

Romans: The Good News of God

Five Unanswerable Questions

Romans 8:31-39

Rev. Freddy Fritz

November 9, 2008

Five Unanswerable Questions

Scripture

Today we come to my last message on Romans 8. The first verse of the greatest chapter in the Bible—Romans 8:1—says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Everything else that follows in the rest of Romans 8 tells us *why* there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There are a number of reasons why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. First, because there is *no condemnation from the law* (8:1-4); second, because *we have been delivered from the flesh* (8:5-11); third, because *we are now the children of God* (8:12-17); fourth, because we have *the hope of future glory* (8:18-25); fifth, because of *the intercession of the Holy Spirit* (8:26-27); sixth, because of *five unshakeable convictions* (8:28); and seventh, because of *five undeniable affirmations* (8:29-30).

Today, we see an eighth reason why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and it is because of *five unanswerable questions*. We see this in Romans 8:31-39:

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. ³⁵ 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. (Romans 8:31-39)

Introduction

Anyone who studies the Bible carefully knows that there are times when we come to some soaring peak of revelation and are left nearly breathless by the view. This is what happens when we come to the last great section of Romans 8. Commentators have called Romans 8:31-39 a “hymn of assurance,” “a triumph song,” and “the highest plateau in the whole of divine revelation.”

But surely these accolades are too weak. This is a mountain-top section. It is the Mount Everest of the letter and thus the highest of peaks in the Himalayan range of the Scriptures. We have made our way up the steep ascent of doctrine in the first half of this great letter. We are able to look out over the beautiful but somewhat lower vistas of the book’s second half. Yet now, for the time being, we are on the peak, and the view is glorious.

Lesson

Strictly speaking, there are seven questions in these verses, two each in verses 31 and 35, and one each in verses 32, 33, and 34.

But the first question is not really part of the set. It is a formula Paul has for moving from exposition to the conclusion of an argument. We have already seen it several times in the letter.

Paul asks in verse 31, **“What then shall we say to these things?”** In other words, “In light of what I have been teaching, what conclusions follow?”

Then follow five unanswerable questions.

The last two questions in verse 35 are actually two parts of the same question. So there are five main questions in all. These five questions concern things that might be imagined to defeat God's plan for us or to harm us. But each question is unanswerable, because there is nobody or nothing that can defeat God's plan for us.

Commentator John Stott says, "The Apostle hurls these questions out into space, as it were, defiantly, triumphantly, challenging any creature in heaven or earth or hell to answer them or to deny the truth that is contained in them. But there is no answer, for nobody and nothing can harm the redeemed people of God."

Let us see that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because of five unanswerable questions.

I. "Who Can Be Against Us?" (8:31b)

The first of five unanswerable questions is in verse 31b: **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"**

Taken by itself, the second half of this question is not at all unanswerable. **"Who can be against us?"**

Why, many people and many things can be against us! And not only *can* they be against us, they *are* against us!

The Bible says that every Christian has three great enemies: the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The world is against us because Christianity is an offense to it and is opposed to its God-rebelling ways. The world will get us to conform to it if it can; and failing that, it will try to overcome us.

Our flesh is also an enemy because it contains the seeds of sin within it; we are unable to escape its malevolent influence during our entire lives.

And, as if that were not enough, we have a powerful enemy in the devil, who is described by the apostle Peter as "a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Yes, there are plenty of enemies against us.

But what are these when combined with the verse's first half, **"If God is for us. . ."**? There's the good news of God!

In Greek there are four kinds of conditional clauses which use the word **"if."** The word **"if"** in this sentence does not imply doubt. Paul has just banished doubt in the previous verses. He has shown us how God has foreknown us by setting his love upon us, and predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of his own beloved Son. Then, he has called us, justified us, and glorified us.

In verse 31 the word **"if"** really means "since." **"Since God is for us"**—and that makes all the difference in the world!

It is as if Paul is challenging us to place all possible enemies on one side of an old-fashioned balance scale, as if we were weighing feathers. Then, when we have all the feathers assembled on the scale, he drops a brick onto the other side of the scale. That side comes crashing down, and the feathers scatter in the wind.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" Who can stand against God? The answer of course is, "No one"! Nothing and no one can defeat us if Almighty God is on our side.

II. **"How Will He Not also. . . Give Us All Things?" (8:32)**

"But," says someone, "that assumes that God does not change towards us. It is true that no one can stand against God. But what if God should grow tired of us, forget about us, or move on to something else?"

Paul deals with this speculation in verse 32, which is the second unanswerable question, asking, **"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?"**

Each of these five questions is unanswerable because each is grounded upon some undeniable truth, and the undeniable truth in this verse is that God has given us his Son.

If Paul had merely asked, "Will God give us all things?" we might hesitate, for how could we be confident he will give us all things? He has given us much, to be sure. But **all things**? Wouldn't

we be right to think that even God has limits to his grace and generosity?

That might be reasonable to think were it not for the fact that God has already given us his Son. Jesus is the greatest thing God had to give. Yet he gave him—and not merely to be with us in some mystical way. He gave him over to death so that we might be rescued from the judgment due to us for our sins.

Paul challenges us to look at the cross and reason as follows: If God did that for us, sending his own Son, Jesus, to die in our place, is there anything he can possibly be imagined to withhold?

Years ago a Bible teacher was speaking to some children. He said that he would give ten dollars to anyone who could think of a promise that God might have made to us that he has not already made. The teacher might as well have offered a billion dollars, because our text tells us that God has already guaranteed us **“all things”** since he has not withheld his Son.

Listen! This verse is a blank check for all our true needs.

For example, we need strength to overcome temptation. By ourselves, we cannot resist temptation to sin. Will God give us the strength we need to overcome temptation? Of course he will. Paul says, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Further, all of us need a friend to be with us through life’s dark places, so that we will not lose hope. Will God be a friend to us? Absolutely. Jesus said, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends. . .” (John 15:15). “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Do we need direction for how we are to live and please God? God himself will provide that direction. God says, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go” (Psalm 32:8a).

Do we need comfort when we have lost a loved one? God is the only sure source of comfort. Jesus promised, “And I will ask

the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” (John 14:16).

Will God be with us in death’s dark hour? Of course he will. He will sustain us in death and bring us joyfully into his glorious presence in the end. The Bible says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15).

And in case somehow we think that some important need of ours has been overlooked, we remember Paul’s words to the Philippians, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Clearly, if God gave us Jesus, the greatest of all possible gifts, he can be counted on to give us all the lesser gifts as well.

As John Stott says, “The cross proves [God’s] generosity.”

III. “Who Shall Bring Any Charge?” (8:33)

The third unanswerable question moves into the legal area, as if we were now in a court of law, asking whether someone might exist somewhere to accuse us and thus bring us into final spiritual condemnation before God. The question is in verse 33, “**Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?**”

Who could do that, Paul asks, since “**it is God who justifies**”?

Do you remember that great scene in the prophet Zechariah in which the high priest of that day, whose name was Joshua, was standing in the temple, no doubt preparing to present the people’s sacrifice, and Satan was also there accusing him? Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes, symbolizing his sin. The devil was arguing that Joshua was unfit for his office, because he was a sinner.

But God was also there, and he rebuked Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” (Zechariah 3:2).

Then we are told how Joshua’s filthy clothes were removed and how he was clothed with rich garments and a clean turban, symbols of his justification through the work of Jesus Christ.

Who could accuse him now? The answer is clear: no one, no one at all. Why? Because God had justified him.

This is the picture Paul's question brings to mind.

There are many who bring charges against us—the world, the flesh, and the devil. But, if we are **God's elect**, the apostle Paul states emphatically, **"It is God who justifies."** Indeed, God *has* justified us (see vs. 30).

Who could possibly secure our condemnation when the highest Judge of all—God—has already acquitted us?

IV. **"Who Is to Condemn?" (8:34)**

The fourth unanswerable question is so closely related to the third question that some have considered it to be asking the same thing. Yet there is a difference.

Paul had earlier asked whether the good purposes of God toward us could change, concluding that they could not, since God has already given us Jesus, the greatest of all gifts (8:32).

Now Paul goes a step further, asking whether the attitude of *Jesus* could change. Verse 34 asks the question: **"Who is to condemn?"**

Paul answers, **"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."**

The Bible teaches this truth in a striking image, using the word *paraclete* (or lawyer) for both the Holy Spirit and for Jesus.

A *paraclete* is "one called alongside another to help," which is also the exact meaning of the word *advocate*, the only difference being that one is derived from Greek and the other from Latin.

Jesus used this word of the Holy Spirit when he told the disciples that he was going to send the Holy Spirit to be their Helper (John 16:5-15). And John used the word to speak of Jesus, saying that in him we have an "advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1).

This is a picture of a divine law firm with two branches, a heavenly office and an earthly office. On earth the Holy Spirit

pleads for us, interpreting our petitions correctly to the Father. And in heaven Jesus pleads the efficacy of his shed blood to show that we are saved persons and that nothing can now rise up to cause our condemnation by the Father.

V. “Who Shall Separate Us from. . . Christ?” (8:35-39)

The final, all-embracing, and climactic unanswerable question is in verse 35: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”**

The answer carries us to the chapter’s end.

With this fifth and final question, Paul himself does what we have been doing with his other four questions. He looks around for a possible answer.

He brings forward all the enemies he can think of, which might **separate us from the love of Christ**.

We may have to endure **“tribulation, or distress, or persecution”**—that is, the pressures of an ungodly world.

We may have to undergo **“famine or nakedness”**—that is, the lack of adequate food and clothing, which, since Jesus promised them to the heavenly Father’s children, might seem to be evidence that God does not really care.

We may even have to experience **“danger or sword”**—that is, the danger of death and actual death, and even martyrdom, the ultimate test of our faith.

These are real tests. Scripture warns us in Psalm 44:22 that God’s people are for his sake facing **“being killed all the day long.”** That is, we are continuously being exposed to the risk of death, like sheep for the slaughter.

These are enemies indeed. These are real sufferings, painful and perilous, and hard to bear. But can they **separate us from the love of Christ**? No!

Far from separating us from the love of Christ, **“in all these things”**—in these very sufferings, in the experience and endurance of them—**“we are more than conquerors.”**

Nothing, beloved, can separate us from the love of Christ!

Conclusion

So, “What then shall we say to these things?” (8:31a).

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” (8:31b). No one!

“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). He gave us Jesus; and he will also give us all that we need.

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” (8:33a). No one! Why? Because “it is God who justifies” (8:33b).

“Who is to condemn?” (8:34a). No one! Moreover, “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” (8:34b).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (8:35). No! No! No! A thousand times no! “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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” (8:37-39).

Let me ask you, “What then do *you* say to these things?” What is *your* response?

One possibility is that you may be utterly indifferent to the question and to the doctrines of God’s grace that lie behind it. That is, you couldn’t care less about the answer, because you think the whole thing is utter foolishness.

Or you may respond with hostility. You think that it is arrogant to believe that God has shown special favor to some people. You don’t believe that God acts in such a wonderful way.

Or you may respond with great joy. You believe that there is now no condemnation for you because you are in Christ Jesus. And as you hear all that God has done for you in Christ, your heart

swells with overflowing joy.

You believe that God's love is indeed a great love. You believe that his love for you is the very foundation of your salvation. You know that the reason you love God is because he first loved you. You know that he demonstrated his love by sending his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to live and to die for you.

You believe that the love of God in Christ is the greatest reality in the universe. It is the strongest, most steady, firm, unbending, solid, substantial, constant, uniform, dependable truth of all.

So I ask, "What do you say in response to these five unanswerable questions?"

Do they strike a positive note in you? Do you find yourself rejoicing? Do you find yourself saying, "Yes! This is true!"

If so, it is proof that God has been at work in your life, bringing you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

But if this teaching does not seem appealing to you—if it does not seem true or if you regard it with indifference—I warn you that you are not a Christian, that you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ in a saving way. Therefore, I present him to you as Savior. I urge you to repent of your sin and turn to him in faith.

It is this very gospel, the good news of the fixed love of God in Jesus Christ, that is commended to you. As Paul wrote earlier in the letter, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

"What then do you say to these things?"

May God give you grace to respond to this message with great joy by believing the truth about the good news of God. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAAYER:

Taken from Ray Ortlund's *A Passion for God*:

Almighty God and merciful Father, infinite in grace and sovereign in majesty, that you would trouble yourself to provide so fully for us, to ensure that our joy in Christ would not, could not, be jeopardized by anything at all, however evil or bizarre, that you would care that much to design our salvation so securely and infallibly, that you would pay so much in the Son to get so little in us, and that you would not only do so but also *tell* us that you have done so, enabling us to enjoy the security of your unchanging love—we bow low before you in wonder. It is all by your grace and all to your glory. We worship you now, blessed God. We will worship you forever.

And for all of this we give you thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.