

# God is for Us

## Romans 8:31-39

**Series:** Romans 2022: Righteousness from God – Yay!

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**Worship:** Nothing Can Separate Us

**Key Sentence:** Because God is for us, nothing can be against us or condemn us or separate us from His love.

**Outline:**

- I. No one can be against us (Romans 8:31-32)
- II. No one can condemn us (Romans 8:33-34)
- III. Nothing can separate us (Romans 8:35-39)

**Romans 8:31-39** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup>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?

<sup>33</sup>Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>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.

<sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>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.

## If God is for Us Romans 8:31-39

The most famous dog in Scottish history was “Greyfriars Bobby.” This little Skye terrier belonged to a man named John Gray. According to a well-researched version of the story, Gray had moved to Edinburgh from the country in 1850, and after a few years doing other things, became a “night watchman” for the Edinburgh police. These night watchmen often had a watch dog with them as they patrolled and John Gray acquired a Skye terrier named “Bobby.” Each day before his shift John would stop at a local restaurant to eat, and the owner also provided dinner for the little dog. After two years Gray developed a suspicious cough and was soon diagnosed with consumption, tuberculosis. He died on February 15, 1858 and was buried in Old Greyfriars Churchyard, an historic church and cemetery in Edinburgh. But his faithful dog Bobby would not be separated from him. He lay down on the newly-covered grave. The curator of the cemetery, where no dogs were permitted, drove him out. A few hours later he was back, and he continued this pattern even in the wind and rain. Eventually the curator took pity on the wet and shivering dog and made him a small nest under a nearby bench. Each day when the one o’clock gun fired at nearby Edinburgh castle, Bobby would hop up and trot out of the graveyard to the nearby restaurant, where the new owner continue to feed him.

This went on for years. In 1867 Edinburgh passed a stray dog law that would require Bobby to be put down, but the mayor of the town paid the dog’s license fee himself. The collar attesting to this can still be seen in an Edinburgh museum today. Finally, in 1872 the dog, by then known as Greyfriars Bobby passed away at the old age of at least 16 years, 14 of which had been spent in his graveyard vigil. He’d become famous, and in the 150 years since then has been immortalized in sculpture, books and even a Walt Disney movie.

Why do we love this story? Because the dog and his master were inseparable, both in life and in death. We resonate with the idea of someone so faithful that nothing will prevent him from being with us. And in today’s text, Romans 8:31-39 one of the key things we’ll learn is that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Because God is not a short-lived animal nor even a mortal man, nothing, not even death has the power to separate us from him.

Romans 8 is all about the work of God the Holy Spirit in our lives. We’ve seen that only the Holy Spirit can free us from the habits and desires of our sinful nature, as we set our minds on Him.

We've seen that it is the Spirit who will give life to our immortal bodies. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God who cry "Abba, Father." Because we have the Spirit we groan inwardly at the fallen nature of the world, but the same Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with his own groans. But this week Paul reaches the crescendo of his celebration and tells us that because God is for us, nothing can be against us or condemn us or separate us from His love.

We'll break this section down into three pieces, following the lead of Paul's questions. Verses 31 and 32 assure us that no one can be against us. The next two verses assure us that no one can condemn us. The last five verses, the crescendo of the crescendo teach us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. So, Romans 8:31-39. *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* <sup>32</sup>*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?* <sup>33</sup>*Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* <sup>34</sup>*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.* <sup>35</sup>*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* <sup>36</sup>*As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* <sup>37</sup>*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* <sup>38</sup>*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* <sup>39</sup>*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.*

"What then shall we say to these things?" The Spirit is interceding for us. God is working all things for our good. He has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified us. All of this shows without doubt that God is for us.

But notice, as Stott points out, that if Paul had simply asked, 'Who is against us?' there would be a long list. By human standards we face formidable foes. Paul will list many of them in verse 35. Even before that we know that the unbelieving world is opposed to us. The sinful nature is our adversary. Death is still an enemy, the last enemy. So is he "who holds the power of death, that is, the devil." Even the fallen, groaning creation is doomed to be against us in this present age. As Charles Dodd says in his commentary "Sometimes under calamity the whole universe seems to be against us." But Paul does not ask simply "who is against us?" He prefaces it with an "if" or "since" clause. "Since God is for us, who can be against us? No one. Nothing.

Now, Paul is not saying that the claim 'God is for us' can be made by everybody. In fact, perhaps the most terrible words which human ears could ever hear are those which God uttered many times in the Old Testament: "I am against you." He is against sin and sinners. He is against rebels and oppressors. He is against those who hurt and destroy. But he is for us. He has not left the world in its sin or its people in unremitted judgment. He has loved us and sent his Son for us. This is the point of the next verse, 32, "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?" This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. The greater thing is that God did not spare his own Son. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Jesus Christ was offered as a sacrifice on the Cross for us.

The language here probably alludes to Genesis where God commends Abraham because he did not withhold, or spare his only son, but was willing to offer him as a sacrifice. In that case God provided a substitute, a ram, but when it came to his own Son God did not spare him but gave him up for us all. He was sacrificed for our sake, so that through faith in him we might receive all things. All things is, remarkably, the lesser thing in this argument. In context "all things" must refer to the things we have received through the Spirit, and specifically to our calling, justification and glorification. But we shouldn't limit all things even to that wonderful list. It can also include all the wonders of creation and the provisions that God gives us day to day. This doesn't mean that we have everything we want in this life, but it does mean that God will supply all our needs. according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

So, if God is for us, who can be against us? Line up everyone in the world, from that family member who just slightly irritates you, to the other one who constantly gaslights you, to that guy at work who belittles you for your commitments, to that friend on social media who always blames Christianity for everything, to world leaders who put their own well being ahead of the people, to others who commit tragic war and violence. Can any one of these or all of them together undo what God has done for us. Can any of them unmake the sacrifice of the Son or unpay the price he paid. No. The only person in the universe whose opinion really counts has proven in the most graphic way that he is for us.

Keith Hartsell, a church planter from Wheaton, Illinois, tells of a time he was driving around with a friend whom he admired for laying down his life for others. He noticed that his friend's cell phone was locked with an unusual password, "pro nobis." Keith asked why he chose that for a password. His friend said it was Latin and meant "For Us." Then he suddenly started choking up. Keith wondered why would those two Latin words cause so much emotion?

Then his friend explained that after walking through deep personal pain, these words brought true healing. When his parents divorced he entered a season when he assumed God didn't care or had given up on him. But when he decided to believe that God was pro nobis, that God had even sent Christ to die for him, he could then decide to lay down his life for others.

No one can be against us. No one can condemn us or charge us. Verse 33: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.” This question and the next (asking who will accuse us and who will condemn us) bring us in imagination to a courtroom. Paul's argument is that no prosecution can succeed, since God our judge has already justified us. Once again, if this question stood on its own, many voices could be raised in accusation. The devil never ceases to press charges against us, for his title diabolos means “slanderer” or “accuser.” In Revelation he is called “the accuser of the brothers.” We also have human enemies and even so-called friends and loved ones who delight to point an accusing finger at us. Most of all, we have the accusation of our own sins, as we saw in Romans 7. But no accusation will be effective because it is against God’s elect that the accusation is being made. Paul has shown in verses 28–30 that those who are God’s elect ones by virtue of his calling and purpose are assured of glory. Therefore, all accusations fall to the ground. They glance off us like arrows off a shield. The apostle is surely echoing the words of the Servant in Isaiah 50:8-9: “He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! <sup>9</sup>It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who will condemn me?” In a sense, then, this manner of designating Christians as “elect” in the question itself is the only answer required.

Verse 34 “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.” Moo points out that Paul, in his growing enthusiasm, has adopted a cryptic writing style in these verses, without a lot of connecting grammar. The New International Version does a better job at turning this into a sentence: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” Just as no one can now accuse us of sin, because we are justified, declared righteous from our sin, so no one can condemn us. Why? Because of Jesus? First of all, he died. Died for the very sins for which we deserved to be condemned. But instead God condemned our sin in the suffering flesh Jesus, Romans 8:3. He redeemed us from the curse or condemnation of the law by becoming a curse for us, as Paul says in Galatians.

Yet there is more, Paul says. He not only died, he was raised to life. Death and sin did not retain their victory over him. He was raised by God, by the Father's will and by the Spirit's power, showing God's acceptance of the Son's sacrifice as the only satisfactory basis for our justification. But there is more than that. The risen Son ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. Stott says that he is "resting from his finished work, occupying the place of supreme honor, exercising his authority to save, and waiting for his final triumph." There at the right hand of the Father he is interceding for us. We saw last week that the Spirit groans within us and intercedes for us in prayer according to the Father's will when we don't know what to pray. Our other intercessor is the victorious Son, whom the book of Hebrews teaches is our high priest and heavenly advocate. His very presence at the Father's right hand is evidence of his completed work of atonement, and his intercession means that he continues to secure for his people the benefits of his death.

Paul said in Romans 8:1 that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because of his death, because of his resurrection, because of his ascension, because of his intercession, those who are his are no longer under condemnation. We can therefore confidently challenge the universe, with all its inhabitants human and demonic: "Who is he that condemns?" There will never be any created being who can again condemn us.

A famous poem tells a story from the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector of England. A court sentenced an erring soldier to be shot. The execution was to take place at the ringing of the evening curfew bell. But the bell did not sound. The soldier's fiancée had climbed into the belfry and clung to the clapper to prevent it from striking. She came before Cromwell to account for her actions and plead for her fiancée. She wept as she showed him her bruised, bleeding hands. Cromwell's heart was touched. He said, "Your beloved shall live because of your sacrifice. Curfew shall not ring tonight!" For you and me, because of our beloved's sacrifice, curfew shall never ring.

So, Paul has shown that because of what Jesus has done no one can be against us and no one can condemn us. Finally, and most gloriously of all, he shows that nothing can separate us from his love. Verse 35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" Everything Paul said in verses 31 to 34 shows us the love of Christ, who doesn't charge sinners with their sins but justifies them from them, who doesn't condemn sinners for their sins, but bears their condemnation for them. "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." The love of Jesus is the greatest love.

But if the very power of God has made us recipients of this love, what could possibly take it away from us. What can separate us from the love of Christ? Like the other questions in this section, we could think of many things that might indicate to us that we had been separated from the love of Christ. But this time Paul doesn't make us do the thinking. He gives us the list himself: "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword." The fascinating thing about this list is that Paul himself experienced these things. In 2 Corinthians 11 he says "Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup>Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup>on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup>in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." Paul himself has experienced each of the seven things he lists, except for the last one, the sword, and he would faithfully submit to that at the end of his life. Thus he has proven for himself that these things are quite incapable of interfering with his experience and appreciation of Christ's love.

Charles Spurgeon once told a story on himself to illustrate this. He was walking in the country with a friend when he noticed a barn with a weather vane on its roof. At the top of the vane were these words: GOD IS LOVE. Spurgeon remarked to his companion that he thought this was a rather inappropriate place for such a message. "Weather vanes are changeable," he said, "but God's love is constant." "I don't agree with you about those words, Charles," replied his friend. "You misunderstand the meaning. That sign is indicating a truth. Regardless of which way the wind blows, God is love."

In verse 36 Paul breaks his chain of thought for a moment to quote from Psalm 44. <sup>36</sup>As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." This Psalm depicts the persecution of Israel by the nations. In this case they were not suffering because they had forgotten Yahweh or turned to a foreign god. Instead, they were suffering for Yahweh's sake, because of their very loyalty to him. As his people they faced death for this loyalty. Paul is teaching that even suffering unto death might be experienced by believers, but that not even this ultimate degree of suffering could separate them from the love of God which had saved them.

Verse 37: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Not only are the things listed in verse 35 incapable of separating us from Christ's love, but we are "more than conquerors" with respect to them.

“More than conquerors” is a wonderful translation, going back the Geneva Bible, of the intensive verb Paul uses, literally hyper-conquerors or super conquerors. Paul wants to emphasize that believers not only “conquer” such adversities; but under the providential hand of God, these things even work toward our good – we actually benefit from them. Notice that the victory is not ours, for it is only through the one who loved us that it happens. Since Christ proved his love for us by his sufferings, so our sufferings cannot separate us from it.

Paul now reaches his climax, verse 38 “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>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.” Paul said last week that “we know” God works for good. He ends more personally with “I am sure,” or “I am convinced.” He uses the perfect tense meaning, “I have become and I remain convinced,” Can anything separate us from Christ's love? Nothing can and nothing will. He chooses ten items which some might think powerful enough to create a barrier between us and Christ, and he mentions them in four pairs, while leaving the remaining two on their own.

Neither death nor life probably alludes to the crisis of death and the groanings of life. Paul starts with death because he had just mentioned it in verse 36. Life might be a simple contrast – we are held in his love whether dead or alive. But in view of the context, I think it is the groanings of life that Paul has in mind, and the assurance that we need not give in to the distress or the despair, or even our own weakness because through it all Christ loves us.

Next Paul says that neither angels nor rulers can separate us from the love of Christ. This pair is probably chosen to represent the whole of the spirit world, all created spiritual beings. Demons, of course, would gleefully separate us from Christ's love if they could. But they can't. Angels can't, and of course they also won't. Paul's point is that even the most powerful spiritual beings, angels and archangels, demons and their demonic master, are powerless against the love of Christ that has drawn and bound us to Him.

The next pair refers to time. “Things present nor things to come.” The believer need have no fear that either present or future circumstances and events will call into question his relationship to God in Christ. No matter how long and evil today gets, nothing that currently exists will be able to separate us. And no matter what comes our way tomorrow, nothing to come will be able to separate us. And no matter how many tomorrows follow, a few or thousands of years, they will not serve to erode the love Christ has for us.

The next word, “powers” stands alone. Paul at times uses this Greek word to denote miracles. He may mean that nothing like that, performed perhaps by demons, can threaten our security as believers. Paul also uses the word “powers” with his previous word “rulers” to denote spiritual beings. He reminds us in Ephesians 6 that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” There is an evil array of forces aligned against us, but he who is with us is way more powerful than all of them put together. And his power is perfectly communicated to us as love.

The final pair is “neither height nor depth.” Just as nothing in time can separate us from God’s love, so nothing in space can do so. The Psalmist wrote “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? <sup>8</sup>If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! <sup>9</sup>If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup>even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” And our relationship with God through the indwelling Spirit is more intimate and more held than the Psalmist could have imagined.

At this point you can think of Paul pausing for an instant to ask himself “have I forgotten anything?” before concluding “nor anything else in all creation.” If there is something else that feels like a threat, like a crowbar that wants to lever you away from God’s love, don’t worry about that one either. “Nothing else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God’s love is fully, freely and finally attested to us in the person and work of Christ Jesus. Because he died for us and rose from the dead for us and ascended to heaven where at God’s right hand he intercedes for us, then nothing, nothing, nothing can threaten us. No one who is against us can harm us. No one who wants to condemn us can find grounds to do so, since our condemnation fell on Christ. And no one and not thing that wants to separate us from Christ has any hope of success. Because God is for us, nothing can be against us or condemn us or separate us from His love.