for us, who can be against us. That is what Paul is really getting to here. The if is not an if of doubt but an if of consequence.

## 1. Who is the God who is for us?

- I think the best way to answer that question is simply through God's word. God's self-description of Himself.
  - Let's start with a passage from Isaiah 40. When Isaiah was written, God's people were in ruins because of their sin and idolatry. Everything looked hopeless.
    - The book of Isaiah was written to call them to repentance and to a renewed hope in God. As God calls Israel to return to Him, listen to how He describes Himself to them:

**Isaiah 40: 9 – 11** "Behold your God!"<sup>10</sup> Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.<sup>11</sup> He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

➤ **This is the God that is for you!**

**Isaiah 40: 12** Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?<sup>13</sup> Who has measured the Spirit of

the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? <sup>14</sup> Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

➤ **This is the God that is for you!**

**Isaiah 40: 15** Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust....<sup>17</sup> All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.

➤ **This is the God that is for you!**

**Isaiah 40: 18** To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?....<sup>21</sup> Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? <sup>22</sup> It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; <sup>23</sup> who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

➤ **This is the God that is for you!**

**Isaiah 40: 25** To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. <sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

➤ **This is the God who is for you!**

**Isaiah 40: 28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. <sup>29</sup> He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. <sup>30</sup> Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; <sup>31</sup> but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

➤ **This is the God that is for you!**

- No wonder David said this in:

**Psalms 3: 1 – 3** O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; <sup>2</sup> many are saying of my soul, "There is no salvation for him in God." <sup>3</sup> But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.

**Psalms 27: 1** The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? <sup>2</sup> When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. <sup>3</sup> Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

➤ **This is the God who is for you!**



I know you believe these things about God, but do them you trust them to the point where you commit your life, your being, to this God who is for you? Do you, like David, see this God who is for you as a shield about you and the glory and the lifter of your head?

## 2. The forces that are against us

**Ephesians 2: 1 – 3** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind

- The forces against us are the broken world that we live in, Satan, and our own sinful flesh.
  - “The course of this world,” in verse 2 refers to the ways of culture and society that oppose the Lord. It refers to the ungodly trends in the world — materialism, naturalism, desire for instant gratification, and more, and the world will either seek to make us conform to its desires or it will seek to destroy us if we will not conform. There is no question that the world is the enemy of God’s people bent on their destruction.
    - You can see this very clearly in all the debate over same sex attraction in our culture today. First the demand of the world was that we accept, then it was that we join in celebrating, and for those who refuse to conform, they are moving to destroy.
    - But our God who is for us and a shield about us is greater than the course of this world. Through union with Christ, we have overcome the world.

**John 16: 33** In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

- The world can still appeal to our remaining sin, but it is no longer be our lord and master, Christ is.
- In ancient times, the term air often referred to the spiritual realm of angels and demons; thus, “the prince of the power of the air” that Paul references in Eph. 2:2 is Satan.
  - This leader of all that opposes God stirs up trouble everywhere.
  - But even Satan is no match against the God who is for us. At the cross and through His resurrection, Jesus has crushed his head and Satan is now bound.

**Revelation 12: 9 – 11** And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony,

- Finally, “the passions of our flesh” and “desires of the body” (Eph. 2:3) refer not to our physical bodies, as if they themselves were wicked. Paul is speaking of our fallen nature, which Christ has also subdued.

**Romans 6:6** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

- All these foes, these forces of evil, are powerful, and they are still at work against us, and will be until God brings us to glory, but they are no match for the power of God that is at work in us.
  - The devil and sinful men can make you sick, can steal your car, can sow seeds of strife in your marriage, can take away your job, and rob you of your child. But remember what Romans 8: 28 says:

**Romans 8: 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.

- God works all those things together for good for those who have been called according to His purpose. Do you realize what that means? God who is greater than all your enemies, takes everything your enemies intended to use for your harm to work good in your life.
  - If God is for you, he does not spare you these things. But he designs good where your enemies design evil. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” If the God who has purposed our glory is all-powerful (and He is!), why are we afraid of any opposition at all?

**Psalms 46: 1** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, <sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling....<sup>11</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

- None of our foes are any match for God, but how do we know that we are a part of the us that God is for.

### 3. Who is the us?

- To understand who the us is we have to look at the preceding context, which is:

**Romans 8: 28 – 30** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup>And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- The us are those who God has foreknown, and as a result of His foreknowing love have been predestined, called, and justified, and will one day be glorified.
- The us are the people who love God because they have been called by God.

- The us are those who have received grace. You can tell they are the ones that God is for because God, through His Holy Spirit has opened their eyes to see and receive the gift of His grace. Those are the ones whom God is for. Those who have received grace are those who God has chosen:

**Ephesians 1: 4 – 6** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace

- You wouldn't love God unless God first loved you.

**1 John 4: 19** We love because he first loved us.

- The response of our heart is conditioned on God first loving us. And If God has chosen to love us then God has predestined us to adoption to himself, and if He has predestined us to adoption to himself, then He will call us, and we will respond to His call by loving Him in return.
- How do you know that God is for you? It is simple. Do you love God? You wouldn't love God if God had not first chosen to love you, and if God has chosen to love you then He certainly is for you.
- So, what do you say in response to this? Do you love God? That's the real test of whether or not God is for you.
  - But what does it look like to really love God? Lots of people say they do, but the truth is not many do. The only way you can be sure that God is for you and is working all things for your good is if you love God, but what does it really look like to love God?
    - It's more than just words, isn't it?
      - We can see all of this beautifully illustrated in the life of Peter. On that night that Jesus was betrayed, Peter denied knowing Jesus three different times. It would have been easy for Jesus to have just written Peter off after that. But instead, after his resurrection, in love, Jesus moved toward Peter and sought Peter out, and called Peter to himself. Listen to conversation that ensued:

**John 21: 15** Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup>He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." <sup>17</sup>He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep.

- ❖ Peter, I know that right now you are feeling defeated and useless by your failure. I know you are ashamed and that you think you have been defeated by the world, your flesh, and the

devil. But I love you, and I gave my life for you. Your failure is why I went to the cross. Don't just say you love me. Love me by joining me in my work of kingdom renewal. Feed my sheep.

- If you love God, it is only because God chose to love you first and called you to himself.
- But God didn't just love you in word. He loved you in deed by giving His Son to die for you.
- That's how you know that God is for you. You know that it was for you and your sin that Jesus died.

- **What do you say to these things?** What do you do in response to these things?
  - Do you move forward in faith and trust and serve the one who loved you and gave his life for you, or do you shrink back in fear?
    - The world, the flesh, and the devil are dust on the scale compared to the weight of glory of God. So, with confidence you can say:

**Psalm 73: 23 – 26** I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. <sup>24</sup>You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. <sup>25</sup>Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. <sup>26</sup>My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

- Consider how practical Paul is being. He is saying: Friend, have you been called? Have you found the gospel coming home to your soul with power? Have you asked God to justify you? Fine! Now realize this—that would not and could not have happened unless the great God of heaven had set his love upon you in the depths of eternity before time and is now infallibly working out his plan to live with you forever in his family.

**Romans 8:1** There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

- God is entirely for us, and never against us.
  - None of our sicknesses is a judgment from a condemning judge.
  - None of our broken cars or failed appliances is a punishment from God.
  - None of our marital strife is a sign of his wrath. None of our lost jobs is a penalty for sin.
  - None of our wayward children is a crack of the whip of God's retribution.
- If we are in Christ, God is for us, not against, in and through all things — all ease and all pain, God is working for our God to conform to the glorious image of His own Son.

**Psalm 27: 14** Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

- If God is for you, who can be against you? This week, as you rejoice in the love of God shown to you through Jesus Christ, may this be the song of your heart:

**Psalm 28:7** The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.