

If God is for us

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, let me welcome you to this Lunchtime Bible Talk. If it's your first time, a particular welcome. And if you haven't had lunch before, there's opportunity to have lunch afterwards.
- Now, this is the third and final of our series in Romans 8. Over the last week or two, apart from last week, we've been looking at this great chapter under the general heading, The Spirit of Life, how in the Spirit we are free from condemnation.
- How in the Spirit we are preparing for the coming of the new creation and the reign of Christ, not just in people's hearts, but in the whole of the created order.
- And now today we come to the final passage, glorious passage of Romans chapter 8, verses 28 to 39, which you'll find on page 944.
- So we'll begin by reading the passage. Romans chapter 8, verse 28. And we know, says Paul, that for those who love God, all things work together for good.
- [1 : 1 3] For those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
- And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.
- What then shall we say to these things? 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?
- Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 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. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?
- [2 : 2 8] 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.
- Amen. That is the word of God. Let's pray. Father, as these great truths echo around us, we pray, Lord, that we may indeed look at the world we live in, at our own lives, in the light of these truths.
- If God is for us, who can be against us? And so we pray, Lord, that this afternoon our faith will be strengthened. And we are all at different stages of our journey.
- And we all have particular issues and problems. But we pray, Lord, that these words, in their power and in their comfort, will speak into our hearts and lives and help us just where we are and help us indeed to move on to the next stage of our journey.

- [4 : 02] And we ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Many years ago, a group of Quakers bought a plot of land in Birmingham near the centre to build a meeting place.
- They were really excited they had managed to do this and they were looking forward to the completion of the building. And just as the building was completed, they received a letter from John Lewis saying that we've been here longer than you.
- We're going to buy you out. And, of course, they were greatly dismayed. A few days later, the top brass of John Lewis also received a letter. Curiously enough, couched in the same terms, we have been here longer than you.
- We want to buy it out. And, of course, the secretary who opened the letter burst out laughing. This is just these bunch of people whistling in the wind until she looked at the signature at the end of the letter.
- And the man who signed the letter was the managing director, indeed the owner of Cadbury. You see the point. John Lewis had no idea that behind this little group of ordinary people was the vast Cadbury Empire.
- [5 : 26] And that, of course, changed everything. Now, Paul is writing to these groups of Christians scattered around the city of Rome in their little house churches. They are at the very heart of empire, probably intimidated by all the paraphernalia of Caesar's power, all the military and political muscle behind that.
- But, apart from it, and apart from that, their own ordinary problems, the kind of problems that all of us face, problems of illness, of death, of suffering, all these sorts of things, how are they going to keep on going?
- And that's the question, of course, that many of us face. How are we going to make it? Will we keep on going? Will we actually reach the goal? Paul says, because of what God has done in Christ, because of the sending of the Spirit, you are going to make it.
- If God is for us, he says, who can be against us? And that's the heart of this great chapter, which is summing up, really, the whole of the letter so far, particularly chapters 5 to 8.
- And in particular, the words in chapter 5, verse 11, being justified by faith, being adopted into God's family.
- [6 : 51] We have peace with God. And Paul is saying, God is going to complete what he has begun. It's not a question of our making it in our own strength.
- The point is, because God has begun a good work, as he's to say later in Philippians, he will complete it until the day of Christ. So let's look at these verses for some moments.
- And they really fall into two main sections. First of all, there is God's sovereign will in verses 28 to 30. God's sovereign will, his eternal purpose.
- You see, the subject here is not the Roman church or the church in Glasgow or anywhere else in the 21st century. The subject is God. We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.
- God always works for good. I think the background of this is Joseph's words in Genesis 50 to his brothers. You meant this for evil, but God meant it for good.
- [7 : 58] God wove the evil that happened to Joseph into his eternal purposes. That does not mean, of course, that everything is good.
- There are many, many things that happen in our lives that are anything but good. Illness, death, suffering, tragedies of various kinds, sometimes on a personal level, sometimes in a family, and frequently on the international level.
- I mean, these appalling pictures from Aleppo that we've seen in the last weeks. see, show that the, not everything is good. The point is that God, that what God will do is that in the end, all of these things as he leads us to glory will be seen to have been part of his purpose.

We won't necessarily, perhaps, we won't at all see in this life the reason for many of the bad things that happen. And we mustn't sentimentalize this verse and say, oh, everything, everything's going to turn out just well.

That is true. That's the good news. But the bad news, if you like, is that it may not happen until eternity. It will certainly happen, but it may not happen in this life.

[9 : 18] What Paul is talking about is all that God does leads to his eventual glory and to the eternal salvation of his people. And indeed, as we saw two weeks ago, to the whole renewing of the, of created order.

So, God works for good. And notice, it says, to those who love God. And that's so important. That doesn't mean, that does not mean that everything works out well for everybody.

It doesn't even mean that those who love God will find life to be easy. We know that's not true. But it does mean that the sufferings, the tragedies, the disappointments, the heartbreaks, will one day be seen to have been part of the journey that brings us to glory.

And God's plan of salvation, these magnificent verses, 29 to 30, you could do a whole series on each of these, spending at least a week on each of these words, these great salvation words.

This is sometimes called the golden chain. They're from foreknowing to glorification. That's all right, but it's rather mechanical.

[10 : 33] It almost suggests that this is a kind of mechanical process. God is the kind of celestial watchmaker, the kind of celestial, the kind of celestial machine maker who works these things out mechanically.

This has got to be seen in the context of the whole letter, particularly the key verses in chapter 1, 16 to 17. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

And that's the important thing. The question we need to ask is not, am I one of the elect, but will I believe? That's the question we need to ask. And that's the practicality of this chapter.

No point in saying, I don't know if I'm one of the elect. The point is, will I believe the gospel? And let's just have a quick glance at these words. Whom he foreknew.

Foreknew means beginning a relationship, not just that in eternity he looked forward and saw the people who would respond, but he was already initiating that relationship.

[11 : 39] Whom he foreknew, he also predestined. That's predestined, set in motion, if you like, the chain of events that would bring his people to glory.

And he called them, usually by the preaching of the gospel. In fact, by the preaching of the gospel, the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

And those he also justified. When I was a boy, I used to be told, justified means just as if I had never sinned. Now you think that was awfully clever.

It's actually not good enough, is it? That just puts us back in Eden with the possibility of it going wrong again. Justified means before we stand on the last day before the Lord, we've already been given a favorable verdict.

That's what it means. The verdict in the present, anticipating the verdict of the future. And whom he justified, he also glorified.

[12 : 43] Notice that. Notice the tense there. Glorified is in the past tense as well. It's as certain, in other words, as the others. And the reason it's certain is because of the indwelling spirit, which has been the underlying theme of this chapter.

So, the indwelling spirit is the guarantee. God's sovereign will, planned in eternity, but carried out in space and time, if you like, in the messy and complicated lives that we live.

That's what Paul is saying. And then he goes on to talk about God's unconquerable love in verses 31 to 29, his great peroration.

What shall we say then to these things? Those of you who know this letter will know that Paul often adopts the law court language here. He's the counsel, if you like, making his summing up speech.

What then? What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? That doesn't mean if God is for us, there'll be nobody against us.

[13 : 53] After all, look at the whole list of things that he mentions here, the whole list of people, the whole list of opposition and our own weaknesses. What it means is if God is for us, who can be effective against us?

Who matters? If the opposition is hopelessly outgunned, we face many, many enemies inside and outside.

And we'll face many more on our journey. But Paul is saying, God is for us. Developing really of the great Old Testament affirmation, God is with us, the Emmanuel.

And God is not just with us, God is for us. And in particular, Paul singles out three areas where there is particular opposition.

Three aspects of our lives where we certainly need to know that God is for us. And first of all, our sins in verses 32 to 34.

[14 : 55] He who did not spare his own son. I'm sure Paul is thinking here of the story in Genesis 22 of Abraham not sparing his son Isaac.

Indeed, in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the same verb is used as is used here. His own son took our sins. If God but gave, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things.

He took our sins. That's been the subject of the letter up to now, hasn't it? Forgiven our sins, he's taken our sins, and he has justified us. But also, it means that he speaks for us in the court of heaven.

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? Now, there's an obvious answer to that. Satan can, Satan does, and Satan will, the accuser of the, the accuser of God's people.

And unless you're a very unusual person, you'll find that others do that as well. And let's be honest, we often do that with our fellow Christians as well. We often bring accusations against God's elect.

[16 : 11] Just imagine, you are standing in the court of heaven, and all your sins are brought into the open.

And somebody says, what on earth are you doing there? Is Bob Fylder? I know lots of things about him that would, anybody here does, you don't know half, but I know all sorts of things about him that should prevent him being there.

But you see, the answer is not to be made by you or by me. The answer is made by the advocate, Christ Jesus himself. She is here, he is here, because I have forgiven them, because they are justified.

You see, there's nothing else that will give us assurance. There's not enough to say we're trying our best and so on. When we face our fierce, John Newton says in his hymn, be thou my shield and hiding place, but sheltered by thy side, I may my fierce accuser face and tell him.

Tell him what? Tell him, I tried very hard. Tell him, lay off a bit. No, tell him, you have died. It will be there because Jesus has died and risen again.

[17 : 30] So our sins are covered. That's why Wesley is able to sing, Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own. See, that's not an arrogant.

If he simply said, Bold I approach the eternal throne, that would have been very arrogant, but he doesn't. He says, claim the crown through Christ my own. So our sins and then our troubles, the dangers and hardships of life in verses 35 to 36.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Now these are things, the list here, read 2 Corinthians 11, Paul himself experienced many of these and at the time of writing this letter still had many more to experience tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword.

And he says, as it is written, quoting from Psalm 44, this has been the experience of God's people throughout the ages, right from the very beginning. Yeah, there are trials we experience because we are human.

We experience all the trials that everybody experiences and there are also trials, of course, experienced because we are Christian. And Paul says, in all these things we are more than conquerors.

[18 : 51] Wonderful phrase, I think, goes back, I think, to the Geneva Bible. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. And that brings us to the third thing, our enemies, verses 36, that really brings us to the third thing, our sins, our troubles, and our enemies.

We are more than conquerors. Not we are more than conquerors because of our faithfulness and courage, which is not to say that faithfulness and courage don't matter.

Faithfulness and courage are a response to the grace of God in Christ. But ultimately, because of God's love proved in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, I am sure that neither death nor life.

Now, facing death is harsh. As we know, facing life is often harsh as well. And death and life, this is the kind of way which very often the Old Testament speaks, putting opposites together to give the whole picture.

Any experience from life's first cry to final breath is included in that. They're like Psalm 121, and the Lord will keep your going out and your coming in.

[20 : 07] Not just leaving your house and returning in the evening, but your coming into the world and your leaving from it. So the whole, every earthly experience, including death itself, is covered by this.

And then the whole, and then the spiritual world, angels nor rulers. Rulers here probably, since it's paired with angels, probably means the spirit powers, the powers of darkness, but obviously includes, by extension, the Romans as well.

There is no power in the universe that can prevent God's purpose, that can defeat his love. and then, nor things present, nor things to come.

The whole of time, if you like. Nothing that's happened in the past, nothing that is happening, nothing that can happen, is going to prevent this purpose being fulfilled.

And, height, nor depth. The whole, the whole of space, if you like, once again, you know, the heavens, the earth, and the whole of the created order.

[21 : 23] David has said in Psalm 139, where can I flee from your spirit? If I go to heaven, you are there. If I make my bed and chill, you are there. And, in case there's anything left out, though it's impossible to imagine anything left out of that comprehensive list, nor anything else in all creation, remember, the basic truth about God is that he is the creator, which means that nothing in creation, past, present, or to come, can ever thwart his purpose.

Jesus is Lord, which means he is going to have the last word. And the gospel is ultimately one of full salvation. These things threaten us.

These things cause us fear. And we'll continue to do so during our earthly lives. But, the gospel is a gospel of full salvation.

And nothing can separate us from the love of God. Now, that's one or two things as we close. This chapter is realistic. It's, our sins, our weaknesses, our enemies will continue to plague us.

But, new life is guaranteed by the indwelling spirit. Verse 1, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

[22 : 55] Although the law of sin and death still exist while we are in this world. So, let's not make unrealistic claims. I think I said in the first talk, we must not get into the silly idea that we move from the defeat and struggle of chapter 7 to the light and victory of chapter 8.

Chapter 7 is the normal Christian life. Struggling with sin, struggling with self, struggling with Satan. But, the other truth about the Christian life is the indwelling spirit and the indwelling spirit is stronger than self and sin and Satan.

And, how do we know these things are going to happen? We know they're going to happen because of two things about Jesus that have already happened. He died and he rose again.

We believe that because Jesus died and rose again. And Paul so often uses that when, and indeed the New Testament writers use that regularly when they talk about the future.

It's based on events that have already happened. The new creation will be far more glorious than the old as we looked at the other week. So, the chapter has enormous practical implications.

[24 : 09] implication, remember, a salutary warning that life is struggle and will continue to be struggle. There will never be a time in this life when the struggle is not raging, although God in his graciousness often gives us times when the pressure is off.

And I think that's very important to remember and to thank him for it. But, we mustn't, we mustn't rely on, we must neither rely on these, nor become depressed when the troublesome time comes.

And, the main implication surely is that the spirit in us is going to lead us to the destination.

It's almost as if God says, Father, I've placed my spirit in this child of yours to bring her, to bring him to glory. There's a long way to go, a lot of struggles ahead, but we're going to make it.

That seems to me ultimately what this chapter is saying. And therefore, since our path to glory cannot be thwarted, then Paul is saying live now in the light of then.

[25 : 24] Live now in the light of what we shall be and indeed of what the restored creation will be. Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, this is a glorious chapter, glorious hope, and of course, already, no doubt, thoughts are filling our minds about failures, sins, troubles, and so on.

But we pray, Lord, that we become increasingly conscious of the power of your spirit in our lives. not in the sense of sensational visions or earth-shattering experiences, but in the daily grind of our livings, making us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ and bringing us to glory so that we may increasingly proclaim the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Amen. Amen.