

God is for us - are we for God?

Rom 8:31-end

The first thing you learn when you study theology is that whenever you come to a biblical text you must always look at what comes before it and what comes after it. It is the context that enables us to correctly determine the meaning of a text.

We see that prior to our text in Romans 8 Paul speaks of suffering;

- suffering engendered by the Fall in Creation
- suffering implicit in following Christ
- suffering caused by our, as yet unfulfilled, hope of Christ's Universal Reign

Paul wants to help his readers/hearers as they live with this reality of suffering.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things?

Paul's response is given in the form of five questions.

(Q1) If God is for us, who can be against us?

God is the answer to every human question, to every human need.

If God is on your side, NOTHING ELSE MATTERS.

But how can we know that God is for us?

*(Q2) He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all
– how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

When we focus on suffering we're focussing on the wrong thing, we're looking in the wrong direction. Don't try to understand God in the light of your circumstances - that will only give you a distorted and changing view of God. When everything is rosy, then God is great and loving; but when everything is going to hell in a hand-cart - what is God then? No look instead at God - at His love for us expressed most graphically and irrefutably in Christ dying on the cross - and then look at your circumstances in the light of that understanding of God.

When Henry Blackaby's teenage daughter Carrie was diagnosed with a serious cancer he felt his world crumbling. He felt himself starting to get angry with God, to doubt God's love for Him, or His power to care for Him and His family. He had to stop himself, to say to God that on Calvary God had proved beyond any possibility of refutation His love for him and that he would not allow any circumstances to cause him to doubt that love.

Whatever the nightmare of his circumstances, his understanding of God's perfect love for him was not negotiable. He would just have to try and make sense of his circumstances whatever way he could, or live with the mystery.

When we look at God, what do we see? We see that we are loved so much that God gave His own Son to get us back. This almost sounds blasphemous - anthropocentric. That the God of the Cosmos should care about us, tiny, puny, creatures of dust, who scabble about for a few short years on a spinning speck of dust in a far flung corner of the universe - YET HE DOES and He has PROVED IT on Calvary.

What are the consequences of God being for us?

(Q3) Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

(Q4) It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?

If God says we are ok, if God accepts us as his beloved children, who's opinion about us, who's judgement of us, means anything? Nobodies!

But can anything affect this fact that God is for us? Can anything happen that might change that in our lives? Can any experience of suffering change God's being for us? This takes us to Paul's next question.

(Q5) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written:

'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'

Paul answers his own question.

(A) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that;

neither death nor life,

neither angels nor demons,

neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,

will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In his list of things that no longer mean anything Paul starts with death, the ultimate enemy of man. It is the first item on his list of things that no longer matter!

"God is for us" is a four-word summary of Paul's gospel and the answer to every human question - death, suffering, failure, loss.

It would be fantastic to leave things there, but unfortunately we can't.

In Romans 9 Paul goes on to talk about how the Jews, the People of God, have rejected Jesus. In a second reading we see Jesus talking about the same theme.

Luke 13:31-end

[Political Opposition]

At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him,

'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'

[Jesus' Defiant Response]

*He replied, 'Go and tell that fox,
"I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow,
and on the third day I will reach my goal."
In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day
– for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!*

You can't stop ME or my MISSION!

[God's Love Reaches Out but God's People Draw Back]

*'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you,
how often I have longed to gather your children together,
as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.
Look, your house is left to you desolate.
I tell you, you will not see me again until you say,
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."'*

God is for us - But we often refuse God's love and refuse God's messengers. It is often the people that seem the closest to God - the most religious - those who know the most about God in their heads, who are the most resistant to His love.

They understand God's ways, but they don't share God's heart.

I spent 12 years writing a book on Jonah. Jonah is a theological giant, he never makes a wrong statement about God. He is an attested prophet whose ministry saw 120,000 people saved. Yet when God uses Jonah as a minister of his grace to bring salvation to Nineveh, Jonah's response is that he is "angry enough to die".

Jonah is more lost than Nineveh. His head was full of the knowledge of God, but his heart was empty of the love of God.

Where are we today?

Do we live in the light of Paul's amazing, shocking statement that "God is for us"? Are we so blown away by that, that it informs our self-understanding and controls every aspect of our daily life - the knowledge that we outrageously loved by God, a love proved beyond any refutation by Christ on the cross?

As those who have the blessing of a deep knowledge of God, are we making sure that we also share God's heart for a lost world? Are we letting the Holy Spirit soften our hearts and open them to those around us.

The worst sinners are the ones who break the most important commandment. And the most important commandment is,

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

May God help us all.