

### **Romans 8:28-39**

Pentecost 8 Midweek + Proper 12A + August 2, 2017

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

God for Us

The Word of the Lord from Romans 8: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Questions, questions, questions. I love the questions in our epistle, because Paul makes sure we know the answers. And they're all good.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" Answer: no one. Oh, devil, world and sinful flesh will whine, but they can't overpower God. If God is for us, no one can separate us from Him.

And how do you know that God is for you? That's answered by the next question: "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?" There's your certainty: He didn't spare His own Son, but gave Jesus up to die on the cross for us all. He condemned Him on the cross so that He might spare you – spare you the judgment of hell for your sin. Since your sin is gone for Jesus' sake, what would keep God from helping you? Nothing. That's why you can be sure that He will graciously give you all things.

Please note, with great joy and thanksgiving, that the reason God is for you is Jesus and His sacrifice – not you and your sacrifice. There would be no comfort at all if Paul said, "God is for you because of what you've done...assuming you've done it well enough." "Well enough" is a term with no comfort whatsoever, because it would leave you constantly asking "Have I done well enough?" until you finally agreed with the Law and said, "I can't do well enough. Therefore God is not for me." But God is for you, because Christ has done enough. His cross is sufficient for all of your sins.

That's why the next question and answer are so comforting: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." Satan wants to distract you from Jesus and His sacrifice, so he'll keep accusing you, dredging up every past sin he can and telling you that you're not forgiven for *that one*, no matter how much you repent. But the Lord's verdict holds. He says, "I've declared you forgiven and 'not guilty' for Jesus' sake, and a defeated devil's gossip doesn't void My verdict. I say you're forgiven, and I have the final word."

The next question supports this even more: "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." Picture, for a moment, a criminal who stands before a judge and asks for mercy, when the evidence against him is overwhelming. There's not much hope for mercy there. That's how the devil would like you to picture God, as the harsh judge who will only help you when you show you've turned your life around. The devil would have you picture Jesus as the witness who says, "Look, I went so far as to die for you. I think you need to be doing better than this if you want the Judge to be merciful." Sadly, some Christian preachers have portrayed God this way, but it is a satanic twist on the truth. God is the Judge: that much is true. But that Judge wants so much to pardon you and be merciful to you that He's already sentenced His Son for your sins – your crimes – against His Law; and further, the death sentence has already been carried out. Far from a merciless judge, God declares, "I desire so much to have mercy on you

that I have already sentenced My Son for your sin. The sentence has been carried out, and I am not going to punish again. I do not hold that sin against you. I do not condemn you." If that's not enough assurance, Paul points out that no less than Jesus – the Victim for your sin! – is now at God's *right hand* to intercede. The judge's right hand was the position of the defense attorney in ancient courts. He's not just a witness, and He's certainly not the prosecutor: He defends you. So if the devil were still to accuse you before God and say, "This one is sinful and must be condemned," the Son of God would say, "Liar! It is true that he has sinned, but it is also true that he must not be condemned, because I have already been condemned for him." And having been condemned for sin, Christ rose from the dead to defeat both death and the devil. Who is to condemn you before Him? No one. God justifies you, and Christ – who died and rose again – intercedes for you.

Then comes the fourth question and perhaps the more famous part of our text: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' 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."

Trouble will come. When Paul lists things like persecution or famine or nakedness, he's listing those things that he has suffered. Your list will be different, but you have a list; and as long as you're in this world, more trouble is coming.

You can also be certain that none of these things can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord. But let us be careful here. What I mean is this: famine, nakedness, unemployment and the rest do not destroy faith. None of these affect your standing before God. Only unbelief does. That is why, when you contemplate troubles to come or are overtaken by them, the question Paul would have you ask from this text is, "How might I be protected and delivered from unbelief, which *would* separate me from God?" The Lord will deliver you in His time: the point of this text is that the devil will use every last trial on every last day to try to wreck your faith so that you spurn the Lord's deliverance. Paul asks, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" because the devil is going to use every trouble he can to accuse the Lord and say, "*God* is against you;" and when troubles are big enough or last long enough, you'll start to wonder if God is really for you or not.

So the question to be asked is, "How might you be protected and delivered from unbelief? How might your faith be strengthened so that you're always comforted that God is for you?"

The answer is as obvious as it is humble: the means of grace – God's Word and God's Supper for you, His baptized children. These seem like such little things and quaint rites when compared against the fears and pains that trouble can bring, because we are always tempted to view death and destruction as greater than God and His grace. But if your faith is to be strengthened, go to where God strengthens faith – His Word and His Supper. God grants you this ongoing diet of heavenly food so that you can be sure that He is for you.

He's not just for you, as in "on your side." He is "for you," as in "present in His means of grace." He's already joined you to Himself in Holy Baptism. He dwells in you through the hearing of His Word. He comes to you in His Supper and says, "So that you may be certain I am for you, here is My body and blood, given and shed for you." For you, so that no one can condemn you.

God who is for you is also with you. And because He shares His cross with you in Baptism, He shares His victory with you. Therefore, even when assaulted by all sorts of troubles, you are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you.

So when you are confronted by some sort of trouble, make the sign of the cross and remind yourself – out loud if you like. You are baptized and God is for you – so who can be against you? This trouble can make you miserable for a while, and your enemies (namely, the devil, world and your own sinful flesh) certainly mean it for your harm. But you are the Lord's, and He shares His grace and His victory with you. While your enemies would use this trouble for evil, God will use it for good – to refine you, to teach you trust and prayer, to strengthen your faith and to make you look forward to eternal life all the more.

When you are tempted to doubt that God could still forgive you because of your sins and past transgressions, remember: Christ has died for you, and it is God who justifies you. If He says you are not guilty, who can declare you guilty once more? No one.

When you are tempted in trouble to believe that you are cut off from God, then know that Christ Jesus is the One who died for you. No less than the Son of God has taken your place for your sin. Who is going to condemn you and cut you off from God now? No one. Furthermore, Christ is at God's right hand, praying for you and interceding for you: is there any way that the Lord does not hear your prayers? No. He does, and He will answer.

For Jesus' sake, God is for you, not against you. And because He is for you, He is *here* for you.

In the midst of this text, St. Paul quotes Psalm 44: "As it is written, 'For Your sake we are being killed all day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'" The people of God cry out to the Lord in that psalm: where is He? Has He abandoned them? That may be your cry, too, when trouble comes. But the answer from God for His people is this: He does not regard you as sheep to be slaughtered. He gave His Son to be born of Mary to be the Lamb of God, led to the slaughter of the cross so that you might be spared.

If God is for us, who can be against us? 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?

Dear friends, God is for you because Christ has died for you. And because Christ is risen from the dead, God is here for you. Troubles will come, but you are not forsaken. In Christ, you are more than conquerors; because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen