

## F. Hope by Virtue of Divine Faithfulness (8:31-39)

Since his opening proclamation in verse 5:1, Paul has been progressively building his argument for the fullness and firmness of the believer's hope in view of his participation in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the previous three verses he brought that argumentation to a pinnacle by showing how Christian hope stands, not on the believer himself or anything he does, but on the eternal purpose and sovereign accomplishment of the triune God. The Christian's salvation and its security find their origination in the eternal love of God for him, and Paul showed how that love has expressed itself first in the Father's election and predestination, and then in the sovereign outworking of calling, justification, and glorification. In this way Paul explicitly extended God's love, its activity, and its effectual accomplishment from eternity past to eternity future. Three crucial implications arise from this reality:

- The first is that the believer must discern and live his life in accordance with the truth that God's love for him underlies and empowers every aspect of His intention toward and interaction with him. Above all else, God is a loving *Father* to those who share in Christ's redemption. Thus it has been rightly observed that the failure to embrace as a first principle the fatherhood of God is ultimately the failure to grasp biblical Christianity.
- The second implication is that, since God's love for His children originates from His own nature and eternal purpose, it is absolutely immutable. Neither time nor circumstance can influence, diminish, or destroy it. Nothing the believer does or doesn't think, say, or do can affect God's love for him in any way or to any extent. The divine love has its source, substance, power, and effect entirely in God Himself.
- Given the immutable and all-encompassing nature of God's love, the Christian must recognize that all that transpires in his life exists under the transforming oversight of that love. Even his sin, folly, and ever present weakness – together with the consequences that arise from them – are ordered and overseen by his wise Father for his good (8:28). The invincible love of the triune God will have its way; far from hindering or imperiling God's work, the countless obstacles supplied by the human condition are merely instruments in the Father's hand by which He perfects His children.

Because their salvation depends solely and entirely on the eternal purpose and effectual work of the Father, Son, and Spirit on their behalf, Christians have a hope that cannot disappoint. As much as the whole created order longs with expectant hope for the day of the saints' glorification (8:19-22), so believers themselves are to live with the same eager and confident expectation. The day of the revealing of the sons of God in glory will indeed come as promised; those the Father *foreknew* He has also *glorified*.

Having brought his argument to its pinnacle, the balance of the eighth chapter may be viewed as Paul's personal eruption of celebration. The significance of the things he has discussed is so profound, and their glory is so magnificent, that it is as if he could not contain his own exultation any longer. His heart was carried away with the sense of God's saving excellencies. And yet, Paul also recognized that the glories of the gospel are the rightful property of all of God's saints; as the Romans shared in his gospel, so his desire was that they would share in his celebration.

1. In accordance with this shift in emphasis, verse 8:31 provides an important point of transition. It moves from Paul's *discussion* of the great truths of the gospel to the glorious *inferences* that arise from them. As noted, these inferences have a marked celebratory tone, but what is most important to observe is that Paul presented them in the form of a series of rhetorical questions and answers.
  - a. The first question is overarching and serves to introduce this final section of chapter eight: "*What then shall we say to these things?*" Given that this question immediately follows 8:28-30, many commentators understand "these things" as referring to Paul's statements in the previous three verses. And while that content must be included, it is more likely that Paul intended his question to embrace all the facets of gospel truth discussed thus far. Two things support this conclusion:
    - 1) The first is the letter itself. Paul's argumentation in it is cohesive as well as progressive. Furthermore, this epistle was composed as a personal correspondence, and Paul knew that it would be read through and considered in its entirety. Thus the saints at Rome would have naturally viewed his question more comprehensively than the modern reader whose analytical approach to the letter results in a more narrow perspective.
    - 2) Secondly, Paul's grammar points to a broader referent than simply the instruction in 8:28-30. His phrase, *these things*, is in Greek a single demonstrative pronoun ("these"). The noun "things" is not present in the original language, but is implied by the grammar and helps to convey Paul's meaning. Specifically, the pronoun is constructed as a neuter plural form, and so denotes a generic group of unspecified *things*.
  - b. As Paul's question in 8:31a overarches the balance of the chapter, so does his answer. When one considers all that is bound up in Paul's gospel, the appropriate summary conclusion is that, "*If God is for us, who is against us?*" Everything that follows in verses 32-39 is merely an explanation and elaboration of this foundational truth. What is most notable about this response is its profound simplicity. It is simple in that it follows Paul's common pattern of arguing from the greater to the lesser, but, it is also hugely significant because of its referents. In other words, there is nothing momentous in a greater-to-lesser argument, but such an argument becomes profound when God is the subject of the "greater." This is made all the more evident by Paul presenting his argument in the form of a rhetorical question: *Given the greater, what does this say about the lesser?*
    - 1) Here, the greater half of the argument is that *God is for us*. This is the overall answer to the question of how the believer should respond to the "things" of the gospel: *What shall we say to these things? They certify to us that God is **for us***. Paul's literal statement is "God for us," and by omitting the implied verb, he purposely juxtaposed the subject (God) and modifying prepositional phrase (for us), thereby bringing them into sharp relief with respect to one another.

Verbless clauses of this type are not uncommon in biblical Greek, but this context suggests that Paul had a specific reason for employing this construction. First of all, the same grammatical structure is reproduced in the second clause (“who is against us”), thereby creating two punctuated, parallel statements set in antithesis to one another. But even more, by juxtaposing the term *God* and the phrase *for us* (so also the pronoun *who* and the phrase *against us*), Paul links the adjoined ideas in an inseparable way. In other words, he intended that, in context, his readers would think of God in terms of the idea embodied in the modifying phrase “for us.”

This being the case, it is vitally important to determine what Paul meant by this phrase. In the most general sense, it has the meaning, *on our behalf*. But how is it that God is “on our behalf”? One answer is that Paul was simply affirming God’s benevolent character and concern for people. A more narrow understanding might limit this concern to those who are Christians – God is for *us*. But the context reveals that Paul had much more in mind. God is “for” believers in the sense that He has justified them by giving them His own righteousness in Christ (cf. 5:1-11, 8:1-11, 26-30). And having justified them, He has made them beloved sons.

And so the truth that God is *for us* must be seen to have two inseparable aspects. First, from *eternity past* God was “for” His own in His loving determination to redeem and recover them to Himself (8:28-29). But having now justified them in Christ, He is “for” them in the sense that both their *present status* as sons and their *future glory* are secure (5:8-10).

2) It is this latter aspect that was in the forefront of Paul’s present consideration, as his second clause (and verse 32) makes clear: “If God is for us, *who is against us?*” Recalling that this clause is grammatically identical to its predecessor, two observations are to be noted:

- The first is that the same emphasis is present here: the subject *who* is inseparable from the phrase *against us*. As God was to be considered in terms of the idea embodied in “for us,” so the “who” of this clause is to be constrained to the idea “against us.”
- The second is the antithetical correspondence between the two phrases. What this means is that the phrase *against us* must be understood in terms of the phrase *for us*. For this reason the second clause may be reworded as follows: *Who can prevail against those whom God has justified and whom He has secured for glory?* As the contextual emphasis is on the believer’s spiritual circumstance, Paul was clearly not indicating that no threat or harm of any kind can come against God’s children. Rather, his point was that no one can challenge, threaten, or undo what God has accomplished on behalf of His own (ref. 8:33-34).

In this is seen the significance of Paul's argument from the greater to the lesser. Because God is *God*, what He has purposed and accomplished cannot be thwarted or challenged. A person may have any number of powerful advocates or benefactors, but only when his benefactor and advocate is God Himself can a person confidently declare that no one can successfully oppose or overthrow what has been done on his behalf.

2. As verse 8:31 provides Paul's overarching conclusion, so 8:32 begins to unfold it. When God is "for" a person, no one can be "against" him. God's love, purpose, and power toward His own span the distance from eternity past to eternity future; who, then, is able to prevail against them? Yet one may contend that such assertions – glorious as they are – are nothing more than religious jargon. What is the *proof* that God is for His own, and therefore that no one can be against them? Paul provides that proof: "*He did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.*"

Of all the evidence that God is for His children, the greatest is the gift of His Son. Paul expressed this gift as God's act of "not sparing," and his meaning is explained by the subsequent antithesis: rather than sparing His Son, God *delivered Him up*. This verb has the general sense of handing over something for another's disposition. It is used commonly in the New Testament in relation to Jesus, and always with respect to His betrayal and crucifixion (cf. Matthew 17:22-23, 20:18-19, 26:2, 14-16, 20-24, 27:1-2).

Thus Paul's point is that God did not *spare* His Son in the sense of withholding Him from the suffering and death of Calvary, but instead delivered Him over to men in order that they should kill Him. This "handing over" obviously implies the Father sending the Son into the world, but it is His atoning death rather than His incarnation that is in view. Paul's statement raises several important considerations:

- a. The first is that Christ's agonizing death must be understood to be both the will and the direct action of the Father; *He* delivered up His Son. God sent His Son into the world in order to give Him over to death (cf. Luke 22:41-42; John 4:34, 12:23-28, 8:28-29; etc.). This death was a sacrifice of atonement, by which God accomplished His loving purpose for His people (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10).
- b. The profound significance of this act is emphasized by Paul's reference to Jesus as God's *own* Son. Unlike men who are sons by adoption, Christ is the Father's only *natural* son; He is the Son who alone shares His Father's nature and substance in full (cf. John 1:1-2; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-3; etc.). For this reason God's giving over of His Son stands as the singular evidence of His commitment to men and their well-being.

But because the Son shares the Father's deity, God's gift of Christ included His condescension to clothe His only Son in our humanity. In giving the Son, the Father gave Him to become *man*, and so also the fountainhead of a new humanity. But the Father did not simply give His Son to be joined to the human race, He *delivered Him up*: He gave Him to be a vicarious, atoning sacrifice for sinners.

c. In the person of the Son, God *Himself* effectively satisfied His own just demands against His unbelieving and rebellious image-bearers. God accomplished for men what they could never accomplish for themselves. In order to be “just and the One who justifies,” God was willing to satisfy His own justice on behalf of His own (3:21-26, 8:1-4; cf. also Philippians 3:7-9). This understanding of the Father’s gift of the Son draws out two important aspects of Christ’s redeeming work, both of which were revealed and prefigured in the upward movement of salvation history.

- 1) The first is that the “delivering up” of the Son expresses the principle of *disciplined love that is committed to a greater good*. This principle was prefigured in Abraham’s sacrificial offering of his son Isaac (ref. Genesis 22:1-18). It is possible that Paul himself was thinking of this event, since his language replicates features of the Genesis passage (cf. esp. 22:2, 12).

In this context Abraham, the devoted father, is required to offer up his unique, “only begotten” covenant son as an offering to God. Although this sacrifice was not atoning, *it was necessary to the continuance and ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant* (22:15-18). Christ is the true “son of the covenant” (Galatians 3:15-29), so that – as was typified in Isaac – the ultimate fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to Abraham depended upon the sacrificial death of Abraham’s singular covenant Son. And as Isaac’s “resurrection” was God’s attestation that He had accepted the required sacrifice and would honor His promise, so it was with the resurrection of the true Seed (cf. 22:9-12 with Hebrews 11:17-19; ref. also 1 Corinthians 15:12-23; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 1:1-4, 8:33-34; etc.).

The account of the offering of Isaac focuses on Abraham’s *faith*, but this faith was simply Abraham’s commitment to God’s purpose and will. Abraham loved his “only begotten son” in a way and to an extent that he could love no other human being, and yet He loved God more. He was fiercely committed to God’s purpose and will, even at the cost of the life of His unique, beloved son. This is the correlation that must be made with Paul’s statement in 8:31-32. God’s commitment to the recovery of His people is so absolute that He would even willingly sacrifice His one Son in order to accomplish it. Abraham’s love for God and His purpose knew no bounds, and neither does the Father’s devotion; He will have His way.

- 2) The second aspect of the Father’s gift of the Son is the *satisfaction of all righteousness*. Unlike the sacrifice of Isaac, Christ’s death was *expiatory*; its purpose was to satisfy God’s justice against human unrighteousness (ref. 3:21-26, 5:1-10, 8:1-4). This core principle likewise finds a notable typological parallel in God’s instruction to Israel. Repeatedly God told the nation that they were not to *spare* the unrighteous among them. Whether it implicated father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter, there was to be the exacting of justice against all unrighteousness; Yahweh’s kingdom was to be a righteous kingdom.

Thus the rebels at Sinai were slain at God's command, even at the hand of family members and close friends (Exodus 32:1-29). So also the false prophet, idolater, adulterer, and Sabbath-breaker were to be put to death for their disregard of the covenant (cf. Exodus 31:14; Leviticus 20:1-10; Deuteronomy 13:1-9). Death was the stipulated penalty for these and other crimes in order to "purge the evil" from Israel. The covenant was characterized by the principle of exact justice, and it was epitomized in the "eye for eye" requirement of the Mosaic Code. This prescription is recorded three times in the Pentateuch (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-20; 19:16-21), and in each instance it has the same significance.

On its face, it clearly stipulates that punishment for unrighteousness must be equal to the offense; it is to be "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand." But as much as this definition would have served to prevent unjustly harsh retribution, *restraint* was not the reason for the commandment. Its purpose was actually the opposite: it was intended to prevent the injustice that results from failing to satisfy the full demands of righteousness. This is evident from the explanatory admonition in the Deuteronomy context: "*Thus you shall not show pity*" (19:21).

Many have seen the strictness of this commandment as contrary to the mercy proclaimed by Jesus (cf. Matthew 5:38-42). But in reality, Jesus' instruction presupposes the full exacting of justice as prescribed in the Law of Moses. *For God to have allowed Israel to overlook or minimize unrighteousness would have been for Him to make His Son's future death unnecessary and ultimately meaningless.* If the King of Israel could have allowed unrighteousness in His typological kingdom, then it was not necessary for Him to fully punish the sin of those who were to inhabit the kingdom of His Son. By insisting that Israel could not spare or show pity in their dealing with sin, God was teaching them about His own justice and the nature of His kingdom. Most importantly, *He was preparing them for the day when He Himself would be obligated to not spare His own Son,* but, for the sake of righteousness, to fully punish Him for the sins of men.

The proof that God is "for" His children is His delivering up of His Son. He willingly gave Him over to death in order that they would regain life. This is the greatest gift that God could give, and provides the proper basis for another greater-to-lesser argument. This God who did the greater in giving His Son; how is it conceivable that He would fail to give the lesser: "...*how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*" Jesus Christ is the Father's grace gift to men, and there can be no greater endowment, for the gift of Christ is God's gift of *Himself*; from everlasting to everlasting, the Lord is the portion of His people. For the Father delivered up His Son in order to reconcile sinners to Himself and make them sons. How, then, now being sons in the Beloved, will the saints' heavenly Father, together with the Son who died for them, fail to grace them with all that is good and needful to bring them into the inheritance? God has taken them to Himself in Christ, and when He appears, they will also appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).