

"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.

The last of Romans eight is one of the best-known and best-loved passages of Scripture. It holds a place in our minds and hearts alongside Psalm 23 and John 14. The opening words of our text suggest a man facing the challenge of life. "What shall we then say to these things?" To express it another way, "What follows from all this?" Paul is referring to what he has been saying in the preceding chapters. He is summarizing the conclusions that follow from the gospel of the grace of God. But the picture of a man confronting the world remains. Paul was writing to people who, like himself, were facing a grim and threatening situation. The world also challenges us with its changes. The future is full of menacing possibilities. What can we say to these things?

We cannot help wondering what the future holds in store for us. There appeared a cartoon entitled, "A Young Man Looks At The Future;" but all that he was staring at was a big question-mark. That is all 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, too, found himself looking into a future that was full of menace and uncertainty. But he did not look for confidence and hope to many of the things that most people rest on today, such as good health or favorable conditions or even good luck. What he rested on was the assurance that God was with him and with all who trust in Him. As he surveyed the menacing future, he took his stand on God's unswerving purpose of love for him and for all mankind, 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. There are things that are for us, and there are things that are against us. 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 depress us; and some awaken in us feelings of joy and exhilaration. It is profitable to look back over the events of the day, and note how we have met them.

"What shall we then say to these things?" This is a very important question, because the effect they have upon us, and the attitude we take toward them registers itself within, 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 solitude until his soul becomes bitter. But put Paul, or John Bunyan, there, and the solitude becomes a spur to his imagination, and an immortal book is produced. Sorrow makes one man hard; whereas, it makes another equally soft and tender. One who has suffered will tell you 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 up to him. Most people forget this. We get accustomed to meeting things in certain ways, and it does not occur to us that there may be a better way to meet them. A certain paralytic, who was crippled hopelessly, was an object of pity to all who met him. Someone once remarked sympathetically to him, "How your affliction must color your life!" "Yes!", he replied, "but I choose the colors."

"What shall we then say to these things?" 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? What shall we say to the sorrow that has come to us? 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 self-pity, or perhaps despair?

There are things that are for us, and there are things that are against us. The question, "What shall we then say to these things?", implies the existence of a combined and powerful hostility to the Christian. To establish this fact does not require a lot of proof. God's Word declares it, observation confirms it, and experience demonstrates it. Who is against the Christian?

1. The world.

This world is like a field covered with brambles, thorns, and thistles, and as the Christian goes through it, he is continually in danger of rending his garments or cutting his feet. Since every Christian must march through the territory of the enemy, Christ says, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." When is a Christian out of danger? Never. If he is prosperous, then he is apt to become proud or carnally secure; if adversities press upon him, then he is apt to murmur and to doubt. The world is a dangerous assailant if we are left alone in the conflict, but not so when God is for us.

2. The flesh.

We would do well to pray the prayer of Augustine who said, "Lord, deliver me from my worst enemy that wicked man myself."

3. The devil.

Little does any Christian know what temptations Satan is plotting and planning for him even now. This crafty enemy understands human nature. For thousands of years he has been tempting men, and he is certainly a master at the business. He knows exactly how to cover up the hook with the bait. For every Christian he has his lure and his trap. He is powerful, but not almighty.

As Paul thought of the opposition which he encountered from the world, the flesh, and the devil, he reflected and was encouraged greatly when he realized the fact that God was for him. Therefore, he assured himself that, because God was for him, everything in this clash between him and his circumstances had possibilities of good. If we, who are God's children, will meet life in this confidence, we shall discover its transforming secret. Not knowing whether the future will be a

time of great blessing, of trial, or of death, we may well pray with Philip Henry, the father of Matthew Henry, who wrote the great commentaries, "Fit us to leave or to be left." While there are many things that are uncertain about the future, it will certainly afford opportunities for testing character and performing duties. For this we shall need both grace and guidance. For those of us who know the Lord in the forgiveness of sins, it is truly wonderful to know that God is for us. According to the verses which precede our text, God is for us, because He has predestinated us; He is for us, because He hath called us; He is for us, because He hath justified us; and He is for us because He has promised to glorify us.

God the Father is for us, His children. He hath chosen us, and will not cast us away. He has adopted us into His family, and will never discard us. He hath given us eternal life, which will never be taken from us. He has been for us in the great ordering of providence; all things have worked together for good for us until now. God has wrought wondrously on our behalf.

God the Son is for us. He carried the heavy cross on His shoulder for us. While He was nailed to the cross the blood dripped from His head, His hands and His feet for us.

God the Holy Spirit is for us. He leads us into the truth, convicts us of our sins, quickens us, persuades us to accept Christ as our Saviour, seals us when we are regenerated, and empowers us for service.

"If God be for us," and He is, what follows?

I. His purpose will be fulfilled.

God wants us to work out His purpose. That is our real business here and should be our main concern. We should be vitally concerned about filling the place in His purpose to which He calls us. That was what Paul was anxious to do. He was not afraid of suffering or poverty or even death. He did not ask for any assurance that he would be protected from the ills of life or that he would find shelter from difficulties. He did not want to fail, or to lose heart in the struggle, or cease to be loyal to God.

Our efforts for God, to Whom we are obedient, will not be defeated. Some of them may seem mere dreams at the moment, and the results may be meager and disappointing. But if God be for us, one day our dreams will become realities. The results may be long in coming and may be reaped by other hands, but they will come in due time.

II. He will answer our perplexities.

Life is very perplexing, and especially to ordinary people. Sometimes it is even more perplexing to those who believe that God is for us. 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 served or achieved by the calamities of nature, or the appalling suffering of innocent people, involved in the crimes of others.

Nobody is free from material concerns, not even those who have all they need. It is our own mishandling of the gifts of God that makes material anxiety

bite so sharply into the hearts of many people. But if we are Christians, our real concerns will be spiritual. They will not be centered in our comfort, but in our character; not in our earthly security, but in our inner peace.

A Christian man will be concerned with the health of his children and with their material success; he will be much more concerned about their character, their ability to stand up to temptation, and to difficulty and to serve their fellows.

III. We can stand up to anything.

If God is for us, then we need not fear. His arm is not weak. His knowledge is not limited. His vision is not dimmed. If God is for us, we can meet anything and find the needful courage, wisdom, love and cheerfulness. When the strains of life come, adequate resources will be made available to us. He will enable us to stand up to the insidious temptations of pleasure, money, and power. He will make it possible for us to have love enough to meet hate, opposition, and injustice.

Our trouble is that we do too much thinking about life and about what is happening, and too little thinking about God. We should give more thought and time 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. His wonderful love and His blessed help are ours for the taking. Look at the future with steady eyes for, if God is for you and with you, there is nothing to fear. He is able to supply all your needs.

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

That is the point of verse twenty-nine which says: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren." Thus in a vast stretch of thought we are carried back to the counsels of the trinity when we were given a place in the eternal purpose of God. Christian friend, you have a place in that purpose. You are dear to God. You mean something to Him. You were elected to the blessing and the blessedness of being "conformed to the image of his Son."

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

What God purposed in eternity He has provided in time in the incarnation and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was delivered up for us all. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" God went His limit at "The Old Rugged Cross." He gave us His best there. Blessings have flown down from Calvary in an endless stream. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

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

Mark the certainty of it: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." But 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. Paul felt himself in the warm embrace of the love that would not let him go, a love for which he counted all things but loss, and held life itself as a dedicated forfeit to that infinite affection. He said: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So, the evidence is in, the argument is finished, and the verdict is rendered. God is for us, God has been for us through the eternity that stretches behind us, and He is going to be for us through the eternity that rolls ahead of us. The divine position has been taken and announced. Who is going to be on the Lord's side?