

“What Shall We Say?”

Romans 8:28-39

July 27, 2014

7th Sunday After Pentecost

It’s probably happened to you: a deal too good to be true. It might be a great price on a car or a house or a job offer that seems too perfect. What do you do? You become skeptical and start asking questions. What about this? Or, what about that? You want answers to your questions. You want to be sure that you can trust whatever it is that seems too good to be true. After all, most of the time, whatever *seems* too good to be true *is* too good to be true.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. We often hear spiritual claims that seem too good to be true. Many people become skeptical over such claims and hesitate to believe them. They come up with questions about such claims and want answers. Can they believe the claims being made? Can they have assurance and certainty over the promised results?

St. Paul, in the beginning of our text, makes some pretty startling claims about the people of God. He says that God predestined us to be His people. He justified us – that is, He has declared us to be right in His eyes. He will glorify us in heaven. But, in the mean time, during our lives here on earth, all things will work together for good for those who love God and have been called according to His purpose.

As you live life, do these promises and claims seem to be a bit of a pipe dream? A bit too good to be true? After all, doesn’t it seem like so much is working against you in life? Most everyone, Christian or non-Christian, would admit that our world is broken. The Bible says that this is not the way God made it or ever intended for it to be.

Sin has corrupted our world and we suffer for it in so called “natural disasters”: floods, droughts, fires, tornados. We read the newspaper and watch the news and these disasters seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity.

Sin has corrupted humanity and we suffer for it when people hurt us with their words, hurt us with their actions, and hurt us with their thoughts and attitudes. This can be something as small as person against person in an argument or as big as nation against nation in war.

Sin has corrupted each of us individually and we suffer for it.. Not only do we live in conflict with each other, but, more importantly, we live in conflict with God. We might try to hide this conflict or pretend it doesn't exist, but, if we are honest, we know that it is there. We live in service to self and our needs and greeds while ignoring God's Word and will. We actively oppose His will by doing what He forbids and by neglecting what He commands. We also oppose His will, not only in our actions, but in our thoughts, our attitudes, and our priorities. All our rationalizations, justifications, and excuses cannot change this. The world is against us. People are against us. Our sinful nature is against us.

St. Paul says, "What then shall we say to these things?" What shall we say about the wonderful claims made about our status before God which seems wonderful? What shall we say about our perception of that status which often seems less than wonderful? Paul asks four questions.

First, what about all the people and things that fight against us? Paul asks, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" The answer is: no one! The world can try to oppose us. People can try to oppose us. Even our sinful nature can be against our new nature in Christ. But none of them can be against us in the sense of overcoming us if God is for us. How can we know God is for us? It is the essence of the Gospel: God for us. As Paul says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will we not also with him graciously give us all things." Despite the fact that we were against Him, He was for us and spared no expense – not even His own Son's life - to have us as His sons and daughters and to bless us with all good things.

Despite this solid declaration of good news, there is still the nagging doubt that it is not true – that we are too sinful for God to love us and want us.. Satan (whose name means "accuser") constantly accuses our consciences. He points out how we continue to sin even after God has

spared no expense to have us as His own. He accuses us of sinning too frequently or too horribly as for a Christian. He accuses each of us of the deep dark sin that we try to hide and keep anyone from knowing. Then we begin to accuse ourselves. Maybe we have sinned too much or too terribly, even for God's grace and mercy.

So Paul asks a second question, "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" In other words, who has the authority and the right to bring a charge against you or me which makes us guilty before God? Does Satan have that authority? Do you and your conscience? Who has the right to declare us guilty before God? The answer again is: no one! Not Satan. Not another person. Not even your own conscience. Paul says, "It is God who justifies." It is God who has declared us to be not guilty before Him for Jesus' sake. "The case is closed; who can reopen it?" (Franzmann, p.159) Who dares dispute the verdict given? It is true and no one – not even Satan himself – can change it.

But what about when you face death? Can you be sure what will happen there? When people are asked, "Will you go to heaven when you die?" many people will respond, "I hope so." Not only are they not sure, but they think it is arrogant for anyone to be sure. Many people think you can blow it at the end and be condemned to hell. It's one reason why so many people are afraid as they approach death. Even after a life time of faith, they are still unsure of what will happen after death.

So, Paul asks a third question, "Who is to condemn?" There is only one Judge of the living and the dead who can condemn anyone to hell. It is not you or your fear. It is Christ Jesus alone. And what has He done? Paul says, "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." The only one who can condemn you to hell is the one who died to earn the forgiveness needed so that you might be saved from hell. He is the one who is raised and seated at the right hand of God so that you might be raised and live in the presence of God for all eternity. He will not condemn you, no matter how tough things get to be. In fact, He is, at this very moment, interceding for you. He is praying to His Father on your

behalf, that you might be preserved in faith now, pass through death in the future, and live with Him forever.

But what about until that time? Although the future may look cheery because of our salvation in Christ, the present may look downright bleak. Life is pretty tough, especially life lived as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. There will be suffering simply for living in a world corrupted by sin and controlled by the Evil One. In addition, there will be suffering, even death, for those who follow Christ faithfully.

So, Paul asks a fourth question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Can life ever get so bad, suffering so severe, problems so monumental that they blot out God and His love for us in Christ Jesus? It certainly seems so, at times, doesn’t it?

Paul first deals with the question concerning suffering for one’s faith. Shall that suffering separate us from Christ and his love? Paul asks, “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword [separate us from the love of Christ]?” Troubles, pressures, persecution, suffering, and even martyrdom are a real possibility, especially in these end times.

Paul quotes Psalm 44, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” The main point of the quote “is to show that the tribulations which face Christians are nothing new or unexpected, but have all along been characteristic of the life of God’s people.” (Cranfield, I, p.440). Can they separate us from Christ’s love? Paul answers his own question, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” Rather than persecution overcoming us, in Christ, we conquer the persecution by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What about all the other things that challenge us as we live our lives here on earth: an uncertain future, spiritual warfare, and even death itself? Paul answers that question firmly and without any doubt, “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.”

God’s love and salvation for us are good but not too good to be true. There are most certainly challenges that we must face. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh may oppose us, but none can overcome us. God is for us and spared nothing – not even His own Son’s life – in order to have us. We will struggle with sin in this life in terms of the quality of sin and the quantity of sin. Our consciences, assaulted by Satan and his accusations, may trouble us greatly, but nothing and no one may accuse us before God. He has already declared us not guilty of all sin in our account before Him because of Christ. Condemnation to hell may frighten us as we approach death, but none can condemn us to hell. Only Christ can judge us and He is the one who died to earn our forgiveness and was raised to give us life. This world’s problems may discourage us as we live life, but nothing shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, in this life or the next. THIS is what we shall say to all those things! Amen.