

Romans 8:18-39

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Date: 02 August 2020

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[0 : 0 0] In Romans chapter 5 and verse 1, we read these words, Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. Your word which testifies that you are for us and not against us.

Your word that testifies that Jesus now is God with us, and that the Holy Spirit has now come to dwell in us. Our Father, we pray that we would hear your voice speaking to us, that we would heed your voice, and that we would trust you and follow you wherever you go.

We thank you for the word of God. We thank you for the people of God. And we thank you for the work of the gospel, that work that is taking place in each of the lives of your people, and that work which is reaching people who are not yet trusting in Jesus.

So we bring our prayers before you. We thank you for this access that brings us into your presence, that we have through Jesus this peace with you, our God, and this access through faith into the grace in which we now stand.

[1 : 2 6] We pray for our church family. We pray for everyone connected to it. We pray for each individual member of that family and each of their individual families.

Lord, you know them each one and you love them. It's our prayer that they would know your blessing and presence in their lives. We pray for everyone involved in the work of ministry.

We thank you for the service that Kellen provides every week with the music. We thank you for James' preaching and teaching ministry. And we pray that he and Vicki would have a good break over the summer.

For Sebastian and Casper, that as a family, they might know your presence and encouragement. And for each one of us, might we all have a time of rest and refreshment with our families, with friends, and that you would comfort us and encourage us and strengthen us.

As we pray for our church and our church family, we pray too for our community. We pray for the city of Edinburgh, the nation of Scotland, the peoples of this world.

[2 : 2 7] As we realize the great blessing that it is that you are for us, and that we have access to you through Jesus, that we are now at peace with you.

We ask, Lord, that your word would go forth, whether through the internet or person to person, and that those who do not yet know would come to know. That those who have not yet heard would come to hear.

And those who have not yet trusted would come to place their faith and trust in your Son, the Lord Jesus. So we give you thanks that you are with us, that you are in us, and that you are for us.

And we ask, Lord, that you would remind us that in Jesus Christ, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Because we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Our reading today comes from Romans chapter 8, and we'll pick up reading at verse 18, and we'll read down to the end of the chapter. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[3 : 3 6] For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it.

In hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as

we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

[4 : 48] And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified. What then shall we say in response 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, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?

[5 : 56] No one, 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.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

As it is written, for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered a sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For 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.

Amen. And may God add his own blessing to this reading of his word. Well, let's turn together to those words at the very end of Romans chapter 8, where Paul says these remarkable words.

[7 : 09] He says, What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? We might be inclined to say, it's not a particularly good time to be a Christian.

The church is numerically small and is divided. There are cultural divisions. There are theological divisions. Some take the message of Jesus and add to it.

Others take the message of Jesus and take away from it. Some try to make this message more palatable to the culture that surrounds it. We can also say that the culture itself is not particularly sympathetic.

It's strangely tolerant of all things, but it seems completely intolerant to the Christian message. So politically, socially, economically, Christians and the Christian church are finding the going tough. They are not in the ascendancy. They are not the powerful. They are not the movers. They are not the shakers. And if we're honest, it looks like things might get worse before they get better.

[8 : 23] Now, if Walter Cronkite, the famous CBS anchorman for CBS News, were to say, and that's the way it is. City of Rome, 57 AD, long time ago.

But that description sounds very contemporary. It sounds very much like today. It's not an easy time to be a Christian. The culture in which we live professes to be tolerant, but in practice is rarely tolerant.

The Christian church is not strong or numerous. And there are divisions, we have to be honest. So it seems like the going is tough, and it's going to get tougher in this process, or in this life of following Jesus.

But what we're told here, as we begin with these words, God being for us, what shall we say if God is for us? Who can be against us? And this passage continues by telling us that we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us.

Now, we find this very difficult to accept. We can find it easy to accept that the Christian faith is marginalized. We can find it easy to accept that the society is not sympathetic, and that the Christian church is not vibrant, and that individual Christians are not particularly strong.

[9 : 41] But sometimes we find it very difficult to accept when something positive is said. I was listening to Radio 4 a few weeks ago, and a psychiatrist was on, and they said that for every one negative thing we hear about ourselves, it takes at least five positives to balance that out.

Now, you might be inclined to discount Radio 4. I encourage you not to. It's one of my favorite sources of news. You might be inclined to discount modern psychiatry and your liberty to do so. But just to give you an interesting perspective, the secular psychiatrist said about five to one, whereas Christian counselors suggest that that number is much higher, that the Christian needs to hear at least seven positives for every one negative.

So as followers of Jesus, we're far more likely to believe negative things about ourselves, negative things that others might say. We might believe the negative rhetoric that the culture or the society has to say about us.

But Paul has something positive to say. And because we believe that the Bible is God's word, God has something positive to say. He wants us to hear it.

[10:57] He wants us to believe it. And he wants us to live in the light of this truth. Because if we live as those who are more than conquerors, if we live as those for whom God is for them, not against them, our lives will be transformed.

Our church will be transformed. Our testimony, the words that we say and the life that we live, will be transformed. Because the alternative is, we hear the negative and we live accordingly.

We hear those words of failure. And strangely enough, we find ourselves living as failures. We find ourselves not living as conquerors, but living as those who are conquered.

Not living as victors, but living as those who are vanquished. So whatever you might think this morning, or whatever you might feel, now your thoughts are important and your feelings are important, but I want to say this, that what God has to say about you is more important than what the society has to say about you, than what the culture has to say about you, and even what you have to say about you.

So when we look at the Bible, particularly the New Testament, there are two great redemptive events. The first is the incarnation, that great word Emmanuel, God is with us.

[12:27] The second great redemptive event is the Pentecost event, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And that means that God is in us. We are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus comes to dwell among us. The Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, and now the Spirit takes up residence in the human heart. Now John Wesley put this together so helpfully.

He said, if any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two.

The doctrine of justification and that of the new birth. The former, relating to that great work which God does for us, and in forgiving our sins, the latter, to the great work which God does in us.

In renewing our character, renewing our lives. So now we turn to Paul, and he wants to focus on these words, God for us.

[13:31] Remember the incarnation? God with us. The Holy Spirit? God in us. Now the atoning work of Jesus. The work of Jesus on the cross, God for us.

What shall we say? How can we respond? God? In many ways, I teach theology, and theology is an attempt to say something, to say something in response to these things, to say something in response to what God has said, and to say something in response to what God has done.

Whatever we say is inadequate, but God has something to say to us. He wants us to hear it. He wants us to believe it, and he wants us to live in the light of these truths.

God is for us. If God is for us, who can be against us? Who is this us? This us is that great numberless group of people from the past, the present, and even into the future.

From all different places, all different cultures. They're Jews. They're Gentiles. They're poor.

They're rich. They're northern. They're southern. They're eastern. They're western. They are all different kinds of people from all different kinds of places.

[14:45] They're young, and they're old, and they're rich, and they're educated. They're illiterate. Whatever it might be. But what I want you to see is as we read this passage, the Apostle Paul is using an illustration.

He's using a courtroom illustration to illustrate this point. And he asks us three questions. And he, in so doing, he mirrors what is happening in a criminal case.

Because in a criminal case, someone is in the dock. And the case will begin with some form of accusation, some form of charge. He has done that.

She has done that. Then the course, the case will take its course, and either the person is acquitted and found innocent and dismissed, or the person is found guilty, in which case they are judged or

condemned.

So you see, a charge moves, if accurate, to condemnation. And then condemnation would then move to some form of separation. So if a guilty person is fined, that means some of their money is separated from them.

[15 : 55] If a person is in prison, I work as a prison chaplain, so I encounter prisoners all the time. If somebody is in prison, they are separated from their home.

They are separated from their loved ones. And in a capital case, where capital punishment is allowed, the guilty party, the condemned party, could be separated from life itself.

So with you, very briefly, I want to look at this magnificent passage that may be precious to many whom I'm speaking to, but I'm aware that some may never have read it before, or may have never considered it before.

But I want you to hear what God has to say concerning those for whom he has done this great work. Those for whom he is on their side.

Because the first question, we see this, that 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 along with him graciously give us all things?

[16 : 59] So you see, the Apostle Paul is saying that in Jesus Christ, God has given us the most precious gift he could give. And if he has given us this gift, the life of his son, the death of his son, the resurrection of his son, there is no limit to what he will do.

There is no limit to what he will give. Because if he gives that which is greatest, and if he gives that which is most precious, he will be not likely to give any other gift or provide any other need.

So the first question we see is in verse 33, who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? So Paul is the great preacher, and he uses these rhetorical devices, question and answer. So you hear a question, and you're brought into the talk. Who's going to bring a charge? Who's going to bring a charge against God's people, God's elect? And he goes on to answer, he says, it is God who justifies.

So you might say there are many charges, and there might be many charges that are true. There are many things that I've done, said, or thought that are wrong and are culpable. But if God has justified, Paul is saying there's no charge.

[18 : 21] No charge can be made. No charge can stand. No charge can be prosecuted. Why? Because another has been prosecuted in our place.

Another has been charged in our place. And another, ultimately, we see, has been punished in our place. So if you're tuning in today and you're not yet a Christian, you might know very little about the Christian faith, the message of the Bible is predominantly a message concerning God and his son. That God sent his son into this world to live, to die, to rise again so that you and I could have life. Jesus describes this as life that is abundant in John chapter 10, verse 10, and life that is eternal in John chapter 10, verse 28.

So life is on offer. But the reality of life is this, that we are guilty. We do things that are wrong. We see things that are wrong.

We think things that are wrong. So therefore, this idea of being charged connects. And we think, well, there's much that I can be charged with. But Paul says, who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

[19 : 32] Who can do it? The answer, of course, is no one. No one can bring that charge. Why? Because Jesus has taken the charge.

Jesus has stood in our place. He has been declared guilty. Remember those two charges that he was convicted of treason and he claimed to be a king and he was accused of blasphemy because he claimed to be God.

So he was accused of the most serious of crimes and he was punished and condemned and was separated from the land of the living. So God is for us.

So this charge, charge number one, who will bring any charge? The answer is no one. The second question, who is he that condemns?

We see this in verse 30. Who is then the one who condemns verse 34? No one. 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.

[20 : 38] So you move from a charge to a condemnation. And the same problem exists because we are by nature guilty. So not only does the charge stick, but then the charge brings some form of

condemnation.

But Paul says, no, no charge will stand and no condemnation will happen. And why? Why will no condemnation? Because Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus died and he was raised.

And more than that, he is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us. You see, it's all about Jesus. If we are united to Jesus, if we are trusting in Jesus, then all that pertains to him pertains to us.

His innocence, his righteousness, his goodness, his obedience becomes our innocence, our righteousness, our justification, our obedience. And all that pertains to us goes to him.

Our guilt, our shame, our failures, all those negative things that we are inclined to believe about ourselves go to his account. He pays the price.

[21 : 50] So who will make a charge? No one. Who will condemn? No one. No charge can stand and no condemnation can stick. Jesus died.

He rose. He's seated at the right hand of God and right now he is praying for us. Sometimes we don't pray for ourselves, but he is praying for us.

And the third question that is asked is in verse 35, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? So that's the third question. The charge.

Who can charge? No one. Who will accuse you? No one. Who can condemn? No one. Who will separate? No one. And nothing. And the whole list here is just quite a remarkable list.

Because the apostle tells us, he says, shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. All these external and internal problems.

[22 : 52] All these challenges and difficulties. And he says, will they separate you? And you might be inclined to say, yes, they will. There are many hardships and many trials and many troubles and they are far greater than I am.

And they are far greater than we are. They are far more powerful and far stronger than we could possibly be. So our inclination is to agree that these enemies are many and varied.

But, if Christ has died and if Christ has risen and if he is praying, then the answer to this third question is the same as the answer to the first two questions.

No one will charge, no one will condemn, and no one and nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

The apostle Paul made up words in the Greek language to capture concepts that the language itself just couldn't capture. Now, the idea of a conqueror was an idea that the Romans had.

[24 : 02] The Latin, the Roman, and the Greek language captured this idea of one who was victorious. Alexander the Great, Augustus Caesar. These were conquerors.

But Paul says, no, no, that's an inadequate word to describe you as a Christian because you are more than a conqueror. So Jerome, one of the early translators of the Bible into Latin, he used a phrase, he said, what Paul is saying here is that we are over-overcomers.

You know, a conqueror is one who overcomes. But more than conquerors is one who over-overcomes. You see, it's difficult to express in language because it's such a big idea.

And you think of all the dangers, all the persecutions, all the difficulties, and then Paul goes on to say in verses 38 and 39, he said, let me list out some more if you want convincing here.

He said, what about death or life? What about angels or demons? What about the present or the future or any powers, height or depth or anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of Christ Jesus?

[25 : 08] So what he's saying is here's everything. You want angels and demons. You want height, you want depth. You want the present, you want the future. So he's saying, let me tell you everything.

Let me put into words all the possible challenges, all the possible difficulties, all the potential pitfalls. Let me bring before you all the enemies, real or imagined, all the dangers.

Let me bring them all together, Paul says. And let me ask this question, can any one of these or all of them together separate you, separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord?

And the answer is absolutely nothing and absolutely no one. In the ancient world, in the Roman Empire, there was what was called a Roman triumph, a great general or the emperor himself.

The Senate would pass a resolution that for a day or sometimes three days, there would be a huge procession through the city of Rome. And this procession was closely choreographed.

[26 : 15] So you would have the prisoners of war and those captured in battle, the slaves. You would have the spoils of war. You would have the conquering soldiers.

You would have the officers and the generals. And then at the end of this great triumph, this great parade, you would have the conquering general. And he would receive the acclamation of the whole city.

the triumph would wind its way through the streets of Rome so that everyone could see what a conqueror really looks like. So if you were a Roman Christian in 57 AD and Paul talked about a conqueror, you would have an image in your mind and you say, I know what that looks like. Paul says that is an inadequate image to describe yourself. Now a Christian would never naturally think of themselves as a conqueror. They would more likely think of themselves as one who is conquered, one who is vanquished, one who is not at the end of the procession receiving the honor, but one who is at the front of the procession a slave or a prisoner of war.

But the Apostle Paul says to you and to me, if you're a follower of Jesus, this is who you are. This is what God says about you. Now if you have anything else to say about you, you have to accept that if God says something and you say something else, there's somebody wrong here and God's never wrong.

[27 : 42] So if this is God's estimation of you that you are more than conquerors, we are more than conquerors, then his verdict is the correct verdict. It doesn't matter what other people say.

It doesn't matter what we think about ourselves. It doesn't matter what society, how society judges us or grades us. But if we are following Jesus, the one who died, the one who rose, the one who's seated, and the one who right now is praying, imagine that, right now he's praying for his people, all of his people.

He's praying for those who are weak that they'd be strengthened, for those who are discouraged that they'd be heartened. He's praying for those who feel like giving up to persevere. This is not about what you are doing for Jesus, but let me tell you what Jesus is doing for you, has done for you, and one day will bring into completion.

God is for us. God is with us. God is in us. Nothing and no one can stand against us. No charge can stand.

No condemnation can be made. And no separation will occur. So if you're today struggling, maybe the way of following Jesus is a tough way, carry on.

[29 : 01] Carry on because there's no better way, no better choice. Turn to him and ask for the help and strength because if he's sent his son, he will send everything. He will provide all that you need.

And if you're not yet following Jesus, these are the terms and conditions. This is what he offers. This is what he provides. This is what he promises. These are his guarantees.

Because without Jesus, every charge that is true will stand. And every true charge will ultimately bring some condemnation and ultimately separation.

So you need this Jesus to stand for you. You need this Jesus to satisfy God's righteous requirements. And you need this Jesus to stand with you, to encourage you, to strengthen you, to equip you, and to enable you to stand.

And to know that this image of a conqueror is an inadequate way to describe you and me. We are far more than a conqueror. We are far greater, far more powerful, far more secure.

[30 : 06] All those great conquerors of the past have been forgotten. All their great victories have long been forgotten. But every follower of Jesus is guaranteed a place in his kingdom, in his family, and in his house.

And I'm telling you today, not one of us will be separated from him. That's why we trust him. That's why we love him. That's why we follow him. And that's why we believe in him.

Let me give you one final illustration. One of my great heroes, I'll call him a hero, D.L. Moody, evangelist at the end of the 19th century. He said this. He said, doctrines are all right in their places. But when you put them in the place of faith or salvation, they become sin. So you see, we cherish the doctrines of justification. We cherish the doctrines of adoption or of reconciliation.

He says, if a man should ask me to his house to dinner tomorrow, the street would be a very good thing to take me to his house. But if I didn't get into the house, I wouldn't get any dinner.

[31 : 11] Now, a creed is a road or a street. It is very good as far as it goes. But if it doesn't take us to Christ, it is worthless. There is plenty of theology.

There is plenty of truths about Jesus. But if those truths and that theology and if these scriptures do not take you to him, they will be of no benefit to you.

It is not enough to know about him. It is not enough to admire him. It is not enough to gaze at a distance. But the scriptures are intended to bring you to Jesus.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe. And for those of us who have believed, the scriptures are given to strengthen us, to encourage us, and to equip us.

Because I guarantee you, this week, if you remind yourself every day, I am more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus who loved me, your life will be transformed by the grace of God, by the power of God, by the presence of God, and by the indwelling spirit of Jesus Christ.

[32 : 19] So may God bless you and may his word dwell richly in your heart. Amen.