

God For Us

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[0 : 00] Folks, it's my great pleasure to spend a few moments with you looking at this magnificent passage at the end of Romans chapter 8. You know, if you've read that letter to the Romans, you know how this sits within it.

The Apostle Paul made a long and detailed indictment of humankind. We have all sinned. We have all fallen short. He then presents the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that Jesus has done what we cannot do.

Jesus has fixed what we have broken. He has restored what we have lost. And as the Apostle Paul is bringing his argument to this crescendo, he wants to remind you and to remind us of all that he is and all that he does through Jesus and what our status and standing is in Jesus.

Theologically, I spend much of my week teaching, and theologically, there are truths that are subjective. Now, today, I'll be speaking to people who have a subjective understanding of the Bible.

You might know quite a bit. Maybe you were brought up in a Christian home. Maybe you're very familiar with the Bible. Or maybe you don't know that much. That's okay. But each one of us has a subjective knowledge.

[1 : 27] We know certain things. We don't know other things. Some of us will have a subjective understanding. There are some of us who understand more and some of us who understand less. You know, there'll be younger people listening today, and if you're 8 or 10 or 12 or 15 or 18 or whatever your age is, you're likely to know less than someone who is 20, 30, 40, 50, or 60, simply because of your age and stage.

So these are subjective things. Some people know more. Some people know less. Some people understand more. Some people understand less. But what strikes me in the Bible are the objective truths that much more frequently God reminds us of our new status, of our new standing, of our new privileges as members of his family, as members of the kingdom or as citizens of this new nation, of this new people.

And you see, objective truths are quite remarkable. Because it's not about more or less or greater or lesser, but these objective truths are true for all of God's people, no matter how much you know or understand, no matter how old or young you might be.

That, for example, when we look at this great truth of justification, when we look at this great truth called regeneration or being born again or doctrines like adoption or reconciliation, all of these are objective.

You are or you're not. You can't be a little born again. You can't be almost justified. You can't be a bit more adopted than other people.

[3 : 15] And with you today, I'd like to notice the scene or the situation that the Apostle Paul is highlighting. He has something to tell us that we would never figure out on our own.

He draws a conclusion that we ourselves, I don't think, would ever come to unless God himself told us. So we're back almost 20 centuries ago.

The year is roughly 57 AD. And using the language of the great news broadcaster from the United States, Walter Cronkite, every evening he would close his CBS Evening News with these words, and that's the way it is.

And that's the way it is. That's the news. So if we take ourselves back to 57 AD, what is the way it is? Well, if you were a Christian in 57 AD, and if you were part of the audience that Paul was writing to, well, you would be in the very heart of the Roman Empire.

You would be at the very center of the political and the military and the economic might that was Rome, the greatest empire that had ever risen until at that time.

[4 : 36] The Christian church was not numerous. It was growing, yes, but it wasn't large by comparison to the wider population. The Christian church was not powerful.

Most of the people were of a lower class economically. They were not the power brokers, but they were rather the more insignificant members of society.

Many Christians were slaves rather than free people, let alone citizens. The apostle Paul, of course, was a citizen of Rome, so he had a position of status, but that was very much the exception.

The Christian church was widespread, which was good, but the Christian church had plenty of problems. They had internal problems.

They had theological problems that Christians were confused as to what they should believe, and they had behavior problems. Christians were confused as to how they were to live.

[5 : 38] And that's the way it is, 57 AD. It's tough being a follower of Jesus. The persecution under Nero was still to come.

That was maybe five years ahead. So it's difficult being a Christian when Paul is writing, and it's going to become even more difficult. There's divisions within the church.

There are hostilities from the society, from the culture towards the church. And even as I'm describing that situation, you might be saying, well, it doesn't sound that much different, does it?

It doesn't sound that much different from our own circumstances today, that the church of Jesus does not seem to be very powerful or very numerous. The church has problems within and problems from outside.

And there's much that could cause us distress or discouragement. And maybe, maybe if you're honest, maybe you're kind of at that point where you're tempted to give up.

[6 : 42] Maybe you feel the Christian life is difficult. Or maybe you feel that you have failed to such an extent that it's almost when you wonder whether, should I even continue?

Well, if that is your circumstance, well, I'm certainly glad that you're listening today. And I hope not only that you listen to what I have to say, but much more importantly, that you have to listen to what the Apostle Paul has to say, because he has something remarkable to tell us.

As somebody who teaches, there are lots of large books on the subject of theology, very thick books, books that are an inch and a half thick, two inches thick, thousand pages, 1500 pages, books that are heavy to lift, let alone to read.

But I'd like to give you nine words, I think, that can helpfully summarize the Christian faith. The first three words are God with us.

The Lord Jesus has come down from heaven to earth, God with us, the incarnation. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

[7 : 53] What was his name? Jesus, which means the Lord saves. What was his name? Emmanuel, which means God with us. So if God is with us, the next three words, God for us.

And we see that in our text, don't we? We see that in verse 31. What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us. The Apostle Paul has a wonderful way of summarizing huge theological truths in just a few words.

And he's summarizing the work of Jesus in these three words, God for us. The cross, the death of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus, the whole life and the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus is presented to us as God is for us.

He's not against us. God is with us. He's not remote. And just to fill out the final three of those nine words, God in us.

Not only has God come down, not only has God the Son given himself as a ransom for many, but God the Holy Spirit now dwells within us.

[9 : 07] Instead of death, we experience life. Instead of being dead to God, we are made alive by the Spirit. Instead of saying yes to all that the world has to offer, the Spirit enables us to say no to that which is displeasing and enables us to say yes to that which pleases God.

So those nine words, God for us, God with us, and God in us. So I want to look at the passage before us and to really consider that great question, what shall we say in response to this?

If God is for us, who can be against us? Now, the Apostle Paul uses a lot of different illustrations. He uses language so powerfully and so persuasively.

And when he's describing the work of Jesus, he uses different imagery. Sometimes he uses the imagery of the marketplace when he speaks of ransom or redemption.

Because apart from the grace of God, we are slaves. We are slaves to sin. As Jesus himself said, if the Son sets you free, you will be free. Indeed.

[10 : 25] So there's the marketplace. There's also the language of relationships. And that's where Paul speaks of reconciliation. So Jesus brings us reconciliation with God because sin brings estrangement, separation.

There's also the language of the battlefield, language of victory and defeat. We are defeated. Jesus is victorious. And Jesus shares that victory with us.

But in this passage, as in many other parts of Paul's letter to the Romans, the scene that Paul is painting is very much a scene within the courtroom.

We're in the law court. And there are a series of questions that are being put to us with a series of answers that are being given on our behalf.

Now, if you're not familiar with procedure or criminal procedure, maybe you're not a lawyer or maybe you're not. You watch enough drama on television, you'll pick up a lot of legal process, depending on the TV shows you like to watch.

[11 : 29] But generally speaking, if you think of it this way, the process begins with some form of charge. A person is charged with a crime.

There then is a form of process where evidence is given and then a verdict is reached. If the person is acquitted, they go free. But if the person is convicted, the verdict is a verdict of condemnation.

And the condemnation is followed by some form of punishment. So you start with a charge. You then move to a verdict. And then if the person is guilty, there is a punishment.

And the Apostle Paul takes us through this process step by step. And if you look with me at verse 31, if God is for us, who can be against us?

And the Apostle Paul asks the question, and then he answers the question. 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?

[12 : 39] It's one thing to say it. It's another thing entirely to show it. God says it, and God shows it. Words and deeds.

As an aside, as a Christian, that's exactly what we are called to be. People who say it, and people who show it. There should be a consistency in our lives that we speak of God, and we speak of Jesus, and we speak of the gospel, and we show the Bible in our lives.

We show forth the gospel fruit in our lives, and we testify to the transforming power of Jesus in word and in action. And if you have that combination, watch out, because God can do wonderful things through the testimony of his people.

That he can take ordinary people, and he can transform us into extraordinary followers. Why? Because we have an extraordinary Savior called Jesus.

So God is for us. How do we know? Because he did not spare his son, but rather gave him up for us all. And Paul, at the end of verse 32, he says, How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

[14 : 01] Paul has a great skill of logic and rhetoric, and he's arguing from the greater to the lesser. You see, as human beings, we often make logical fallacies.

We argue sometimes from lesser to greater. For example, I could swim easily. Not so easily, but I could swim a couple lengths in an Olympic-sized pool.

50 meters each way. You know, I could go up and down. That's 100 meters. No problem. I could. But if I said, you know what? I can swim those 100 meters so easily. You know what?

I could swim the channel. I could swim from England to France, or I could swim from France to England. No bother. Well, that's a pretty poor argument, and that's unlikely to work, because somebody that can swim a couple lengths in a pool, well, that's fine.

But somebody that can swim the channel, that's another thing entirely. But if I just finished swimming the channel, which I haven't, and I said to you, you know what? I just swam from France to England.

[15 : 06] And you know what? I can swim two lengths in an Olympic-sized pool. I think he would accept that, if that was true. The Apostle Paul says that God has given us the best possible gift, his son.

There's nothing greater. There's nothing of more value. He has given us the best of the best. And Paul is saying that if he has given us Jesus, then he will, of course, give us all other things, because we are arguing from the greater to the lesser.

He's given us his son, so anything else that we require, he'll give graciously, wonderfully. And I want to remember I was telling you that there were three stages to a criminal proceeding.

Notice the Apostle Paul asks and answers three questions from verse 33. First question. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

Okay, we begin with the beginning of the process, a charge, an accusation. And you think, well, unfortunately, it's quite easy to bring a charge, because I've done a lot of things that are wrong.

[16 : 20] I've said a lot of things that are wrong, and even more, if I'm honest, I've left undone a lot more things that I should have done. I've left unsaid a lot of things that I should have said.

So if I'm being honest, there's plenty of charges that could be laid against me. But notice what Paul says. It is God who justifies. It's a strange answer, isn't it?

Who's going to bring a charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. That's the answer. God has now declared you and I righteous.

He's declared us righteous through the work of another. He's declared us righteous through his Son, who is righteous. He's righteous in act. He's righteous in deed. He's righteous in nature.

And he has lived that perfect life. So the charge. Well, there's no charge. Why? Because we're trusting in Jesus. His righteousness becomes my righteousness.

[17 : 21] His goodness becomes your goodness. So the first part of the procedure, the answer is there is no charge. But he proceeds in verse 34 to the second step in the process.

Who is he that condemns? Remember, the process begins with an accusation. It continues with a trial. And for those who are guilty, there is a judicial condemnation.

Paul says, who is he that condemns? Well, again, if we're being honest, we are not only charged with misbehavior. We're not only charged with transgressions and sins.

We've actually done them. We're guilty. So the answer to that would be, well, I'm charged and I'm guilty as charged. Not so, says Paul. Who is he that condemns?

Christ Jesus who died. More than that, who was raised to life is at the right hand of God. Think of that.

[18 : 23] How remarkable. Jesus Christ has died. Jesus Christ has been raised. Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God.

Therefore, there is no condemnation. There is no judicial action. Why? Because we are in Christ. He died so that we don't.

He was raised to newness of life and we share in that new life in Christ. So there's no charge. And there's no condemnation. Now remember the audience here.

This is not a powerful audience. This is not a well-educated audience. This is not, you know, these are not the people of substance in Roman culture or Roman society. These are weak and these are frightened and these are insignificant people.

And probably very much aware of their faults and failings. Paul says there's no charge. Paul says there's no condemnation.

[19 : 26] And the key, of course, is Jesus. James O. Fraser, who was a pioneer missionary to the Lisu people in China, did a study of the Book of Acts.

And you'd be well encouraged to do so as well. He looked through all the various addresses in the Book of Acts regarding the Gospel. And he noticed that in each address, the resurrection of Jesus was always mentioned.

There was never a Gospel presentation without the resurrection of Jesus. And Paul is true to form here. The resurrection is key. Jesus died and Jesus was raised.

He was raised to life. He is victorious. Victorious. Victorious over sin. Victorious over evil. Victorious over death. And what's more, notice what he's doing now.

This is what he did and look what he's doing. And he is also interceding for us. And then the final question, verse 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[20 : 28] Remember the third part of the process. If there's an accusation followed by a guilty verdict, there is some form of punishment. Some separation. That punishment might be a fine.

That means some of your money is separated from you. It might be an imprisonment. That means your liberty is taken from you. It might be, in the case of those places that have capital punishment, it might be your life that is separated from you.

And Paul says, okay, we've talked about charges. There's no charge. We've talked about condemnation. There's no condemnation. They said, well, let's look at separation. Who shall separate you?

And he then suggests, shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. These two words, trouble and hardship, probably refer to external and internal.

Things that are outside of ourselves and things that are inside of ourselves. And that really means everything. Because there are internal troubles that each one of us has.

[21 : 34] Peers, anxieties, guilt, shame, regrets, sorrow. And there are things that are outside of ourselves, like persecution or opposition or ridicule or whatever it might be.

So Paul is saying, okay, let's consider the possibility of separation. Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword. As it is written.

You see, he knows his audience. And he understands what it means to follow Jesus personally. But then he says, let me tell you what the Bible says. And what the Bible says is that we face death all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. And Paul goes on to say, no. So, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

So, Jesus, who has died. Jesus, who has risen. Jesus, who has seated at the right hand. And Jesus, who is praying for us.

[22 : 38] Maybe this morning you're saying, you know, I should pray more. My prayer life is inconsistent. I'm not particularly good at that. I would agree with you. Not that you're not particularly good at that.

I would agree with you that I should pray more. I'm not particularly good at that. But I'll tell you one thing. Jesus is good at prayer. And Jesus' prayers are consistent and persistent. So, if he is praying for me.

If he is praying for you. If he is praying for us. We've got someone on our side. Who prays and keeps on praying. The Apostle Paul uses this.

He moves us from the law courts. Remember, charge and condemnation and separation. And all of a sudden, we're on the battlefield. He's talking to us about a conqueror.

Now, in the context, in Rome, there was what was called a Roman triumph. There was a great military victory. And the Senate would pass a resolution that there would be a celebration.

[23 : 39] And there would be a huge parade that would go through the streets of Rome. It might last a day. It might last three days. And this procession, it would begin with the prisoners of war that were captured.

It would then follow with the spoils of war. The treasure that was captured in the battle. The soldiers would then follow behind the victorious soldiers.

And then the officers, those that led the men. The senators would sometimes be in the procession as well. But as this long procession went through Rome, at the end of the procession would be the conqueror himself.

It might be the conquering general. It might be the emperor. But all the eyes and all the applause and all the honor was reserved for the conquering hero.

It might take one day or three days to see the whole of the parade. But the one person that you want to see is the person that's the end of the parade, the emperor, the conqueror.

[24 : 41] And Paul says to the Roman Christians, they know what he means by conqueror. They know what he means by using this military image. They've seen it.

And Paul says, let me tell you, that description, that symbol or that illustration is inadequate to describe you.

It's an inadequate description of you, the Christian. Because you, the follower of Jesus, are more than the conqueror. You are greater than the conqueror.

You are worthy of greater honor than that conqueror. How is it possible? The only way this is possible is through him who loved us.

You see, when you experience the love of Jesus, you receive all the blessings, all the benefits, all the privileges that come to his people, that come to his family, that come to those who trust in him for themselves.

[25 : 49] I can't explain it other than to say it's true. It doesn't seem right. It doesn't seem possible. It doesn't seem feasible.

And yet, the Bible says it. So therefore, it must be true. More than conquerors. Through him who loved us.

And Paul then closes by saying, death or life, angels or demons, present or the future, nor anything, height or 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.

In the American Civil War, the United States president at the time was Abraham Lincoln. And he often received correspondence or was asked, Mr. President, is God on our side?

And one of the correspondence he responded to in a short letter, he said, sir, my greatest, my concern is not whether God is on our side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side.

[27 : 01] For God is always right. So let me ask you a question. Whose side are you on? Are you on God's side?

Are you on Jesus's side? Are you on the side of the gospel? Because if you've trusted in God, if you believed in Jesus, if you are part of this family, then all of these privileges are yours.

You are more than conquerors. You are loved. You are justified. It's Jesus who died more than that, who raised to life and is seated now praying for us, for you, for me.

So if you are a follower of Jesus, all of these privileges are yours today. It doesn't matter how you feel. It doesn't really matter what you think.

It doesn't matter what this last week has been like or what next week might be like. These are true. And the Bible is always true. But if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, let me be honest with you.

[28 : 07] The path of following Jesus is not easy. There are trials and troubles, tribulations. Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. John Newton described the Christian life.

It's not an easy life, but it's a great life. There's no better choice, no better life. So for us who are Christians, we will testify that there are discouragements. We get down.

We let ourselves down. Other people let us down. We feel that we're confused and perplexed. But the Apostle Paul is saying to this audience then and now, whoever you are, that if your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are the recipient of his love, you are the recipient of his love.

And his love is powerful. His love is persistent. And his love will hold you and keep you and bring you to be with him.

So that will there be a charge? No charge. Will there be condemnation? No condemnation. What about separation? Impossible. Impossible to separate you from Jesus.

[29 : 16] Why? Because his commitment, his love, his promise, his faithfulness is 100% guaranteed.

All the time, in all the places, to all of his people, these are unconditional guarantees. Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side.

My greatest concern is to be on God's side. The only way that you know, the only way that you can be sure, is if your faith and trust are resting in the one who died, and the one who was raised, and the one who ascended, and the one who has sat down at the right hand of the Father, the one who is praying right now for his people, he is the object of your faith.

He is the foundation of your faith. He is the beginning of your faith. He is the middle, and he is the end. Tim Keller, the minister in New York Redeemer Church, puts it this way.

He says the gospel is not the ABCs of the Christian life. The gospel is the A to Z of the Christian life. The gospel is Jesus, and Jesus is the beginning, and Jesus is the middle, and Jesus is the end.

[30 : 39] We start with him, we continue with him, and we finish with him. Or rather, he starts with us, he continues with us, and he will bring us home.

So today, you, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. It doesn't matter what other people say or think.

It doesn't even matter what you say or think. But it matters first and foremost what God says, what God thinks, and what he has to say about you.

So may God bless his word to our hearts. May he speak to the hearts of those who are not yet his own. And may he powerfully persuade and transform hearts and minds so that they come to a willing knowledge and a willing submission to his life, death, and resurrection for themselves.

May God bless you. Amen. Amen. Amen.