



Romans 8:31-38 - ³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? 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, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered 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 convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There's no question about it – God is for us!



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
(1 John 3:1)

“Honey, let’s not exchange gifts this year for our anniversary this year.” A woman says to her husband. “After all, it’s just stuff. What’s important to me is that we’re together.” “Hmm. That was easy.” Thinks her husband. “I guess I don’t have to worry about buying a gift this year.” But then his wheels start turning. The husband muses to himself, “I wonder if she meant what she said.” This guy is no fool. “I mean, she said, ‘no gifts,’ but does that really mean, ‘no gifts’ or does that mean, ‘buy such a big gift we’ll have to take out a second mortgage on the house?’” The husband is befuddled. He heard what his wife said, but was the subtext stronger than the words she spoke? Would he have to read between the lines to get at what was really going on? Admittedly, that scenario might seem like farfetched fodder for sitcom television, but I think it illustrates a point. Human beings are prone to question things. Since we can’t always read a person’s intentions, and maybe because we’ve been burned in the past, we have our guard up and feel like we’re left in the dark and wondering if we can really trust what we hear. The boss says, “Why don’t you take the rest of the day off. We’re good.” Did he say that to reward me for hard work or does he think they can get along fine without me? Is my job safe? The schoolmate says, “I’m happy you got the part,” but is she really? Unfortunately, our questioning minds don’t stop at interpersonal relationships. The devil loves to get us to question what our God tells us. Wasn’t that his first trick in the Garden of Eden - “Did God really say...?” The father of lies has had a few thousand years of practice, but his methods haven’t changed much. He questions, and he gets us to question.

In our lesson this morning from Romans 8, the Apostle Paul asks us seven questions in nine verses. Seven questions! But Paul’s questions aren’t meant to raise doubt, or try to get at what God’s *really* saying. Quite the opposite, in fact. Romans 8 is one of the most sublime sections of Scripture, and as a preacher, it’s one of those Bible readings that I think I’d serve you best simply by standing up, reading it, and then sitting down. (And that’s undoubtedly true!) But let’s not pass over Paul’s profound promises of God’s love for you. Listen, as Paul tells us, there isn’t a shred of doubt in his mind. There’s no question about it. God is for us.

Paul asks his first questions, **“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”** “God for us” is a three word summary of God’s saving activity – from eternity to eternity, God’s story of eternal election, faithful love, free forgiveness, constant protection, divine providence, and eternal life – all of God’s redeeming work is summarized in those three words, “God for us.” All of God’s redeeming work has only one object, one goal, one desire – YOU. It’s infinitely profound in its simplicity – God is for you. How did God make all of those bullet points of redemption history into reality? Through a word of promise – I will be your God. But he didn’t just speak and not follow through. He didn’t just wish into being your forgiveness and your eternal life, no he didn’t just speak his word of promise. He wrote it in blood; in the blood of his one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

What, then shall we say in response to this? The answer is obvious. There’s no question about it: God is for us. But it’s human nature to question - How can I be sure? How can I know that I can trust what God says? He makes some pretty remarkable, downright impossible sounding promises. For many people, having God on their side means little more than having him give you a positive outlook on life or better health or a few more dollars in your pocket. But is that what God delights to give? Is this how we know God is for us? We see just how and just how much God is for us especially during these weeks of the church year. Last Wednesday, we observed Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the 40 day journey of Lent – following our Savior to the cross of Calvary on Good Friday. There, we see that God is for us. That’s so much more than simply, “God is on my team.” Your God is actively engaged in battle for you – and he’s already won. He sent Jesus to suffer the punishment and death that your sins deserved. God himself defends you against any charge that could ever be brought against you.



God is for us, so who could ever be against us? Paul asks another question: **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?** The answer: Nobody! Almighty God himself has declared us 'not guilty' of sin for Jesus' sake. We stand beautifully dressed in the robes of Christ's righteousness. No one can bring any accusation against us. But that doesn't mean that no one will *try* to accuse us. Sometimes, as people get older, they say things like, "My memory is good, but it's short." It's normal. We can expect our memories to fade a little bit as the years go on, but aren't there some things we can never seem to forget? What are those things we always seem to remember with remarkable accuracy? Usually, our failures. Our past sins. You might not be able to tell me what you had for lunch on Friday, but I bet you could retell with stunning clarity the saga of your sin – whether it happened last week or when you were 13. And when we least expect it, the devil grabs us by the throat and accuses us all over again. He tries to get us to question what God tells us. Then we find ourselves standing side by side with Eve in the Garden. "Did God really say that? Could God ever forgive you for that one? You, sinner, you deserve to die!" What can we say to that accusation from the devil? The same thing Jesus said when the devil tempted him in the wilderness, *Devil, you lie! You're lying about God not loving me. You're lying about God being against me. You're lying about me – because I have one who took my every sin upon his back and laid down his life to pay the price in full. God himself has promised that I am his and he is mine, and he'll never let me go.*

God is for us. Who can be against us? **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?** Paul wasn't writing this book of Romans in a vacuum. There was a definite context and it wasn't a friendly one to Christians. The question of **who shall separate us from the love of Christ** really takes on another level of meaning when it's your family who gets tossed into the coliseum to be ripped apart by wild animals to entertain a crowd. **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ** really demands an answer when you are about to be dipped in wax and lit on fire so you can provide light for the emperor's evening garden party. The certainty of God's promises meet people where they are at – even if where they're at is a dark, scary place. God's promises are for you, who lies awake at night and wonders if you can go on anymore. God's promises are for you, whose self worth was shattered when that person did that awful thing. God's promises are for you – and what does he promise you? That he is for you. He has defeated your death, he has suffered for your sin, he has risen triumphant over all of it. If Christ Jesus is willing to go, literally, through hell and back for you – will anything separate you from his love? Never. Not a thing.

Listen to Paul's defiant cry of faith that rests in Christ, even in the face of terrible hardship. Will any of those things separate us from the love of Christ? **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** There's no question about it. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. God is for us. It's a very well known Bible passage, but did you ever wonder what Paul means by saying that we are *more* than conquerors. How can we be more than conquerors? Usually there's a winner and a loser. Nothing more, nothing less – but then Jesus shows up. In him we are MORE than conquerors, because we have a victory that lasts forever. Through faith in Jesus, we have been forgiven for all those times we questioned God's promises or doubted that he could work even our situation for good. Those sins were nailed to the cross as Jesus died and rose to make us more than conquerors. Consider the radical changes that brings to our lives.

In Christ, God is for us, which means that we can think of our lives as having a "before, a right now, and a not yet." What about the "before?" How should we handle our past, our baggage? The past is evidence playing before our eyes, over and over again of God's perfect love for you – his protection and providence; his forgiveness and favor. In Christ you can look back at your past in ways that nobody else would dare to do – admitting freely that I am a sheep who loved to wander. I have sinned. But, in Christ, notice something else – a greater mountain, if you will – overshadowing and swallowing up the sin and guilt of the past. It's the mountain of Christ's righteousness. I see in stunning clarity all the ways I have disobeyed and disappointed my God, but through all of it



God's ways to me have been mercy, love, and grace. How do I know? **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** Jesus died for every one of your sins, and now he lives forever to plead your case before his Father in heaven. Your life also has a “not yet.” God's promise is sure, and that day is coming when you will be delivered from this veil of tears to stand in joy beside your Savior Jesus. That's God's promise for you in Christ. So what about your “right now?” With a forgiven past (present, and future) and a secure future in heaven, you really do live and move and have your being in Christ. Nothing separates you from his love. Therefore, just as certainly, you know that your God is for you. You know that your God is living and active in this present moment to do you good!

I don't think people will ever stop questioning whether they can trust what they hear. And maybe sometimes the subtext or the context will make us think twice about what people tell us. But because of Jesus Christ, we never need to wonder whether we can trust what our God tells us. There's no question about it. God is for us. How about one more question that Paul doesn't ask, but he answers: What is the opposite of questioning? Conviction! Let's listen to Paul's answer: **I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** We are convinced. No matter what comes our way in life, it is impossible to get beyond God's loving reach. We are convinced. God is for us as we face down our past. God is for us as we look ahead to our future. And by God's grace, there's no question about it.

Amen

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:7)*