

Two weeks ago, I challenged you to stop living from one emotional high to the next. The habit of doing that is partly the outcome of the drug culture with its highs-on-demand. It is partly the outcome of television and movies, which need something more exciting than last time to get us to watch or to buy something. It is a satanic cycle, and it produces in us ever-increasing desires for ever-diminishing pleasures. It is disastrous for spiritual life.

It is also disastrous for something else. The more we organize our experience around feeling good, the less we care about pursuing truth. That is subhuman. Before long, it becomes inhumane. When people cease to care about the truth, it won't be long before they cease to care about people. When Christians cease to care about the truth, it won't be long before they cease to care about Christ.

I don't want that to happen to our church. It could happen – easier than you believe. It would start with a statement like this: "I like Jesus; I don't like the Church." If you ask what the person likes about Jesus, he might say, "He cared for people. He was on the side of the downtrodden. He challenged the hypocrisy of the religious establishment. He was a great moral teacher."

Every one of those statements is accurate. Every one of those statements is false, if they are meant to tell us who Jesus is. People who make those statements about Jesus and stop there are "saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up as a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45)

And by the way, liking Jesus is not the same thing as believing in Jesus. Liking Jesus will not move you to deny yourself, take up your cross everyday, and follow Him. It is simply not true that feeling good about Jesus validates your ideas about Jesus. Our feelings offer very little help in measuring our spiritual maturity. That's why I challenge you to stop living from one emotional high to the next. Pursue truth. Pursue the truth about Jesus Christ. Pursue the truth about Jesus Christ before happiness.

God Is for Us

So, come, pursue with me the truth about Jesus Christ in twelve of the most startling verses in the Bible. We begin with the one-liner that governs all the others, Romans 8:31: **If God is for us, who can be against us? God is for us.** On what basis could the apostle make such a statement? Verse 32: **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?**

Now hear me! Hear me! Verse 31 without verse 32 is verbiage, fluff, wishful thinking. How do you know God is for us? What evidence do you have for that? Verse 32 takes it out of the theoretical and roots it in dark soil of Jewish flesh and a terrible divine sacrifice. God gave His nearest and dearest on our behalf. That's how we know God is for

us. **God is for us** is not a statement of passion. It is not wishful thinking. It is a statement of faith rooted in a historical act – the death of Jesus Christ. And even that doesn't tell the whole story. We need to integrate it into the core meaning of the death of Christ.

Verse 32 says that God did **not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all**. If you want to hold in your heart the core meaning of the death of Christ, you need to know from memory Romans 5:10: **When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son**. In that verse the apostle fashioned a tiny net of four words that captures and holds the entire meaning of Romans one and two: **we were God's enemies**. That's why humanity is at risk of divine condemnation.

Another tiny net of words in that verse catches and holds the entire meaning of Romans three and four: **we were reconciled to him through the death of his son**. That's why we say that Christ deflects the divine condemnation of human sin. That's why the death of Christ is the basis for saying that **God is for us**.

So, here's my question to you: Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Central to your participation in this reconciliation with God is your faith in Jesus Christ. What faith are we talking about? Romans 10:9: **If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved**.

Do you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead? If you do, have you said so publicly? Have you been baptized? Have you joined yourself in loyalty to a local congregation of people who believe the gospel? If you do not believe the gospel, why not believe starting right here, right now? Believe in Christ before you leave this act of worship. You can go away from here with a new sense of knowing that **God is for us**.

All Things

Now, we're ready to move on. What does it mean to say **God is for us**? What does he do, now that He is for us? Verse 28 gives the apostle's first answer. **And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose**.

The line that takes your breath away says that all things work together for good. **All things** covers a lot of ground. How dare you say that? How dare anyone say that? How do you know what other people suffer? Again, this would be verbiage, fluff, wishful thinking. It would be insufferable if it were not for verse 32. God **did not spare his own son**. Can you comprehend that? Is that not more awful than any human suffering you can think about?

I can't predict what life will throw at me, and I can't predict how I will handle what life throws at me. There is no escaping temptation, and I am weak. There is no escaping adversity, and I am weak. So, everyday of my life I pray to God that He will preserve me with His mighty power, so that I do not fall into the grip of sin, and I am not overcome by adversity. I pray that way, because I believe God is near me in every temptation and adversity, even if He seems far away; and I believe He can make anything that invades my life work for good.

Remember: I believe that because of verse 32. **God did not spare his own Son**, and our Lord cried out, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** But God was there, and if He was there, then we can believe He is with us in **all things**.

The second reality in verse 28 that binds our hearts to the living God is that God is not only there with us in all things; He is also at work in all our circumstances to make

something good happen. God has our good in mind, no matter how life may batter us. The New Testament letter of Hebrews 12:10 calls those battering experiences God's **discipline**, and it says that **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.**

The third reality that binds our hearts to the living God is that He makes all things work for the good of **those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.** And we love Him because He first loved us and demonstrated that love when **God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.** Verse 28 says powerfully that **God is for us.**

But I say again: verse 28 is not positive thinking. It is not optimism. It is an act of faith, and it is rooted in the reality of Good Friday.

All of this matters when life stops working the way you thought it was supposed to work. When that happens, do you ever listen to what you say to yourself? You say things like these: "Why is this happening to me?" "What did I do to deserve this?" "Just suck it up. We don't always get what we want?" "Why did I ever think I was immune to this sorrow?" It's hard when things don't go our way. It's even harder when the bottom falls out of your life. You wonder if you can go on, and you say all kinds of things to yourself.

Nothing I say can stop those thoughts from coming into your head. My plea is this: don't let any of them have the last word. Let Romans 8 have the last word. Let Romans 8 speak truth into your soul. **"God is for us, and God will make this awful thing that has happened to me work for good."** Choice by choice your life takes shape. No choice matters more than the choice of what you believe about God. Allow what you believe about God to be shaped and nurtured by Christ and the promises of Romans 8.

He's Got You Covered

The next two verses further expand what it means to say that **God is for us.** They set that statement in a breath-taking context. Verses 29-30: **For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called, those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

Five words in these verses are intimidating: **foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified.** They don't intimidate everyone. A few great and a multitude of lesser men have taken these words in hand and filled library shelves and bull sessions with their thoughts about them. I'll make one comments, which will capture the point Paul was making here.

Paul began by talking about **those God foreknew.** Now, think of yourself as one of **those God foreknew.** What did Paul say next? **Those God foreknew he also predestined.** Did God leave any He foreknew behind? No. If you are one of those God foreknew, you are also among the predestined. **And those he predestined, he also called.** Did God leave behind any He predestined? No. And **those he called, he also justified.** Did God leave behind any He called? No. And **those he justified, he also glorified.** Did God leave behind any He justified? No.

If you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and you have said so publicly, He's got you covered from start to finish. **God is for us** in the most comprehensive way we can imagine. From eternity past to eternity future **the plans of**

the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations – Psalm 33:11 – and our little lives fit right in. **God is for us.**

God is for us in other ways. I will not comment on them. I'll just read them, beginning with verse 33. Prepare to be amazed. **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 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.” 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.**

Now What?

I stand in a long line of pastors, when I say to you that Romans 8 begins in verse one with **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, and it ends with no separation **from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord**. We can say all this, because God did **not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. God is for us**. He is our Friend. Friendship with God is not a friendship between equals. Friendship with God never becomes chummy. It “simply puts you in the position where God can begin to change you” and where you want to be changed. You want the friendship to work.

Now, come sit down and let's have a talk. Let me ask you a question. What are you going to do with what you heard? Don't go away like you didn't hear anything important. I can't give better than I gave today. Romans 8 is the best Christianity has to give, and it asks something of you and me. I can tell you what it is.

Romans 12:1: **Therefore, I urge you . . . in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.** God wants you to worship Him by placing yourself at His disposal everyday of your life. Here's what that means.

Romans 12:2: **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** The way of world is always trying to squeeze you into its mold with money, sex, and power. It's always telling you that's all that matters about you. It's a lie. God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for you. God loves you. He has included you in His eternal purpose. You are a child of God.

You've got to let that truth work its way into your soul. Let it put some space between you and the way of the world that hits on you every day. Even a little space at first makes something possible that wasn't possible before. Look at the rest of verse 2: **Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

Lord, I can lead the horse to water, but I can't make him drink. We need your Spirit to fall on us here. We need the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. Don't let the wickedness and the silliness of our age make our hearts so hard that you can't get through to us. **God is for us**. We know that is rooted in reality. We trust God that He will make all things work together for good for us. Heed this blessed truth.