

If God is For Us . . .

Romans 8:31-34

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

³¹ 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. – Romans 8:31-34, ESV

Paul has been working throughout Romans 8 to give believers assurance of salvation and security in God's love in the face of various challenges, obstacles and threats to that security. To this point, the challenges have either been internal – sin, guilt, doubt – or external and impersonal – suffering for Christ and suffering in general.

Paul's assurance for believers reached a climax with verses 28-30, where we learned that all things work together for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose. Then we learned that to be called according to His purpose is, in fact, to be loved by God from eternity past, before we were born or before the world was ever made, and to have our glorification in the future be a settled reality in the purposes of God, which cannot be thwarted.

Having answered our own internal feelings of guilt and doubt, and having answered the external sufferings for Christ and general sufferings caused by the circumstances of life in a fallen world, Paul now asks: *What shall we say to these things?*

In other words, in the face of all of the assurance Paul has given – our justification, the help and intercession of the Holy Spirit, the working together of all things for our good, the eternal purposes of God for our salvation – what can be said? And then he gets personal . . .

I. **Getting Personal: Who?**

Paul asks the rhetorical question: If God is for us, who can be against us?

Now, to be clear: Paul is not trying to cast doubt on whether or not God is for us. His whole argument in this whole chapter has been to establish the fact that God is for us indeed.

Paul is also not saying that we won't face any opposition. When he says, "Who can be against us?" he means "Who can effectively be against us?" or "Who can successfully oppose us?"

But when he asks “who,” Paul does have someone in mind! And this is what I mean by “getting personal.” Paul knows that we do face opposition, that we do in fact have someone against us. He just wants us to know that this enemy, this accuser- the one who brings charges and who finds fault- cannot succeed against us.

Now some people don’t believe in the devil and will immediately tune out a message or an argument that takes the devil seriously. But if you’ve tried to live a Christian life in this midst of this fallen world, you know that your opposition is more than just your own internal feelings of guilt or your own doubts and your opposition is more than just circumstances of suffering or even people who might hate you because you follow Jesus. You know that behind your own sin struggles and behind the temptations and trials and persecution you face in this world, there is an unseen enemy. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.

The Bible has different terms for the enemy of our souls. Jesus referred to him as “the thief” in John 10, when He said, “*The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy.*” He is also called Satan, which means “the adversary” or “the opponent.” In Revelation 12, he is called “the accuser of the brethren” and in Revelation he is depicted as a dragon, while in 1 Peter, he is called “your adversary, the devil” and is compared to a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

The name Satan or “adversary” or “accuser of the brethren” comes the closest to the role Satan plays in our lives that Paul has in view in these verses.

a. **The Four Fiery Darts of the Enemy**

Satan has four fiery darts that he likes to hurl at believers. These four darts are described well by Sinclair Ferguson in his book, *By Grace Alone*:

Fiery Dart 1: "God is against you," Satan says. "He is not really for you. How can you believe he is for you when you see the things that are happening in your life?"

Fiery Dart 2: "I have accusations I will bring against you because of your sins," Satan argues. "What can you say in defense? Nothing."

Fiery Dart 3: "You can say you are forgiven, but there is a payback day coming—a condemnation day," Satan insinuates. "How will you defend yourself then?"

Fiery Dart 4: "Given your track record, what hope is there that you will persevere to the end?" Satan asks.

Paul skillfully answers each of these four fiery darts as he reminds us of the wonderful love of our Heavenly Father, who is most assuredly FOR us, and as He describes the finished work of

our wonderful Savior, who has satisfied divine justice, conquered all of His and our enemies in the resurrection, and who lives forever at the Father's side making intercession for us.

b. **The Cross is Always the Answer**

Notice that at the heart of Paul's answer to Satan's fiery darts is the cross. The cross is always the center of our salvation, our assurance, our hope. How do we know God is for us? Look at what He was willing to sacrifice for us on the cross! How do we know we are really forgiven and cleared of all charges and will not face judgment? Look at what Christ took upon Himself at the cross!

The cross is always the answer. It proves the Father's love and favor and it demonstrates clearly the source of our forgiveness and cleansing.

The key to understanding why the cross is so central and is always the answer is in the little word "for" in verse 31 & 32. In earlier messages in this series, I have made a big deal of the word "for" as a linking word of causation meaning because.

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, **FOR** the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. vv. 1-2*

*if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. **FOR** all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God – vv. 13-14*

This word "for" is different. It doesn't mean "because," but it means "on behalf of" or "on the side of." So, how do we know that God is FOR us? Because He "did not spare His own son but gave him up FOR us all." God is *on our side* and we can know that because He gave His Son *on our behalf*.

II. **Our Wonderful Father**

Think about what it meant for the Father to give His Son for us!

a. **He Did Not Spare His Own Son**

He did not spare His own Son, Paul tells us. And Paul adds a little word as an intensifier to help us grasp the significance on this sacrifice. Unfortunately, it's hard to translate. The ESV says: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all," using the word "who" to

translate this word, but it might be better as “He indeed spared not his own son” “He even did not spare his own son.”

God did not spare His Son. This thought becomes even more significant when we consider two things:

1. God did spare Abraham’s son, Isaac.
2. Jesus asked to be spared.

Almost 2,000 years before Jesus died on the cross, God called Abraham to offer up his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah. The depth of Abraham’s dedication to God was shown in his willingness to offer up his son. Some people have wondered and questioned how God could ask this of Abraham, but remember that God spared Abraham the grief that He later would not spare Himself. God did not ask more of Abraham than He Himself was willing to give and He relented of actually requiring this from Abraham. But He did not spare His own Son, even though His own Son asked to be spared.

In the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed, as Judas was leading Jesus’ enemies to the garden, Jesus prayed in agony, such agony that He sweat drops of blood. He asked His Father to spare Him, “if possible” and then submitted Himself to His Father’s will. But it was not possible. Jesus could not be spared. Although the very thought of the Father pouring out His wrath upon His Son and allowing Him to be condemned in our place is beyond comprehension and was so terrifying to Jesus that He pleaded to be spared, there was no possible way to spare Him.

This, to me, is one of the most convincing arguments for the exclusivity of the Gospel – in other words, for the truth that salvation can only be found in Jesus and Jesus alone. Jesus pleaded with His Father. The Father loved His Son, perfectly and eternally. If salvation could be accomplished any other way – through good works or meditation or reincarnation or whatever – surely God would have spared His Son.

But our Heavenly Father’s love for us, His adopted children, is so great, that He spared not His own Son. God is so FOR us that He gave Him up FOR us all. This passage also makes it clear who the Father gave the Son for. He gave Him “for us all.” In the context of verses 28-30, “us all” means those who love God, who are called according to His purpose, who are foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified by God. God gave His only begotten Son FOR all of His adopted sons and daughters, “for us all.”

b. He Graciously Gives Us All Things

And then, Paul argues, once we know and believe that God has given His Son for us, “*how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*” What does Paul mean by “all things”? What will God give us? Well, Paul’s argument is that, once God has given His only Son for us, for Him to give us everything else good that we need is no big deal, no major sacrifice on God’s part.

Think about what God has promised us:

Psalm 84:11 says, “*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.*”

Psalm 34:11 says, “*The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*”

2 Peter 1:3-4 says, “*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises.*”

Jesus said in Matthew 5:5, “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*”

But some people abuse these promises, as if the good things God has promised to give us will make for a life of health and wealth, prosperity without suffering. So remember also Philippians 1:29: “*For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.*”

III. **Our Wonderful Savior**

All of this so far has been to answer Satan’s first fiery dart:

How can we know that God is for us? Answer: He even did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all!

Now we know He is for us and will graciously and freely give us all things along with Christ. In other words, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ of all things.

Now we look at the next two darts in the form of Paul’s rhetorical questions:

1. Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? Answer: (Implied: Satan may try, but . . .)
It is God who justifies!
2. Who is to condemn? Answer: *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*

These questions and their answers deal with accusation and condemnation and the answers again take us back to the cross and beyond to the full work of Christ for our salvation.

Satan brings accusation. Who will bring any charge? The accuser of the brethren, of course! But it is God, the highest judge in the universe, who justifies, who declares us “not guilty.” How? On what basis? On the basis of the finished work of Jesus! (We’re already seen this in verses 1-4, in our first sermon in this series, but here it is brought back again in even stronger language as an answer to Satan’s accusations.)

a. **He died and was raised**

“Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised . . .”

If the cross is always the answer and our salvation is always cross-centered, then why does Paul express our confidence in Christ in this way – “Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised . . .”? Simply put, because our confidence in the finished work of the cross relies even more heavily on the resurrection of Jesus than it does on the death of Jesus.

If Jesus merely died but was never raised, we would have no confidence. As Paul put it in 1 Corinthians 15:14 and 17, “*if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. . . if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*”

Imagine if we could say “Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins,” but we could not say that He rose again from the dead. Well, what assurance would we have that the justice due for our sins had been satisfied? Death is the penalty for sin, or, as Romans 6:23 puts it, it is the wages we earn for our sin. If Jesus paid the full penalty and took the full measure of all of our earned wages on Himself, then justice is satisfied and death no longer has any claim. Death has to release Jesus once justice has been satisfied.

But if Jesus remained in the grave, then the accusation could be brought that He didn’t fully satisfy the justice owed. He didn’t fully pay for all sins, thus He remains dead and the debt remains outstanding. This is why, in Romans 4:25, Paul refers to Jesus as, “Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” His resurrection is our open and public justification – the debt is paid, justice is satisfied. Even though Jesus was able to cry out on the cross, “It is finished,” and it was, the public declaration of this finished work was the resurrection.

It’s kind of like building a house. Imagine you were to hire me to build you a house. Now, you’d have to be out of your mind to do that, because I’m in no way qualified to do such a thing. But, as long as we’re imagining, let’s imagine that you hired me to build your house and I worked

hard to build it well and complete it perfectly. Can you move in as soon as I'm done? No! What remains? Well, the final house inspection, of course! Only after the inspector thoroughly checks the house and all of the work done can a certificate be issued and you be granted the right to occupy.

The resurrection of Jesus is two things: It is God's declaration that the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross was accepted as fully satisfactory. It is also the triumph of the first human being to conquer death forever. Yes, Jesus is fully God, but He was raised fully man, too, in an authentic human body that can never die again! It would be like receiving an occupancy certificate from the inspector that not only allows you to move into the house, but then finding that the house has been built to last forever and to fully supply all of the needs of its occupants forever! The resurrection is not just our justification but also our eternal life.

So, Christ Jesus died, but more than that, he was raised!

b. He is interceding for us

But Paul doesn't stop with the resurrection. He goes on to say, "*who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*" Jesus wasn't just raised from death to life; He was also raised from earth to heaven. As our Messiah, our representative Lord and Head of the Church—as the firstfruits of the resurrection, the first-born from the dead—Jesus has been raised to the seat of highest honor in the universe, to God's right hand. Your president may sit in the highest office on earth in the White House, but your Lord sits at the highest seat in all of heaven and earth, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, on the Throne of God.

We refer to this technically as Jesus' ascension and His session – His sitting in office – at God's right hand. "*There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Tim 2:5) – the man Christ Jesus sits at God's right hand, interceding for us.

I always appreciate it when someone tells me they're praying for me. I really do. I need all the intercession I can get. (By the way, don't ever say that to someone unless you really are.) But what encourages me and strengthens me more than anything else is knowing that Jesus, my Great High Priest, is interceding for me.

Hebrews 7:24-25 describes Jesus in this way: "*he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*"

Next week, we'll look at verses 35-39 of Romans 8, concluding our summer series, and we'll see exactly what it means to be "saved to the uttermost." But let these verses echo in your hearts and minds this week as we close:

“he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

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