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An Anatomy of Salvation, Part 5

We have come to Paul's last installment in Romans 8, the "therefore" of his teaching.

Romans 8:31, "**What shall we then say to these things?** If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Based upon what Paul has just said in this chapter and the entire book

- What effect does this have on the here and now?
- What application does this have for those living in a state of sin and grief?
- What are the by-products of the gospel?

These are great questions. As you know, Romans 8 is the climax of this epistle in which Paul details the glorious benefits which flow from Christ.

- No Condemnation, 8:1-4a.
- Fellowship With God, 8:4b-8.
- A Transformed Life, 8:9-11.
- A New Priority, 8:12-13.
- Sonship, 8:14-17.
- The Promise of Glory, 8:18-25.
- Help in Our Weakness, 8:26-27.

- Assurance, 8:28-30.

Now to show that these benefits rest with all God's children at all times, Paul transitioned into a discussion on the anatomy of salvation in Romans 8:28-30. With verse 31 we see that Paul wrapping up his discussion with a very important question: How does knowledge of the anatomy of my salvation related to the certainty of the benefits outlined in this chapter?

Triumph Over Opposition

It is to that question that Paul turns his focus. We have been examining the first four applications that Paul gives to the anatomy of salvation: namely that the Christian now triumphs over physical opposition.

Romans 8:31, "What shall we then say to these things? **If God be for us, who can be against us?**"

The word if, could be rendered because thus giving us this reading: "Because God is for us, or on our side, who is against us?"

While the implication of this phrase is "No one!" that doesn't mean that the child of God doesn't have opponents. Scripture is replete with examples of God's children being opposed by great foes who would seek their ruin. Chief of all would be Satan and his host.

1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

This is why Paul gives us this exhortation:

Ephesians 6:11-12, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The point of all this is that Satan is out to destroy us!

Another enemy that we have is the non-Christian world.

Matthew 18:7, "Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

Peter further exhorts us:

1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."

The world as the expression of Satan's rule is out to destroy us!

The we have the false-believers in the church.

Romans 16:17-18, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."

Speaking about these false believers, Paul writes:

2 Timothy 3:6-8, "For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith."

Even the church contains those who would seek to destroy us! In fact, a survey of church history reveals that some of the most heinous persecution against God's children has been done in the name of the God!

Indeed, opposition in this world is real and to be expected. In fact, to the child of God who longs to live godly in this age, we read this promise:

2 Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Opposition is alive and well- expect it! Yet, as we look at our God and His intentions regarding us, all that might oppose us in this life quickly fade in significance! After all brothers and sisters, what are false-teachers, non-Christians, nations, or even Satan? Compared to the power and glory of our God?

The First Martyr

Stephen was the first martyr in the New Testament church. He was a Hellenistic Jew who was called as one of the first deacons of the apostolic church.¹ Now, Stephen was arrested for preaching Christ. At his trial, Stephen gave a stirring defense as he cataloged the history of the rebellion of God's people. And then, in his concluding words we read this:

Acts 7:51-53, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

Now brothers and sisters, this was no small thing that Stephen did. In Acts 7, Stephen is standing before some of the most powerful men in Palestine: The Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin consisted of the High Priest, chief priests, scribes and elders numbering seventy in all.

Manned by the leaders of the parties of the Sadducees and Pharisees, the Sanhedrin held enormous power. And so, standing in the center of this august assembly, Stephen boldly proclaimed the truth of God's word with little thought of the consequences. Why?

Acts 7:54-56, "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on

¹ Compare Acts 6

him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

While Stephen stood before some of the most powerful men in his day, their grandeur was overshadowed on account of the One before whom he really stood: The King of kings and Lord of Lords! And thus, though opposed by such a powerful and intimidating group, Stephen essentially could say, “If God is for me, who can be against me!”

Now brothers and sisters, so often in our reading of the account of Stephen we are quick to point out the fact that while what he did take courage, he also beheld the glory of God, something we never will behold in this life, or will we?

The point of our passage, is that through the gospel we see the glory of God just as Stephen did! Paul has just spent eight chapters detailing the saving work of Christ with as much confidence and boldness as Stephen did. And it is Paul who writes, “If God is for us, because He is on our side, who is against us?”²

In essence, Paul says, “When we consider the gospel- the good news of our salvation in Christ, the God of the Gospel before whom

- The nations are a drop in a bucket.
- The angels in heaven incessantly worship in fear and dread.

all opposition pales in comparison!” “We have no opposition on earth!”

Our Triumph

Now, these are bold words. On what basis does Paul make this assertion?

Romans 8:32, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

There is no greater proof of God's commitment to us than the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Yet, to understand the significance of this sacrifice, turn with me to Genesis 22.

Genesis 22:1, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

That God called Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, the offering of dedication in the Old Testament, and that God did this to test Abraham leads us to the conclusion that this trial was to determine Abraham's devotion to God. The main question posed to Abraham was this:

Who is more important Abraham God?” Or your Son?”

Well, most of you know the story. Abraham, Isaac, and two servants travelled three days to Moriah.

² Compare also Psalm 23:4, 56:9; 11; 118:6-7

There Abraham and Isaac ascended the mountains by themselves. When the time came for the sacrifice Abraham bound Isaac and lifted his knife. And yet, at the last moment, he was stopped by God. The test was over. God in turn provided another lamb! Now, the passage I want you to notice is Genesis 22:16-17.

Genesis 22:16-17, "And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for **because thou hast done this thing**, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: **That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed** as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies."

What does this account have to do with our passage and God's commitment to us in Christ at the cross?

Just this, the word used in Genesis 22:16 for "withheld" is the SAME WORD used in our text: "He who did not *spare* (or withhold) His own Son."

On account of the parallels in these texts, most commentators believe that Paul is alluding to Genesis 22 but here with a twist. Unlike the account with Abraham in which God provided another lamb, at the cross, there was no "other lamb" that could take the place of the Lamb of God. And thus, the offering up of Abraham's only son as a statement of his devotion and commitment to God was but a type of a greater sacrifice; the sacrifice of God's Son in which God testified to His unlimited devotion and commitment to us! Murray put it this way:

"Sparing refers to suffering inflicted. Parents spare their children when they do not inflict the full measure of chastisement due. Judges spare criminals when they do not pronounce a sentence commensurate with the crime committed. By way of contrast, this is not what God the Father did. He did not withhold or lighten one whit of the full toll of judgment executed upon his own well-beloved and only-begotten son."³

Listen, if God is so committed to us that He is willing to sacrifice His very own Son, holding back nothing when it came to His bearing our sin in His body "how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

The "gift" given here is a reference to all the benefits we have in and with Christ, chief of which is our glorification.⁴ Now, let us not miss the significance of the comparison in this verse. Would God do less for believers after they are saved than He did for them prior to salvation? If the greatest sacrifice and statement of God's commitment to us was the sacrifice of His Son, then doesn't it follow that God will fulfill the lesser and protect His blood-bought children such that they receive all He intended in Christ? Will God do less for us now that we are His children than He did for us when we were His enemies?

The answer is, "NO!" In Christ, the promises of God are "Amen" to the believer!⁵ (2 Cor. 1:20)! Murray put it this way:

"The greatest gift of the Father, the most precious donation given to us, was not things. It was not calling, nor justification, nor even glorification... these are favours dispensed in the fulfilment of God's gracious design. But the unspeakable and incomparable gift is the giving up of his own Son. So great is that gift, so marvelous are its implications, so far-reaching its

³ John Murray, Commentary on Romans, page 323

⁴ Compare Romans 8:30 and Ephesians 1:3

⁵ Compare 2 Corinthians 1:20

consequences that all graces of lesser proportion are certain of free bestowment.”⁶

As we stand before the Cross of Christ, like Stephen, we gaze upon the magnificence of God as He commits Himself to our salvation. This is a magnificence before which our greatest foes pale and fade away! Indeed where are the

- False-teachers?
- Non-Christians?
- Nations?
- Satan?

Compared to the power and glory of our God that has been committed to our well-being at the cross?

The gospel is God's commitment to us to conform us to the image of His Son unto the glory of Christ. Now flowing from this, as a byproduct, is God's commitment to

- Protect.
- Guide.
- Govern us.

such that we ultimately shall triumph over all physical opposition and participate in the fullness of our salvation. Brothers and sisters, what is it that threatens your well-being? What is occurring in your life from which you are tempted to shrink back? What are the things that worry you most? What are the things that keep you awake at night? What are the things that drain you of your strength?

John Bunyan captures one such worry when he writes of Christian's anxiety over death.

“Now I further saw, that between them (Christian and Hope) and the Gate (which is salvation future) was a River (which represents death), but there was no bridge to go over, and the river was very deep. At the sight therefore of this River, the Pilgrims were much astounded, but the men that went with them, said, 'You must go through, or you cannot come at the Gate.'”

“The Pilgrims then began to enquire if there was no other Way to the Gate; to which they answered, 'Yes, but there has not any except two (Enoch and Elijah) that have been permitted to tread that path since the foundation of the World, nor shall until the last Trumpet shall sound.' The Pilgrims (especially Christian) began to despond in his mind, and looked this way and that, but no way could be found by them, by which they might escape the River.”⁷

How does a gospel that is concerned with salvation and the glory of Christ address

- Death?
- Persecution?
- Trial?
- Opposition?
- Lost jobs?
- Uncertain futures?

⁶ Murray, page 326

⁷ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, page 181

- Or any difficulty we might face as God's children?

By sending His Son to overcome the *greatest obstacle* facing His children- sin and Satan God rendered *all opposition* impotent, impotent in its ability to

- Thwart God's plan for our lives.
- Keep the child of God from any of God's good gifts.
- The blessings promised.
- The inheritance granted.
- The life that has been pledged.

Listen to the promise God gave His people in Isaiah 43.

Isaiah 43:1-3, "But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee."

Isaiah 43:4-5, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west."

This doesn't mean that we shall not be touched by trial or difficulty. Indeed the

- The flame of persecution is still there.
- The poison of sin is still active.
- The threat of Satan still heard.

Rather, it means that none can destroy us or rob us of one benefit promised in Christ! John Nisbet, the great, great grandson of John Wycliffe, shortly before his martyrdom in 1685 reflected this confidence when he wrote what would be his last words

"Be not afraid at His sweet, lovely and desireable cross, for although I have not been able because of my wounds to lift up or lay down my head but as I was helped, yet I was never in better case all my life... He has so wonderfully shined on me with the sense of His redeeming, strengthening, assisting, supporting, through-bearing, pardoning and reconciling love, grace and mercy, that my soul doth long to be freed of bodily infirmities and earthly organs, so that I may flee to His Royal Palace, even the Heavenly Habitation of my God, where I am sure of a crown put on my head and a palm put in my hand and a new song in my mouth, even the song of Moses and of the Lamb, so that I may bless, praise, magnify and extol Him for what He hath done to me and for me. Wherefore I bid farewell to all my dear fellow-sufferers for the testimony of Jesus... Farewell, my children... Farewell, sweet Bible, and wanderings and contendings for truth. Welcome, death. Welcome, the City of my God where I shall see Him and be enabled to serve Him eternally with full freedom. Welcome, blessed company, the angels and spirits of just men made perfect. But above all, welcome, welcome, welcome, our glorious and alone God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Into Thy hands I commit my spirit, for Thou art

worthy. Amen.”⁸

Child of God, it is because of the Gospel that we can have such hope in any trial or opposition.

Romans 8:31b: “...If God is for us, who is against us?”

In light of this truth, let us

- Renew our faith!
- Become convinced of His calling and choice of us!
- Let us live in light of the Gospel- the good news- that God has conquered all His and our enemies!

And if you do not know Christ this day, if

- You do not have a personal relationship with Him.
- Your sins have not been washed away by His blood.

Then far from the assurance that you will triumph over physical opposition, it truly is just a matter of time until

- You are ensnared by the Devil.
- You are taken captive by some sin.
- Your life drips away in the face of some trial.

Come to Christ this day! Receive His forgiveness. Live for His glory. And the byproduct of God's preserving care will be yours!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 30, 2008. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.

⁸ Taken from Ray Ortlund, Jr.'s *A Passion for God*, page 122. During his capture, he sustained an attack in which he received seven severe wounds- so much so he found it hard to function. Yet they kept him alive that he might be tried and condemned. And so he was. On Dec. 4, 1685 John Nisbet was hanged. The following are the last words he wrote.