

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part twenty-two
Sunday, March 31st, 2019 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2119
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WORKING THROUGH THE LOGIC OF REDEMPTION

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

These verses are Paul's attempt to pull out the *meaning* of the theology of **verses 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. [29] 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. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”

These truths about God's saving work are almost too big for us. We can know the *facts* without drawing out with care and particularity the *application* of these truths to our lives. That's why today's text (31-39) spins around a series of *questions*. The Bible is showing us how it wants to be studied. We're meant to sort out what *difference* it makes that we've been predestined, called, justified, and glorified through the redeeming work of Christ Jesus, God the Son.

“What then shall we say to these things?”(31). We must *dialogue* with these truths. We're not meant to just *hear* these verses in some sermon or Bible study. That's why Paul calls us to “*say*” something *back* to what God has done in Christ. It's not just *knowledge* Paul's after. These ideas are too big just to be *mentally cataloged*. We're to see everything else about our lives *through* these truths.

How do we *talk to ourselves* about what God has done? Paul presses for a *response* to these things. What do we “*say*” in our minds? How do we draw out the *application* of these things? How do we *volley back* these truths, like a tennis player seeing the ball coming, stancing himself or herself to *engage* with the ball by hitting it back?

If we studied nothing else tonight, there is precious truth enough just in noting the *method* of Paul with theological truth. Look at the questions in this passage: “What then shall we say to these things?”(31). “If God is for us, who can be against us?”(31). “...how will He not also with him graciously give us all things?”(32). “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?”(33). “Who is to condemn?”(34). “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”(35).

Six questions. This is Paul *pressing himself into the truth*. Don't just *read* the Word. *Engage* it. *Involve* yourself with it. Love God with all your *mind*. Don't settle for reading just for the *duty* of having done the reading. This is so common and usually fruitless. Read to *figure things out* - read to *discover* - read to have something to “*say*” (“...what shall we say to these things?”) to your soul. Don't read the Word with *indifference*. Fight *laziness* like it was a bandit because it will *rob* you of meat for your mind and sweetness for your soul.

There is a reason Paul wants us to work with him through the details of today's text. There is a reason for the repetition of searching questions. Our text deals with the *ultimate* issues of our existence. You are a Christian, I assume. Your life, says Paul, is hidden with Christ in God.

There are only two possible threats to consider. There are *internal issues of sin and guilt* (31-34), and there are *external threats of pain, rejection, persecution, and death* (35-39). There simply are no other enemies to consider. There are *internal dangers* and there are *external dangers*. If we are safe against these *two* things, we are safe and secure indeed. This is where Paul leads us in this text.

1) **THE FOUNDATIONAL DEFENSE AGAINST CONDEMNATION**

Romans 8:31-34 - “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [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? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [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 first of all that you can't just *soothe* condemnation away. The only solution Paul offers is a *doctrinal* solution. Psychology can't help with the actual guilt of sin. Therapy can't erase my condemnation before God. These just deal with the damage of *emotional guilt*. Creation and the Fall have left us with bigger, more objective problems than these.

This isn't just a matter of telling people something good is going to happen to them today. It takes more than listening to your own breathing or heart-beat. Those things can change only your *feelings*, not your real guilt before the God who is there.

Paul has an *argument* to offer - a *case* to build. These verses form the reasoning process behind the bare statement in **Romans 8:1** - “**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**” That's the grand position for the Christian. That's the assertion of faith. But *why* is this so? What entitles us to rise above condemnation? We're certainly not perfect. It's not as though we aren't *aware* of anything we've said or done that isn't *worthy* of God's just wrath and displeasure. If we aren't under condemnation anymore, we need to know *why* we're not.

And the reason we're *not* under condemnation is the heart of the message of the Christian gospel. Paul puts his position in *general* terms first - “**....If God is for us, who can be against us?**”(8:31b). The verbal play is between those words “*for*” and “*against*.” No condemnation can stand *against* us because God is *for* us.

But *how* is He for us? Is He *for* us the way a mother is *for* her child's junior baseball team as she watches the game unfold from the bleachers? Is He *for* us in terms of wishing us His best? Is He *for* us in the sense that He just really, really loves us? How is He for us?

Let's be clear. God isn't for us in any of the senses I have just painted above. None of those alone, nor all of them combined, would solve our problem of condemnation. So Paul explains it a bit further - “**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?**”(8:32).

Now we have more details supplied. God is *for* us in a way that is somehow tied to “*not sparing His own Son*” but “*giving Him up for us all*.” This means God is not for us in some general sense of just forgetting about our sins because it's His nature to be pleasant and nice. It's not as though God were just *loving*, so everything is going to pan out OK. It's not that we're all God's children and He's not going to let anything bad happen to us. The multitudes of people who think these things are tragically mistaken about God's plan for mankind's sin and guilt.

But Paul goes deeper here. He says God is *for* us by being *against* something - or *Someone* - else. We know He is *for* us because He did not “*spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all*”(8:32). This is central. There is no condemnation *now* for us because that condemnation has already been poured out *before*. God *gave up the Son*, says Paul. But He didn't just give up the Son in the sense of allowing a group of people to wrongly accuse Him and put Him to death on a cross in Jerusalem. That's not seeing or saying nearly enough.

And Father God didn't “*give him up*” when he was born into this world that first Christmas. The Father *gave up* the Son for us all by placing *our* condemnation on *Him*. The reason there is *now* no condemnation *for us* isn't due to our innocence, but due to the fact that God is too just to condemn the same sin *twice*. Father God gave up the Son to divine wrath.

Paul will say it even more strikingly in **2 Corinthians 5:21** - “**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin [Jesus], so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**” Or, quite clearly in the words of the prophet Isaiah - “**....upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace....**”(53:5).

We read those last words so frequently we don't think to ask the obvious question. We don't read those words, as Paul encouraged, asking, “**What shall we say to these things?**” The obvious question we should “*say*” to Isaiah is “**Why in the world would Jesus, God's only Son, need to be chastised? What did He do that was so wrong? What did Father God see in Him that merited condemning?**” And Isaiah would say, “**No, no. That's not it at all. He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities**”(Isaiah 53:52).

Paul pulls out his argument even further - **Romans 8:33-34** - “**Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [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.”

Note that first question carefully. **“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?”** Then, **“It is God who justifies”**(33). God is the Creator of all. Anyone who might stand to bring a charge against us is one of God's **creatures**. But God Himself, the Almighty Creator, has already **justified** His elect. And they're **His** elect elect in Christ. No other creature in all creation is powerful enough to sustain a charge against those whom the Creator has justified.

But there's still more: **“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”**(34). Notice how Paul specifically makes reference now to **Christ Jesus - the One who died and was raised and is interceding for us**.

The reason Paul ties my freedom from condemnation so intimately with the person and work of Christ Jesus needs to be thought through. The place where my sin would scare me the most would be the appointed place of the judgment of God. He is blazingly holy and I'm not. But the place where this judgment takes place has a **name** in the New Testament - **2 Corinthians 5:10** - **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”**

It's the judgment seat of **Christ**. It's the judgment seat of the One who already bore my sins in His death. It's the judgment seat of the One who rose from the dead, not just as a fluke, or bare act of divine power, but who was **“...raised for our justification”**(Romans 4:25b). It is the judgment seat of the One whose very intercessory presence in the throne room is eternally stamped with my very own humanity. He is eternally **attached** to you and me. He is forever one of us. He's a **sympathetic** High Priest.

Paul wants us to walk with him all the way through his argument. This is something every Christian **must** carry around in his or her head all the time. Our own **hearts** can be full of self-condemnation at times - **1 John 3:20** - **“...whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”** For any condemnation to stand against me in Christ someone - some **creature** made by the power of the **Creator** - has to stand up and prove Jesus Christ a fraud. And that will never, ever happen.

2) EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES CAN'T UNDO WHAT JESUS CHRIST, GOD THE SON, HAS ACCOMPLISHED

Romans 8:35-39 - **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] 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 these verses Paul moves from the **internal** enemy of guilt and condemnation to the **external** enemies - too many in number to list - that face God's elect in this present world. We need this reminder from Paul. The Christian faith isn't pretend or make-believe. There is no shortage of enemies, and they **march on your life and mine**.

This is why Paul quotes the words of the Psalmist in **verse 36** - **“As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’”**

Those are the words from **Psalm 44:22**. Paul quotes them to show that this has been the experience of Christians down through the centuries. No Christian is to think because God loves him or her there will not come trials or difficulties. There is always a **cost** to following Christ in this hostile world. This is Biblical realism at its best.

But if there is always **cost** to be **considered**, there is never **threat** to be **feared**. The issue Paul drives home is raised in the question - **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”**(35). Or, **“Who or what can win against Christ?”** And he could simply answer **“Well, nothing at all.”**

But because he wants us to think through all the possibilities, he builds his list: **“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] 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 covers everything he can think of. He ponders the fearful inevitability of **death** and the drudgery of toil and suffering of **life**. He thinks of the **powers** of the natural realm and the spiritual realm. He thinks of the things that are **present** and the unknown danger awaiting in the **future**.

Then, to sum it all up, he covers everything he might have missed by referencing “**anything else in all creation**”(39). That covers every eventuality, every trial, every foe. Nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ because anything other than God is just a **part** of His creation. Only God is the **Creator**. So it’s certain that nothing in all **creation** can usurp His power.

But what is Paul’s **purpose** in telling us this? The clue is found in the way he describes us as “**more than conquerors**”(37). Nothing **separates** us from the love of God in Christ, and because of that we are more than **conquerors**. It’s a **military** term. Paul’s purpose is to give us all **courage**. **The design of these verses is to give us such security in Christ we aren’t afraid to risk everything else to extend His kingdom**. These words are tied to the meaning and purpose of your life here on earth. We are given courage because none of the things that normally **threaten** such courage apply.

Persecution shouldn’t stop us from risking all for Christ because we are still more than conquerors in persecution. Famine shouldn’t stop us for risking all for serving Christ because neither famine or nakedness (both forms of extreme lack and want) can keep us from conquering all for Christ. What might happen to us in the **future** shouldn’t keep us from risking all for Christ because we are more than conquerors no matter what the future holds in Christ Jesus.

So we are given these words to shove us out of a life dedicated to pleasure, security, comfort and possessions. We are given these words of blood bought security in Christ to spend ourselves recklessly for Him. We have Christ’s eternal safety net underneath all our ventures for Him. We are secured the way a rescue worker is secured with a life line to the shore so he can reach out with strength and confidence to the one who has fallen through the ice. We are always safe in investing our life for the lost and dying of this world.