

Sermons through

Romans

The Gift of Infinite gifts

Romans 8:32

With Study Questions

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Romans 8:32

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things (Romans 8:32)?

Introduction

I don't apologize for placing a premium on propositional truth; that is to say, if God has chosen to communicate with us via words, sentences, paragraphs and various forms of literature, it is in our best interest (to put it mildly) to seek to grasp what those words actually mean.

I was recently in a discussion with a friend who voiced discomfort with a political candidate because he felt the man was too much of an ideologue. I got what he was saying (he viewed the man as unnecessarily inflexible), but it must be said that everyone has an ideology (a body of doctrine which guides their thoughts and decisions). Some just don't have a well thought out ideology. Others, perhaps, seek to hide it. But everyone has one. And they are very important!

It is dangerous business to be governed by lights, music, some alluring visage or the comforting, or powerful tone of a presentation. We see a warning in Psalm 55.

My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant. ²¹ His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords (Psalm 55:20, 21).

One of the many reasons I find myself resistant to likenesses and images of Jesus is the tendency they have to form less than inspired caricatures yielding the Jesus I think I currently need rather than the Jesus who is. Scripture informs us that even if Jesus were here in the flesh He **“had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53:2)**; all this to say that it is the content

which must prevail. And what is the content of the opening phrase?

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Romans 8:32a).

Not a Systematic Theology

As we consider this short phrase (clearly speaking of the Father sending His Son to die on the cross for our redemption), let us reflect on the possibility that if the current western evangelical trend is to overly depend upon emotive presentation at the expense of content, there is often an error in more academic settings and churches that place a premium on doctrine to reduce the Christian faith to a systematic construct devoid of affectivity—the warmth, the agony, the frenzy, the indignations, fatigue and joy that we find interwoven into God’s presentation of who He is and what He has done. The Bible is not a systematic theology.

We sometimes think our religious pursuits would be easier if Jesus simply would have written a confession of faith. But we are called to wrestle through stories, psalms, poetry and what amounts to be somebody else’s mail (which is what the epistles are). If I were the demonic Uncle Screwtape for example, I might advise my nephew, Wormwood, to tempt the Bible student to ignore the simple yet profound opening phrase of this verse and proceed to excavate the theology.

How easy it would be to brush by **“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all”** in our attempt to unpack the divinity of the passage! I am reminded of a comic strip I read years ago of two pirates speaking on the deck of their ship. One pirate lamented that the evening before, during a movie they were all watching, he got too much butter on his fingers from the popcorn and a ring fell from his finger. It was a rare ring his father had given him as a young man with special meaning to him. It fell to the ground and rolled off the ship into the ocean and he was heartbroken because his father had since passed away. The other pirate’s response was “There’s popcorn?”

Even many translations leave out the emphatic particle *ge* **“indeed”**. Some translations would read **“Indeed, He who His**

own Son did not spare...” The short particle designed to “focus the attention upon a single idea, and place it, as it were, in the limelight.”¹ We must be careful brothers and sisters that we not dehumanize the narrative.

Dehumanizing the Narrative

What I mean by dehumanizing the narrative (a story in the Bible) is the tendency, especially in the Reformed camp, to reduce the stories in the Bible into a literary device designed to more fully amplify the attributes of God, especially as it relates to the Gospel. Allow me a preemptive strike at those who take issue with my use of the word “reduce”. I am not suggesting by using that word that there is something better in the Bible than the Gospel or even that the Gospel is not the primary point of the narrative. If the Bible is God’s self-disclosure, one is hard-pressed to find something more prominent that God wishes to disclose than the Gospel.

But all too often, again in Reformed circles, we hear teachers ridiculing how some other teachers might present the stories of David and Goliath or Judah and Benjamin or Abraham and Isaac. Many will utilize these stories for the purpose of teaching about the requisite human faith and heart necessary for Abraham to reach out his hand, take a knife and slaughter his son (Genesis 22:10). More than once I have heard snarky comments, poking fun at these teachers when they seek to apply the story by asking their listeners: “What are the Isaac’s in your life?” or “What Goliath’s must you conquer?” or as with Judah and Benjamin “What prison cell are you willing to sit in for your brethren?” and so forth.

Now it may be true that the primary lesson in all these stories is the Gospel—God sacrificing His Son, Jesus conquering our giant enemy, Christ taking our place of condemnation and so forth. But we should not somehow draw the conclusion that Abraham, David, Judah, Joseph, Daniel et al did not fight through the spiritual, psychological and emotional barriers as mere human beings called to faithfulness in the midst of horrible circumstances

¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

—there are certainly lessons here for us all. What I am suggesting here is when we view these accounts in Scripture as mere types, or illustrations, we dehumanize the narrative. After all, God chose to instruct us through non-fiction biographies. Let us not turn them to fiction.

Not Sparing His Own Son

Of course fiction is not necessarily bad; the parables are fiction. In light of this opening phrase **“He who did not spare His own Son”** I am reminded of a dramatic presentation I saw as a young Christian. I had, more or less forgotten it, until it was brought to my attention by one of my own children recently because of the impact it had upon them.

The drama was an attempt to deepen our appreciation of the opening phrase of this verse. In short, it portrayed a man who had one child—a small boy who he dearly loved. The man’s job was to lower the draw bridge for a train as it would go over a river or canyon. As he began to lower the bridge he noticed his own son had gotten stuck in the machinery of the draw-bridge and he was confronted with the dilemma of sacrificing his son or the people on the train. If I recall correctly, the son was also aware of the dilemma. Both the father and the son made the decision that it would be best to save the people at the expense of the life of the son. It was moving.

Perhaps we have heard it so much **“He sent His Son...He did not spare His own Son²”** that it has lost its force. I would like to suggest that when we dehumanize the narrative we depersonalize the sacrifice. And from here it is quite easy for our Christian faith to evolve into empty gestures and cold transactions. The second half of Romans 8 allows for no such disposition. A deeper grasp of this sacrifice transforms everything.

Imagine if you will, that you were in that train and I was the man who had sacrificed his child. Suppose someone organized an event and you were invited to honor me? Would you even consider missing it? Say you attended the event. Could you

2 **“Own Son”** *idios huois* “an exclusive relationship.”

envision any scenario where you would walk away from the event complaining that you weren't fed or that it didn't meet some need in your soul? When you put it that way, it seems, one would have to be vehemently clueless. They could only walk away with those thoughts if they had walked in with an inappropriate idea of what the event actually was to be.

Of course I'm comparing this to a church service. And a church service is, or should be, nurturing to the soul. But that is only achieved when the true purpose of the gathering is recognized and pursued. Not to push my illustration too far, but the questions following the service might gravitate more toward an accurate rendering of the goodness, grace, mercy and wisdom of the father; of what he did for the people. We would be more inclined to ask if the words spoken, songs sung, sacraments administered did justice to the beauty of the son.

As in most stories and illustrations, the train drama falls short in too many ways to enumerate. But, as it relates to the second half of the verse, it falls short in terms of the ongoing lives of the passengers on the train. In the drama the father saves them, but he doesn't adopt them; he doesn't engage in the ongoing care of their lives and their eventual and inevitable deaths.

All of the problems the people on the train had before this near disaster are still there. Those without jobs still have no work; those who were sick are still sick; those in difficult and broken relationships are still right where they were before the train went over the bridge. It is precisely here that the Apostle Paul makes a marvelous statement—a statement that I have rested on numerous times over the years when life seemed to be getting the better of me.

“...how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things (Romans 8:32b)?

All Things

It almost sounds narcissistic at this point for the recipient of the gift of life (by way of the Father not sparing His only Son) to ask what comes with that gift. And yet, this is where the verse

goes. And the answer is **“all things.”** What Paul seems to be saying here is that although all other gifts are immeasurable less than this “Gift of gifts”³ the other lesser gifts are virtually included in it. When we read **“with Him”** *syn autos* we should not think of receiving all things alongside Christ but with Christ.

Similarly to how in Christ **“are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3)**, the gift of Christ includes the Father freely giving His children all things—Paul using the verb form of grace *charisetai* which could be understood as how God will **“grace us with all things.”** An unsearchable transformation has taken place for every passenger on the train. Nothing will ever be the same. The Maker of all things has set His affections upon us. And His capacity for grace is deeper and wider than our feeble comprehensions.

Paul is about to launch into a series of rhetorical questions which we will pursue at a later time. But right now I would like for us to briefly set our hearts on a parallel text to the one we’re in—keeping in mind that Paul, as a loving pastor is addressing a suffering church (Romans 8:18; 36—the present sufferings...sheep for the slaughter).

Addressing another church which had broken into factions of personality cults, Paul seeks to bring their petty minds to loftier considerations. It is as if the answer to both suffering and internal strife consists of the same meditation.

Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. ²³ And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

Christ belongs to God, we belong to Christ and therefore, all things belong to us. There is no other Maker, no other Owner, no other Savior. It all belongs to God and because we belong to Him we can be assured that not only are all our enemies vanquished,

³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Ro 8:32). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

but the very calamities which beset us are designed for us—as if they were contraptions in the exercise room for our souls. And the list is exhaustive.

Not only does Paul include himself and other instructors (it is easy to comprehend how they exist for the benefit of saints), but he almost casually includes **“the world...life, death, things present and things to come.”** How transformed must our thinking be to arrive at the platform where our current difficulty is not merely something to be endure, but is for us—including death itself—it is usually not an easy place to reach—as if the Lord must strip us down of earthly comforts to get there. But as T.R. Schreiner indicates, Paul’s readers were to understand that:

All the woes and sorrows of the present world order are turned to their good.⁴

Or Calvin observes:

This passage ought to remind us of what Christ brings to us, and to awaken us to contemplate his riches; for as he is a pledge of God’s infinite love towards us, so he has not been sent to us void of blessings or empty, but filled with all celestial treasures, so that they who possess him may not want anything necessary for their perfect felicity.⁵

There is no suggestion here to go about our business pretending there are no trials, but to view our trials (and everything else) through the eyes of faith in a God who **“from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”**⁶ It was no doubt this mentality Paul had when he wrote of himself...

4 Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Romans* (Vol. 6, p. 461). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

5 Calvin, J. (1998). *Romans* (electronic ed., Ro 8:32). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

6 Westminster Confession of Faith III, 1.

...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Let us pray that in this, we have a more highly developed appreciation of our heavenly Father's power and affections toward us and a deeper grasp of the gift He has given us in His Son.

Questions for Study

1. What is propositional truth and why is it important? How has God chosen to communicate with us (page 2)?
2. What are the dangers in an emotive presentation (page 2)?
3. What is a potential problem if we pursue our faith as merely academic (page 3)?
4. Why do you suppose Jesus (or one of the apostles or prophets) didn't write a confession of faith or a systematic theology (page 3)?
5. What does it mean to dehumanize the narrative and what are the dangers (pages 4, 5)?
6. How would a deeper understanding of God sending not sparing His Son affect a church service? How would it affect other aspects of our lives (pages 5, 6)?
7. When the Father sent His Son, what came with Him (page 6)?
8. What belongs to those who belong to Christ and how does that transform our thinking (pages 7-9)?

