

The neighborhood where I grew up... included a school yard that was almost across the street from my house... my older cousins (Byron and Stewart)... my older brother (Harry)... and several other guys who were a year (or older) than me... from all around the block. Nearly every weekend we would gather in the school yard of Del Vista school to play either football or baseball (depending on what time of year it was.)

I look back now... and see how nearly every one of these OTHER guys became outstanding High School and college players on championship teams. (These were some remarkable athletes.) Me...? ... I was the slow kid who dropped nearly every fly ball that was hit to me in baseball... and who was told inside the huddle of every football skirmish – *“Jimmy... you just block... and try to keep a defender from disturbing our wonderful effort... We will do all the running and passing... and moving the ball up field... and scoring.”*

But nothing was more humiliating... than the selecting of teams... before every game. Sometimes I would go as high as the 11th player to be picked... (if we had 12 kids that day.) But usually I was number 12. The picking of team members would go back and forth... with team captains showing great enthusiasm – until the 11th or 12th pick. I never got to hear: *“Jimmy! I pick Jimmy. I want him to play on my team. Yo... Jimmy... common over! Let’s do this!”*

But I learned to accept my position on the block... and I still had fun.

Today... I want to talk to you about being picked very early... and with great enthusiasm. [P A U S E] ... Have you ever thought about the fact... that **YOU** are so valuable to God... that you are an immediate and primary

pick for His team... and that He does it with such eagerness... that you might have a hard time believing that it is true...? ... We have a passage of Scripture today... that I can't wait to show you!

We have come to a section of Romans... in our study through this book... where we have been seeing God's enthusiasm in choosing you and I (if you are a believer.) It is tremendously encouraging. And today... it reaches such a crescendo – that it leads me to say what I did a moment ago. (*Some of you may have a difficult time accepting it as fact.*) The Apostle Paul (it seems) anticipated that we would have this struggle... and so he writes a few things in order to help us overcome our doubt.

Do you ever feel that you are not good enough... or important enough to be on God's team...? Has it ever seemed to you that the Biblical assurance which says – "If God is for us... who can be against us"... is a verse for other believers – but NOT you?

If you have ever felt this way... you are not alone! What a passage (for you) that we come to today... Because it is intended to completely annihilate that erroneous conclusion.

While I studied our passage this week... I kept envisioning the time (a few years back) when a friend (from our church) and I ... joined a group of men from our fellowshiping church in Prineville... and climbed the back side of South Sister. It was such a grueling – but at the same time – an exhilarating experience. (*Because of one of the commentators that I read... it made me compare that excursion... to our passage.*)

Since we began studying the Book of Romans... we have made our way up the rather steep trail of doctrine... in the first half of this letter. All the way

up... as I climbed the back side of South Sister... I would stop every now and then... and look back at the tremendous scenery... looking down on various lakes along Cascade Lakes Highway... and even looking **DOWN** on Mt. Bachelor! It was a perspective of reality that I never understood before.

Today... we have reached the peak (the summit) of Romans. We are able to sit and look out over the top... and experience the glory. From here... we can even gain a perspective for where we will go in... the last half of the book.

The opening phrase of our passage today asks... "*What shall we say then to these things?*" Here we are – at the top – and our tour guide (the Apostle Paul) says to us "*So... what do you think?*"

At the trail head (back at the base of the mountain... which was the Green Lakes / Devil's Lake parking lot)... we started our journey tromping through the doctrine of the depravity of man. We drudged through an understanding of how deserving – we all are – of God's full wrath. (All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.) We got through that... with an appreciation – but not admiring (yet) what we were seeing.

But eventually we came to such meadows as Romans 5:8

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We saw several cascading falls (streaming down the mountainside) of God never-ending grace toward us. ... As we got closer to the top... breathtaking scenery came faster and faster (around every corner.) We passed through regions like Romans 8:1

Romans 8:1 (ESV)

¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Right after... we walked through Romans 8:26 territory...

Romans 8:26 (ESV)

²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

And wasn't Romans 8:28 a most spectacular view...?

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

So... here we are today... sitting on a ledge at the top. We are looking out at the valleys and canyons below. We have just been asked: "So... *what do you think?*" ... Our tour guide gives us (only) a mere a second to collect our thoughts... but before we have time to answer... he cups his hands over his mouth... lifts his head... and shouts five questions... letting each one (just) echo off the canyon walls...

They are unanswerable! Fading! And hollow! John Stott says, "*The apostle hurls these questions out into space, as it were, defiantly, triumphantly, challenging any creature in heaven or earth or hell to answer them or to deny the truth that is contained in them...*"

Romans 8:31

The first question to bounce off the canyon walls is "*Who can be against us?... be against us?... against us?... against us?... who?*"

Now perhaps... as you sit there with the Apostle Paul and I... you actually **do** hear an answer that comes back. "Who can be against us...? Well... of course there are many people... and many things!... And not only **can** they be against us - they **are**.

Let's start with: the world... the flesh... and the devil. The **world** is against us because Christianity is opposed to its God-rebelling ways. ... The world tries to have us to conform... and if it **fails**... it will try to **do us in**. ... Our **flesh** is also an enemy... It contains **the seeds of sin** within it. ... And... (as if that were not enough)... we have a powerful enemy in **Satan**... who is described by the apostle Peter as "*a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*" (1 Peter 5:8).

Make no mistake about it - there is plenty to oppose us in life. ... Hardships and tragedies relentlessly batter away at the hope of all believers.

Persecutors and naysayers oppose us. Indwelling sin opposes us. Fear of loss opposes us. And then - the evil one (and those who serve him)...

Yes... there are plenty of enemies to wage war against us. ... So let's go back and address the first part of the question – "**If God is for us...**"

In the original language of the New Testament... this is what is called a 1st Class Condition. Paul's use of the provisional term "*if*" assumes the condition to be true for the sake of argument. Therefore, the term "*because*" can be inserted to render the verse: "*Because God is for us, who can be against us?*"

Paul looks back at the scenery of our verses last week and asks... "So *what do you think?*" And then he immediately proceeds with (...and I'll

paraphrase) “*Because God proactively foreknew and predestined believers to be like His Son... and then faithfully called and justified us... will He not be faithful to complete each and every step?*”

The logic of our text pushes us to the heights of **confidence**. (LISTEN!)... It means more than God being “graciously inclined” toward us. ... It means God is for us - **in all that He does!** ... We may be defeated at this moment... but God is glad that we are on His team... and we are always being led to victory in Christ. ... “*God is for us!*” ... We can write our names in the verse: “*God is for Jimmy Hofman...*” (But.. of course... write your own name over it.)

It is as if Paul is challenging us to place all the possible enemies that we can think of... on one-half of an old-fashioned balance scale. These enemies are like those styrofoam peanuts that they used to put in packages for shipping. Yeah... go ahead put 10-12 of them on one side of the scale. Now... once you have all the Styrofoam packing peanuts (every enemy you can think of) assembled on the scale... throw an **anvil** onto the other side of the balance. That side comes crashing down... and the peanuts uselessly fly everywhere. .. “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” Who can stand against God? The answer is “*nobody.*” Nothing can defeat us if the Almighty God of the universe is on our side.

Psalm 118:6 (ESV)

⁶ *The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*

The next question that defiantly and triumphantly echoes off the canyon walls is an excellent follow-up. (You see) even though you have climbed to such a great height and taken in such wonderful views... you may still be

thinking that God could never deal with your particular problems... in this manner.

"Perhaps he is too busy to care about me. ... Maybe I am too insignificant for Him to give us even a second thought. ... What if my sins have caused Him to regret that He brought me onto His team in the first place?"

Paul has no doubts along any of these lines (of course.) But he anticipates that we might. So he follows his first question with a second one... which is meant to blow these fearful considerations to the winds.

Romans 8:32

"How will He not also with him?... How will He not also?... How will He not?... How will He?... How...?"

Paul was a pastor... and he knew well that we can all easily doubt such statements... particularly when life becomes difficult. *"All right,"* we may say, *"I grant that God is love. But does he love **me**? How can I believe he loves me when I just lost my job... or when my child is rebelling against God and throwing their life into the dumpster... or when I have been diagnosed with an incurable cancer? In fact... even when things go well... there are times when I just do not feel that God loves me... or even that he cares about me at all."*

If God gave His Son for you... He isn't going to turn around and condemn you! ... He will not withhold anything you need to live for Him.

Dwight L. Moody illustrated it somewhat like this: Suppose I go into the finest jewelry store in the land... and balloons immediately fall from the

ceiling... horns blow... and confetti falls. A sign unfurls and it reads “Congratulations to our 1,000th Customer! They bring out their most expensive (luxurious) diamond... and the owner says, *"It's yours!"* And I say, *"You don't mean that you are giving me this valuable diamond!"* He says, *"Yes. I am giving it to you."* ... Now suppose I thanked him and then asked if he had a simple little plastic bag for me to carry it home... but he answered – *"No! Now you're asking for too much! Look Buddy we've already given you more than you could expect! Asking for a small bag is over-the-top!"*

My friend... (Moody concludes) since God gave His Son to die for you... don't you know that He is going to give you everything that is necessary in this life and in the life to come?

I believe that if you and I just sit here on our ledge of South Sister mountain... and take a moment to meditate on this verse... we would discover (from what is written here) – *that we are not asking God for enough!* I think that the clear implication of this verse is that God is MORE WILLING to give to us – than what we are even *willing to ask.*

What is it... that you really need to be trusting God for – but you have not been willing to ask...? ... Or maybe you have asked – but given up hope...?

Let's just pause (right now.) I am going to ask you bow your head with me in prayer. ... (Yeah! Right in the middle of this sermon.) Is there a need in your life... that God is calling you to ask Him for...? ... Why don't you ask Him for it... right now. Go ahead. I'll wait. ... [P A U S E]

What upsets us is that God seldom answers in line with our plans or schedule. At those times we may think that God is intentionally withholding something from us. But God has already given us the greatest gift of all. Remembering God's gift will help us see that God is working for our good even when we can't immediately see it.

Hollow question number three (now)...

Romans 8:33

Who will bring a charge?... Who will bring?... Who will?... who?...

Well... to this question... Scripture may seem to call back.

Revelation 12:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."

It isn't only our own conscious that accuses us – we also have Satan (the Great Accuser.) If you are a Christian... Satan is accusing you to God. He is saying, "*Did you see what Janet Smith did? That is no way for a Christian to act. That act is disgraceful, ungodly, secular. How can a person do that and still claim to be a Christian? How can you regard her as a Christian?*"

Satan is saying, "*Do you know what Bobby Jones is thinking about right now? His thoughts are unworthy of even a highly immoral man, let alone a Christian. Aren't you ashamed of his conduct? I know I am.*" Satan is saying, "*I wouldn't have those people as my followers. How can you accept them? How can you have sent your Son to die for them?*" And Satan is making such accusations "day and night," according to the text in Revelation.

Now... get that balance scale back out. Yes... there are charges. But these are more styrofoam packing peanuts! Drop on the other side the anvil of God's justification. Whoosh! Watch them all scatter. (Those peanuts scatter as far as the East is from the West.)

(LISTEN!) God is omniscient. He knows all of our outward sins – that everyone can see... and He knows all of our hidden (inward) sins that we think we are hiding. God even see the sins that we WOULD commit – if we had the opportunity... and He knows the sins that we sought out to commit – but could not find the opportunity.

BUT EVEN KNOWING ALL THIS – GOD HAS JUSTIFIED US!

Now... I am saying this to Christians. We do not need to be afraid. But if you have never trusted Christ for the forgiveness of your sin... and asked Him to take control of your life – THEN YOU SHOULD BE FRIGHTENED! There is no comfort in this verse for you. One day you will meet the God you have spurned... and receive what you deserve.

Question number four...

Romans 8:34

What does it mean that He is (indeed) interceding for us...? ... It means that there is no need that you can possibly have... in which the Lord will be indifferent. ... It means you do not have a problem... to which He will turn a deaf ear!

Finally the last question is...

Romans 8:35

What possible obstacle will separate us from the love of Christ? ... Paul tries to think of any possible hindrance that he can think of. I will just speak about the first two... and let the others speak for themselves. The first is "tribulation."

The English word *tribulation* comes directly from the Latin noun *tribulum*, which meant a "threshing sledge." In the ancient world at the time of the grain harvest... the stalks of grain were brought to the threshing floor and a wooden threshing instrument (like a sled covered on the bottom with strips of metal) was dragged over the stalks to separate the heads of grain from the chaff. This instrument was called a *tribulum* because it pressed out the grain. This vivid picture produced the idea embodied in the word *tribulation*, because circumstances frequently press down on people so forcefully and constantly that it seems to them that they are being threshed like stalks of grain.

Perhaps you have experienced such harsh pressures. Life has been hard. But, says Paul, you may know that no tribulation, however severe, will separate you from Christ's love.

The next obstacle is distress (στενοχωρία sten-o-chor-ia). This word properly means, *narrowness of place*. The idea is not so much that of being pressed down by circumstances (which is what "tribulation" means)... but rather that of being confined within a narrow and oppressive space. ... It refers to a great anxiety and distress of mind... such times as when we do not know where to turn... or what to do to find any relief. – That will not separate us from the love of Christ.

In view of these many dangers... toils... and cares that come into the lives of Christians... How are you to triumph in such circumstances?

The best way is to realize that Jesus Christ... has fixed His love upon you... and that nothing is ever going to separate you from His love. You may be in narrow straits now... but you are an heir of heaven... and one day your horizons will be as vast as the universe... and as soaring as the stars. Nothing will deprive you of this destiny... because nothing... (not even hardship)... will be able to separate you from Christ's love.

Romans 8:36

If you are a believer who is not at this time facing hardship in your life... please prepare yourself by knowing that you will. We should never be surprised and think "**this is not supposed to happen!**" ... Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 to prepare us. Even the Psalmist has warned us that God's people will continuously be exposed to the risk of death – like sheep for the slaughter. ... Our enemies consider us to be appropriate subjects for the slaughter... with as little concern or remorse... that they would have for sheep that are butchered.

Verse 36 (here)... is like a doctor's warning about a medication that he/she has just prescribed. "*Now you are going to feel a little nauseous and dizzy... when you take this. It's normal...*" OK... now I know what I can expect and will not over-react when it happens. I anticipated it. (You and I will suffer persecution – because the world hates Christ... but we can get through it – when we focus on the unquenchable love that Christ has for me.) **[P A U S E]**

Did you hear the questions echo (*very hollow*) off the canyon walls today?

Very quickly... (as we close) I want to present to you... what I read from Chuck Swindoll's wrapping-up of these verses:

I want to encourage you to do something unusual. Open your Bible to Romans 8:28-36. Think of a word (or two) that best encapsulates the one struggle you face now, the affliction that makes your life miserable, which you would do almost anything to remove. Draw a bracket in the margin of your Bible alongside 8:28-36 and then note your affliction along the bracket.

For the next few days, place your Bible somewhere close to where you will be during the day and keep it open to this passage. Read it periodically and, each time, pray. Pray that the promises of this passage will penetrate your mind. Pray that the Holy Spirit will heal your wounds and teach you both trust and submission. Pray that your affliction will end, but then quickly surrender control to God's way.

I would not presume to tell you how things will unfold for you or dare suggest that the path to obedience will be short or easy—on the contrary! But I can promise you this: This page from your Bible with the words you write next to Romans 8:28-36 will one day become a treasure for you. You will reflect back on this time and you will realize how far you have come . . . and you will not want to trade anything for the richness of God's blessing you will have received.