

The Epistle to the Romans - Doctrinal 4 **The Spirit's Assurance - conquerors**

[English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Today, we complete our study of the doctrinal section of Paul's letter to the Romans; and our talks on ch.8 about the Spirit of God by considering vv.28-39. I'll divide today's study into two parts:

1. vv.28-30: the certainty of Glory - God's purpose for us.
2. vv.31-39: the celebration of God's love towards us.

The certainty of Glory - God's purpose for us.

Let's read vv.28-30 from the ESV:

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those who 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.”

Whereas Paul says in v.26, “We do not know what to pray for as we ought”, v.28 opens with the emphatic assurance, “But we do know!” (Darby). This absolute knowledge¹ is ours by faith in the God we love. His Spirit gives us spiritual insight into His purpose for us:

“What God has prepared for those who love him...[he] has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Unbelievers may complain, grumble, protest, even vehemently object to the way life adversely, or tragically, affects them or their loved ones. But believers know that God is for them and that He combines every experience for their total good. That is, all these are working together, now, in our world of constant travail. That doesn't mean believers necessarily understand it at the time, but they accept it by faith. That's because they're “called according to his purpose” and they live, to quote W. G. Scroggie, “in daily trustful fellowship with God, through Christ, by the Spirit. [...] The true lover of God finds that there is a compensation for every [difficulty or disaster].”²

Vv.29-30 give the reasons for such confidence in God's providential control of our lives. From His standpoint in eternity, He's already completed the five parts of His divinely planned purpose: He has predestined, conformed, called, justified and glorified those whom He foreknew He could make suitable to fulfil His purpose. He did so in eternity past, operating outside of the past, present and future of human history. That means nothing of space and time can thwart His purpose. Knowing what He wanted to achieve, caused and enabled Him to identify believers for the blessing of predestination - the special blessing of being conformed to the image of His own Son

in heaven. Predestined simply means that He marked out that blessing for us before we existed and before He created the universe. His foreknowledge meant He knew who He had to predestine. But He called us in time by means of the preaching of the gospel. Upon believing, every believer discovers the secret that he/she has been ordained/appointed to eternal life (Acts 13:48). And the calling of God cannot, and does not, fail (Romans 11:29). This is what God has chosen to do and so He will do it. I continue with the fact that believers have been justified by God. That is, He pronounces believers to be righteous. Paul explains this tremendous truth in chs.3-5 and I'll say more about it when I comment upon v.33. Believers experience the call of God and are justified by Him when they hear then believe the gospel and are saved during the day of grace. But v.30 finishes with the fact that they're already glorified, which in reality, they'll experience at the Rapture. God's purpose will be accomplished when all believers are conformed to the image of His Son in heaven, which is the vital truth of these verses. That means we'll have spiritual bodies fashioned like Christ's to be permanently like Him:

“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil.3:20-21).

J. N. Darby's hymn captures the appropriate worshipful response to such a wonderful prospect:

And is it so? we shall be like Thy Son!
Is this the grace which He for us has won?
Father of glory, thought beyond all thought,
In glory, to His own blest likeness brought.

Nor we alone, Thy loved ones all, complete
In glory round Thee there with joy shall meet,
All like Thee, for Thy glory like Thee, Lord,
Object supreme of all, by all adored.³

God's will is for His Son to occupy the highest place in heaven. This is the reason for our predestination and it's the central issue of God's purpose – to glorify His Son as the Firstborn among His chosen people. As Firstborn, He's the One who's supreme and who takes the highest rank in heaven, eternally (cp. Col.1:18).⁴ However, we can, indeed must, give Him that place in our lives now by ensuring we morally reflect His character by our lifestyle.

The celebration of God's love towards us

For the celebration of God's love towards us, let's now read vv.31-39:

“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? 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.”

With the question, "What then shall we say to these things?", Paul changes from teaching gospel truths to exulting in them. By "these things" he means the doctrine of God's purpose we've just considered in vv.28-30 of glory with Christ in heaven; but also, all the gospel truths presented chs.1-8. In concluding his teaching on the universal condemnation of mankind, Paul stated that every mouth was stopped and the whole world was accountable to God (3:19). But now, our mouths are open, and our tongues are set free to boast in these gospel blessings! So, vv.31-39 are a song in which the gospel truths are celebrated by Paul. He joys in their blessed reality. In doing so, he highlights the believer's eternal security with a series of mainly rhetorical questions.

The first question asked is, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (v.31). Christians do experience hostile opposition to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ but there's none who can put forward a valid counterargument to it. Perhaps I could paraphrase v.31:

"The gospel explains how God is for us. Who, or what, can possibly take away our blessings of sins forgiven and the hope of heaven?"

In ch.5, Paul stated that formerly we were defiantly against God. We were:

- ungodly, we did not care about His claims (v.6);
- sinners, we transgressed His laws (v.8);
- and His enemies, we rebelled against Him and we hated Him (v.10).

But now that we're reconciled to Him, there are no barriers between us and God. He's nothing outstanding against us. He's now for us, not against us! We have seen in v.28 that every opponent of ours, and each adversity we experience, He uses for our ultimate good.

The second question follows in v.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?" Through the gospel, we've come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. As to His nature, God is love (1 John 4:16). His love has flooded our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us (Romans 5:5). From John 3:14-16, we know He loved us to such an extent that He gave His best - His only Son, who He loves, to die upon the cross. He did not spare Him from sacrifice, He delivered Him up to suffering and death for us. And here in v.32 we've the Spirit's assurance that He and His Son will freely give us every blessing from His riches in glory! But the mention of "give us all things" would remind us of how the things in v.28 are also turned into blessings. There's not a hint of doubt in Paul's mind. Rather we boast in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we've received the reconciliation (5:10-11).

Paul's third rhetorical question is even more of a direct challenge: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" No one can make any valid accusation when "It is God who justifies." Here in v.33, believers are described as "God's elect" - those He sovereignly chose, or picked out, in eternity past so that He can fulfil His purpose for His Son. His foreknowledge was the source of this choice. "Elect...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:1-2), we were "chosen in [Christ] before the foundation of the world" (Eph.1:4, KJV). Therefore, we can now add election to 'the divine chain of blessings' of vv.28-30 and state that those God elected, He predestined, He conformed, He called, He justified, and He glorified.

The justification of believers is an important truth of the gospel. It's one of the many things that God has graciously given us: we're "justified...by His grace" (3:24, ESV). The basis of our justification is the blood of Christ (5:9) and faith is the means, or the instrument of justification, by which righteousness is obtained. "[A person] is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (3:28). Believers have placed their faith in God, who delivered up His son for our trespasses and raised Him again from the dead for our justification (4:24). Negatively, justification clears us of

every charge that a holy God can righteously lay against us. Positively, God has pronounced that we have a fully righteous standing before Him in Christ Jesus (8:1).

In v.34, the fourth question, “Who is to condemn?” flows out of the end statement of v.33 that “It is God who justifies.” The grand finale of the doctrinal section of Romans is: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). Believers have been justified from the penalty of their sins (3:21-31) and from the power of sin, which rules mankind (6:7, footnote). The rest of v.34 essentially states that we’re eternally secure “in Christ Jesus” because He’s in the place of highest authority and power – at God’s right hand in heaven. There He intercedes for us and represents us before God. The gospel is much more than just having our sins forgiven, great as that is. It’s that we’ve been justified by His blood, and that we’ll be saved from the wrath of God. And now that we’re reconciled to God by the One who died and rose again, we’re being saved by His endless life. Hebrews presents our great high priest’s intercession for us:

- “We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God... For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).
- “Because he continues for ever...he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:24-25).
- “Christ has entered...into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Hebrews 9:24).

In Romans 8:27, we’re told that the Spirit intercedes for us so that our prayers are adjusted to be in harmony with God’s will. So we can conclude this section by saying that the clause “God is for us” in v.31 means all three persons of the Godhead are involved: Father, Son and Holy Spirit! We boast in the triune God, who’s provided so great a salvation (see 5:9-11).

But v.35 directs us to consider and celebrate the assurance that there’s no separation from the everlasting love of our Saviour, with the question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (v.35a). Paul identifies seven potentially hostile menacing powers and asks if any of these is able to break the bond of Christ’s love: “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (v.35b). These were not imagined hostilities but those that he’d actually encountered and endured throughout his missionary service. They’re expanded upon in 2 Corinthians. Things such as afflictions, calamities, hardships, labours, extreme weakness and utter poverty, sorrows; being dishonoured, slandered, stoned, insulted and persecuted; being shipwrecked and adrift at sea; often experiencing cold and exposure, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst; being treated as an impostor or a nobody, caught up in riots and punished as a criminal with many severe beatings and imprisonments; as well as his daily anxiety for all the churches (see 6:4-10; 11:23-28 & 12:10). Then there was the thorn in the flesh, which rendered him weak of natural strength to do his ministry (12:7-9). All these things he recognised were for Christ’s name’s sake and were in accord with the experiences of the godly in Ps.44:22, quoted in Romans 8:36. Answering his own question, in v.37 Paul replies emphatically, “No!” He boasts that believers are super-conquerors in all these things through Christ, our great Lover. ‘Super-conquerors’ is a special word, which Paul makes up to describe the battle success over all adverse things and situations we face as believers. The Spirit gives us this assurance that we won’t somehow scrape through and win by just a hair’s breadth. No! The victory cry is that “we are more than conquerors through Christ who has loved us.” Elsewhere Paul expresses the paradoxes: “On every side pressed hard, but not hemmed in. Without a way but not without a [way out]. Pursued but not abandoned. Thrown down but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, The Emphasised Bible, Rotherham). So we must conclude that the all things of v.28, which God uses to work for our good, are those very things listed in v.35; whilst the all things of v.32, which He freely gives us, are the

blessings that are heaped upon us.

In vv.38-39, Paul climaxes this triumphant song and gives his firm conviction of his answer to the question: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v.35a). He explores various adversaries to Christian believers. He's certain that: The extremes of being (in life or in death) can't break the love-bond between us and Christ. Neither can angels nor rulers, that is, other superhuman beings. Nor can things of time, either in the present day or those in the future of our lives here upon earth. Nor can the combined attacks of all evil spiritual powers, the whole host of the devil's forces in the heavenly spheres, those cosmic powers over the present darkness, with whom we constantly wrestle (see Ephesians 6:10-13). Nor can anything to do with space, either its immense height or its unfathomable depth. Then, to ensure that he hasn't omitted anything, Paul adds that nothing else in all creation, whatever it is, or wherever it is, has any capability of severing us from the love of God, which is resident in Christ Jesus our Lord. To which we must hastily add our resounding, "Amen"!

Our studies of the doctrine of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in Romans conclude then with this great blessing we have in Him - that we're eternally secure in the love of God. Paul's gospel truths have brought us:

- from condemnation to justification (1:16 – 5:11).
- from justification to sanctification (5:12 – 8:4).
- from sanctification to predestination (8:5-29).
- from predestination to glorification (8:30).

Finally, a summary of ch.8 clearly highlights the glorification of believers. (First, two promises of glory.)

- vv.1-11: Glory! Our mortal bodies will be made alive by the Spirit at the Rapture.
- vv.12-17: Glory! Our joint heirship with Christ, who inherits all things.
- vv.18-23: The expectation of glory! The redemption of our bodies and our subsequent manifestation will result in the deliverance of the whole creation. vv.24-30: The certainty of glory - to be like Christ in every way – in heaven!
- vv.31-39: Glorification is celebrated now and includes these truths:
 - vv.1-4: No condemnation.
 - vv.5-17: No obligation to the flesh.
 - vv.18-30: No frustration of God's purpose.
 - vv.31-32: No violation of God's love.
 - vv.33-34: No accusation against God's elect, as well as,
 - vv.35-39: No separation of God's elect from His eternal love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk, T1156 on Romans 8:28-39, The Spirit's Assurance – conquerors.

Footnotes

1. *The New Testament, An Expanded translation*, K. S. Wuest, Eerdmans Publishing company, Michigan.
2. *Salvation and Behaviour*, W. Graham Scroggie, Pickering & Inglis Ltd, London.
3. No.247, *Psalms, Hymns & Spiritual Songs*, Scripture Truth Publications, Crewe.

4. See Ps.89:27 - Christ will occupy the highest rank upon earth during the Millennium as King of Kings and Lord of lords.

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