

"IF GOD BE FOR US"

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"
Romans 8:31.

We cannot help wondering what the future holds in store for us. There is a cartoon entitled, A Young Man Looks at the Future; but all he is staring at is a big question-mark. It is all that any of us can see. There never was a time when the outlook was more uncertain. Everything seems to depend on factors of which we are in doubt. However, there is one possibility which few people explore, but on which everything depends. Paul found himself looking into a future that was as full of menace and uncertainty as our own. But he did not look for confidence and hope to any of the things that many people rest on now, good health, or favorable conditions, or a bit of good luck. He did not bank on any of these things. What he rested on was the assurance that God was with him and with all who trust in Him. It was God's unswerving purpose of love to him and to all mankind on which he took his stand as he surveyed the menacing future and said, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

These questions face us every day. Things happen to us and we make some response to them. We take up some attitude towards them. Some of them we resent; some we welcome; some we resist; some impress us; some awaken in us feelings of joy and exhilaration. It is a very useful thing occasionally to look back through a day with all its events, noting how we have met them.

"What shall we say then to these things?" Is a very important question because the effect they have upon us, and the attitude we take to them registers itself withing, making us what we are. It also produces an effect on the world in which we live. The real difference between two people is not in what happens to them, whether they are rich or poor, whether they are fortunate or unfortunate, whether they have sorrow to meet or life flows on like a sunlit stream that is never ruffled.

It is all in the way in which they react to these things. Put one man in prison unjustly and he eats out his heart in resentful until his soul becomes bitter and dark. But put Paul or John Bunyan there, and the solitude becomes a spur to his imagination, and an immortal book is born. Sorrow makes one man hard; it makes another equally soft and tender. One who has suffered will tell of how unjust the world is; another will tell you how in his suffering he came to know the comforts of God as he had never known them when life was undimmed by a tear.

It all really depends on the response which each one makes to what meets him, and that response is in his own hands. Most people forget this. We become so accustomed to meeting things in certain ways that it does not occur to us that there will be a better way. There is a story of a man who was paralyzed, hopelessly crippled, an object of pity to all who met him. Someone once remarked to him sympathetically, "How your afflictions must color your life!" "Yes!", he replied, but I choose the colors."

"What then shall we say to these things?" What shall we say to the sorrow that has invaded our homes? What shall we say to the big disappointment that has dashed some hope to the ground? Some door has closed, perhaps; some opportunity has passed by. What shall we say to the closed door? What shall we say to the disagreeable task? Are we going to make these things a stimulus and a challenge, or are we going to let them become an irritant, or drive us to despair or to self-pity?

What did Paul say? His first reflection was, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" His first thought was to assure himself that because God was for him, everything in this clash between him and circumstances had possibilities of good. If we meet life in this confidence we shall find in it a transforming secret.

As we think of the uncertainties of the future we are reminded that this year may be a time of prosperity, of trial, or of death. Philip Henry, a father of Matthew Henry, the great commentator, frequently prayed this prayer, "Fit us to leave or to be left." While there are many things that are uncertain about the future, let us remember that this year will be a time of opportunity -- opportunities for testing character and winning souls, and a time of duties. We shall need both grace and guidance. Paul's stirring words ring with confidence and victory. For him, as for us who know God's love, it is not in question that God is for us. It is a conviction. If God be for us, what follows?

I. His Purpose Will Be Fulfilled.

The efforts we make in obedience to Him will not finally be defeated. Some of them seem mere dreams at the moment and the results meager and disappointing. But if God be for us, our dreams will one day become realities. The results of our work may be long in coming and may be reaped by other hands, but they will come and they will be worth waiting for.

II. He Will Answer Our Perplexities.

Life is very perplexing, especially to ordinary people. The senseless cruelties of life look very dark against the background of faith in the love of God. It is hard to see how any divine purpose can be achieved by the calamities of nature or the appalling suffering of innocent people, involved in the crimes of others.

III. We Can Stand Up To Anything.

If God be for us, we can meet anything and find the needful courage, wisdom, love, and cheerfulness. Our trouble is that we do too much thinking about life and what is happening, and too little thinking about God. We should give more time and thought to the possibilities that are open to us if God is with us and for us. All sorts of things are hidden in the shadows, but still there is God. There is also His love and His blessed help. Look at the future with steady eyes for if God is with you and for you there is nothing to fear. He "is able to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

1. God is for us electively in the purposes of His grace.

That is the point of verse 29. Thus in a vast stretch of thought are we carried back to mystic beginnings, back of Calvary with its shadows and anguish, back of Bethlehem with its cradle song, back of Sinai with its thunder-toned pronouncements of law, back of the garden of Eden with its sinless symphony of physical beauty and moral purity, back of creation's wonder chorus when the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy, back there in the counsels of the trinity, we were given a place in the eternal purpose of God.

(1) You have a place in that purpose.

You are dear to God. You mean something to Him.

- (2) You are elected to the blessing or blessedness of being "conformed to the image of His Son."

2. God is for us efficaciously in the cross of His Son.

What God has purposed in eternity He has provided for in time in the incarnation and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. The vicarious sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross is the central fact in the whole revelation and realization of God's redemptive purpose. To us all preceding ages point the way; from it all succeeding ages take their rise. He was delivered up for us all. Shall He not forgive us our sins? "Whom He called, them He also justified." Shall He not confer upon us who are by nature aliens and by choice rebels, the title of sons of God? Verses 15-16. And would not time fail us to tell of all those divine ministries and human benefits that flow down to us in endless stream from that crimson Fountain-head at Calvary? God want His limit at "The Old Rugged Cross." He gave us His best. "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly."

3. God is for us encouragingly in the mysteries of His providence. Verse 28.

Mark the certainty of it. "We know" is characteristically the language of Christian conviction. But do not fail to mark the limitation of it: "to them that love God. to them who are the called according to His purpose."

4. God is for us eternally in the fellowship of His love.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" is the daring defiance that Paul lifts against all comers. He feels himself in the warm embrace of the love that will not let him go, a love for which He counts all things but loss and holds life itself as a consecrated forfeit to that infinite affection. Read the rest of the chapter.

The evidence is in. The argument is finished. God is for us -- has been for us through the eternity that stretches back of us, and wants to be for us throughout the eternity that rolls ahead of us. The Divine position has been taken and announced. Who is on the Lord's side?