

## Romans 8:28-39

### God's Loyalty and Allegiance to His People

*If God be for us, who can be against us? – v. 31*

I never realized until preparing for this message just how extensive a use Paul makes of asking questions in this epistle to the Romans. The thing I did that made me realize this was to do a word search in which the only thing I entered into the little search window from the search dialogue box was a question mark. Basically I wanted to know how many question marks there are in this epistle to the Romans. There are 88 question marks in the AV of Romans.

You find questions in nearly every chapter. Of the 16 chapters in this epistle Paul asks questions in 11 of those 16 chapters. You might, I suppose, say that there's a sense in which time in Romans amounts to Q and A time with the Apostle Paul. He's obviously not able to take questions from his reading audience but what he does to a very large degree is to anticipate the questions that would be asked and that should be asked were this a Q and A time. Let me give you a very brief sampling:

The very first question is found in 2:3 *And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?*

2:23 *Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?*

6:1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*

I never realized just how common this type of question was that we just read in 6:1. Notice again the beginning part of the question: *What shall we say then?* Now compare that to 6:15 *What then?*; or 7:7 *What shall we say then?*; 8:31 *What shall we then say to these things?*; 9:14 *What shall we say then?*

This method of Paul's teaches us something, doesn't it, about the reading of our Bibles and especially the reading of this epistle to the Romans. Do you see how Paul makes this epistle something to be interacted with by the reader. You're suppose to think. You're suppose to contemplate these various things. You're suppose to respond to the various gospel truths that Paul sets forth.

You could, I suppose, draw an analogy between these questions of Paul in Romans with all of those "Selahs" in the Psalms. The "Selahs" in the Psalms are generally thought to be pauses. They might be more musical notations than anything else but the application that's drawn from them is usually to call on the reader to pause and consider. Isn't that a variation of what Paul is doing in Romans? Maybe when you read the word *Selah* in the Psalms you should pause and say to yourself *what shall I say then to these things?*

Now this morning I want to draw your attention to one of the 88 questions that are raised in this epistle. And my focus is not really going to be on the question itself so much as it's going to be on the premise to the question. The question is found in v. 31. Look at what it

says. *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?* There are two questions in the verse: *What shall we then say to these things?* That's the first question. The second question is *who can be against us?* The premise to this second question is found in the words: *If God be for us.* The point that Paul has been making and will make in the ensuing verses is that God is indeed for us. And since that's the case the question arises *who can be against us? If God be for us, who can be against us?*

*If God be for us* - This is an affirmation that needs to be made again and again throughout the course of the Christian's life. The Christian, in other words, finds himself in constant need of being reminded or being assured that God is for him. The whole issue in our warfare, you see, is whether or not that statement is true. The devil doesn't want you to believe that. And there's much within you that could lead you to doubt it. It's worth remembering here how chapter 8 in Romans follows chp. 7.

Chapter 7 ends with that internal wrestling match being fought in Paul's mind. *I see another law in my members*, he writes in 7:23 *warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.* This internal battle of the mind is what leads Paul to exclaim near the end of chp. 7 *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (There's another question by the way) and in a sense you could say that chp. 8 serves the purpose of answering that question.

And the first part of that answer is found in 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.* And we could certainly say that it's in that same connection that the affirmation of v. 31 takes place which is that God is for us. And if God be for us who can be against us? I want to take a closer look at this affirmation today of God being for us. Basically what we find in this affirmation of v. 31 is a statement of God's love and loyalty to His people. I want you to bask in that love and loyalty this morning. I want you to understand it. I want you to be so moved by it that you find yourself compelled to say *What can I say then to these things and to this thing in particular that God is for me?*

## If God Be For Us? – An Affirmation of God's Love and Loyalty

Let's think first of all on:

### I. The Marvel of Such a Statement

God is for me – God is for you – God is for us. Can that really be true? If I might borrow a statement from Nicodemus in John's gospel – *How can these things be?* (Jn. 3:9). The marvel of such a statement becomes all the more magnified when you reflect back to the beginning of Romans. What does Paul seek to accomplish in the first two and half chapters of this epistle?

He seeks to bring the whole world into the court room of God in order to establish the guilt of all mankind. He begins with the Gentiles – those who never had the benefit of God's word and who never heard the gospel. What about them? This the question that

perplexes so many gospel deniers and scoffers today. Is it fair for God to condemn a man who has never heard the gospel? Is it fair for God to judge a man by a standard that the man has never even heard? And the answer is pretty simple. God will not judge any man by a standard that the man has never heard. God will not judge the heathen from some remote jungles that's practically unknown to the rest of civilization by something they haven't heard. Does this mean, then, that those inhabitants of those remote jungles won't be condemned?

Oh, they'll be condemned for sure. They won't be judged by a gospel they've never heard but they will be condemned. That's the first point that Paul makes when he labors to establish the guilt of all mankind. 1:18-20: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

They don't know enough to save them but they do know enough to condemn themselves. They have broken even the most basic law that is stamped on their hearts. They know God's eternal power and Godhead or deity. They know in the depth of their hearts that God is their Creator and they know that since God is their Creator they're accountable to Him. So the Gentiles are guilty before God.

The Jews, of course, would have no problem affirming that so Paul goes on in chp. 2 to show that the Jews too fall under the same condemnation. This is what leads to the very first of those 88 questions back in 2:3 *And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?* This is a statement that is aimed at the Jews in particular. So the thing that Paul labors to establish is the truth that all the world is guilty before God. Listen to his conclusion of this first section in Romans. It begins in v 19 and carries through to v. 29:

*Rom 3:9-19 What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; (10) As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (11) There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. (12) They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (13) Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: (14) Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: (15) Their feet are swift to shed blood: (16) Destruction and misery are in their ways: (17) And the way of peace have they not known: (18) There is no fear of God before their eyes. (19) Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

This includes you, it includes me, it includes all men. Take the man in his Sunday best apparel, stand him next to the man from the gutter in his tattered rags – they both have

more in common than you might think. They both have sinned. They both are guilty and condemned. Both of their righteousnesses amount to filthy rags. I won't take the time to analyze the verses we just read in any great detail but the next time you look at those verses you can conduct your own analysis. And note how the whole man is covered in the scope of those verses – his mind, his desires, his words, his deeds, his heart. This is the meaning of the phrase *total depravity*.

Some have mistakenly thought that the meaning of total depravity is that sinful man is as wicked as he possibly can be. That's not the meaning of the phrase. The term *total* refers to the *total man*. Every part of man was effected by the fall. And the only thing that keeps him from being as wicked as he possibly can is not that his sinfulness is offset or balanced by some kind of inherent goodness. No – the thing that keeps him from reaching the full potential of his wickedness is the restraining grace of God.

And the longer a people or a nation go on in sin and rebellion against God the more the restraining hand of God is lifted and men are given over to their depraved affections and reprobate minds. So this is our heritage and our nature and yet Paul could still make the statement in 8:31 that God is for us. How can God be for anyone that falls under the description of being totally depraved? How can God possibly be for anyone who falls under the verdict of being guilty?

You begin to appreciate, I hope, that our text is indeed a marvelous text. It's a text that should move us to marvel. And let me say again what I said in my introduction that this is where the battle lines are drawn in the Christian's life. The question I just asked will be the very thing the devil will whisper in your ear. How could God possibly be for you? Look at how many times you fail. Look at how many times you transgress. Even at your best you come short of God's glory and yet you have the nerve to harbor the notion that God is for you? Do you think God is like you? Do you think God is complicit in your crimes? Do you think God is as indifferent to your sins as you are? The nerve of thinking that God is for you!

What shall we say, then, to these things? I think we know what the devil would say. He would say such a notion is preposterous that you could be in the realm of God's favor. And we ourselves would respond by saying that they're not preposterous but they certainly are marvelous. And if we are going to lay hold to such a claim and own the claim without being some kind of self-righteous, self-deceived hypocrite, then we really better have a firm grasp of the basis for it. And this leads to the next point of my analysis. We've seen the marvel of the statement that God is for us. Let's consider next:

## II. The Assurance of the Statement that God is For Us

When you look at v. 31 and the verses that follow you find what is perhaps the most concentrated section of these rhetorical questions that is asked by Paul. Look at them with me beginning in v. 31:

In v. 31 the question is: *Who can be against us?* If God is for us who can be against us? Paul is certainly not meaning to suggest the child of God has no enemies. Certainly he does but what he's really asking here amounts to this – what do those enemies really amount to if God is on your side? They might seem in this world to be powerful and frightening but we see beyond this world. In terms of eternity your time in this world is but a tiny blip on the radar screen. That's why Jesus said in Mt. 10:28 *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

And then beginning in v. 32 we see the groundwork being laid as to why God is for us. The first and perhaps most important foundation stone for that assurance that God is for us is found in the words: *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.* There's the basis for your assurance that God is for you. He spared not His Son. He went through with condemning His Son. He forsook His Son. He judged His Son. He unleashed His wrath upon His Son. His Son became the propitiation or the "wrath-bearer" for our sins.

And what this means is that God has already given His all for us. In giving or delivering up Christ for us He gave us the greatest blessing He possibly could. This is why this statement is followed with that question *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 isn't anything in this world that you could ask God for that could possibly be greater than what God has already given you. Isn't that a pretty strong basis for assurance that God is for you?

Next question – v. 33: *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?* There's plenty of answers to this question in terms of those that may try to lay things to the charge of God's elect. The devil, after all, is termed the accuser of God's people and his practice of accusing has been a day and night activity. Listen to the words of Rev. 12:10 *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. Aren't you glad this proclamation has come from heaven – and that it's come with a loud voice? In the light of this proclamation we might repeat Paul's question *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?**

There are those in this world, as well, that will seek to lay many charges to God's elect. They charge us with being hypocrites? They charge us with being superstitious. They charge us with believing nonsense. They charge us with the crimes of church history without bothering to distinguish between true Christianity and false Christianity. If the crime any association with any form of Christianity then the charge is laid to all the people of God. Just this past week I was reading a blog comment from a scoffer who accused Christians of picking and choosing what they believe and follow in the Bible.

So the answer to this question of *who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect* is that plenty of the Christian's spiritual enemies will try but notice Paul's response to the

question: *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.* The One who has the power not only to kill but to cast into hell has already rendered His verdict for the followers of Christ – they're justified. In spite of their sin, they're justified. Based on the perfect life and atoning death of Christ they're justified. They're justified because Christ is justified.

Paul covers this matter both positively and negatively by the use of his questions. *It is God that justifieth* he writes in v. 33 so now in v. 34 *Who is he that condemneth?* What does such a sentence amount to coming from men or demons if the highest court beyond which there is no higher appeal has declared the follower of Christ to be justified? This question in v. 34 is followed with the basis for God being for us. And in what follows the question of who condemns in v. 34 you find what is perhaps the most concise and yet comprehensive statement that spans 4 very important headings of what Christ has done.

Look at them in v. 34: *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* Do you see the 4-fold basis of assurance in this verse as to why God is for you? That 4-fold basis is as follows: The death of Christ; The resurrection of Christ; The ascension of Christ to the right hand of God; And the intercession of Christ. He died, He rose, He ascended into heaven, He intercedes for His people and pleads the merit of His life and death before His Father for every covenant blessing to be applied to His blood-bought people.

Isn't that a pretty good indicator that God must be for you? Could a firmer foundation for assurance possibly be laid? But alas – these things are all in the spiritual realm. We read about Christ's death historically but we don't see Him today. We affirm that He's risen and that He's ascended into heaven and that He's seated at the right hand of God but aren't there times when these invisible truths seem so distant from present reality? They certainly seem that way when and if we walk by sight instead of walking by faith.

The truth, however, stands. Christ really did die and rose and ascended into heaven – whether you see it or not, whether you believe in it or not, it is true. It's not something you make true by believing in it – no it is in fact true no matter what circumstances seem to tell you. But what about those circumstances? This leads to my final point of analysis now in God being for us. We've seen the marvel of the statement and I hope you understand a little more about the basis for the statement. Let's consider finally:

### III. The Ramification of the Statement

If God is for you and the evidence of His loyalty and allegiance is certified by the death and resurrection and ascension and intercession of Christ then what does that lead to? It leads us to Paul's next question found in v. 35. This is the final question of the chapter. It begins as a general question which is then broken down into a number of specific questions. Look at what it says: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

Now we're getting to where the rubber meets the road. For these were the very things the Christians at Rome were knowing. And these are the very things that Christians throughout history right up to the present hour know. I dare say that to some degree you know the reality of trials and distress and some form of want and some form perhaps even of persecution. It's what we've seen and it is what we do see on the horizon. Should we count it as strange? I don't see why since it's something that Christ Himself promised when He said in Jn. 16:33 *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

But what does it mean? Does it mean God is angry with us? Do these things or should these things rob us of the assurance that God is for us? And the answer here might be the same answer that Paul provides for another question earlier in this epistle when he says *God forbid.* And then Paul goes on to explain why these things come our way. Look at what he says in v. 36. *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

I'm reminded of the exchange between Christ and His disciples in Jn. 9:1-3 *And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. (2) And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? (3) Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*

That's why you are killed all the day long – that the works of God should be made manifest in you. And the way those works are made manifest is given to us in v. 37 *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* Do you see what conformity to Christ looks like here? Christ said that He has overcome the world. He more than any of us here knows the reality of tribulation and distress and persecution and famine, nakedness, peril and sword – and He overcame. And now it's our task in being conformed to His image to be overcomers ourselves.

On the surface of it that might seem to make Christianity hard. And it's good that we know and affirm that there's a sense in which Christianity is hard. It was never meant to be the kind of religion that simply caters to our affluence and ease and makes us comfortable in this present evil world where we still struggle, like Paul, in the matter of doing the things we shouldn't do and failing to do the things that we should. How can we possibly rise to such a standard?

Your success in rising to such a standard will depend entirely on what you're persuaded of. Paul is certainly a model overcomer. Look at what he was persuaded of in Rom 8:38-39 *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

If you know and are convinced of the basis of God's love for you then you will be an overcomer. If you're able to perceive that the reality of God's love is not to be measured in

present circumstances but rather in what Christ has done and is doing and will yet do then you'll be able to say to the world *throw your worst at me. Bring it on.* I know that God is for me – who can be against me? He spared not His own Son for me. He delivered Him up for me. Who's going to lay anything to my charge when my God has already justified me? And if Christ did really come and die and rise again and ascend into heaven where He makes intercession for me then what's going to separate me from His love? God has already demonstrated His love for me by giving me something more valuable than all the treasures and trinkets of this world. He gave me His Son. How shall He not then freely give me all that I need to glorify and enjoy Him?

And so I wonder this morning – Is God for you? You really don't want Him to be against you. Better by far that the combined forces of earth and hell be against you than that God be against you. Is He for you? If you're a believer and follower of His Son then there's no other conclusion you can come to. He must be for you. Look at all He's given you already. I hope you're persuaded of His love. I hope you're able by the grace of God to bask and glory in the blessed truth of His love and loyalty to you. He's certainly gone to great depths to make you realize it. May the Lord Himself stamp the truth of such love and loyalty on your heart this morning that you may, in turn be persuaded and in that persuasion be more than a conqueror through Him that loved you.