

February 5, 2017

Isaiah 41:8-10 / Jeremiah 29:10-14; 32:36-41 / Romans 8:31-32

“If God is For Us, Who Can Be Against Us?”

So far, I have preached three messages having to do with this often overlooked topic of predestination. And I need to say I do appreciate the many questions, comments and responses a number of you have shared these past three weeks – because those questions mean you’re listening, and seeking understanding!

Yet I’m sure that by now some of you may be thinking, or saying to yourself: *“I think I grasp what you’ve been saying, but what do I do with it, and how do I respond to it, or apply it to my life?”*

In fact, given how Paul starts v. 31, if you’re NOT asking that question, you may be a little bit behind where Paul expects you to be! Because that’s the question Paul both anticipates and goes on to answer in the rest of this chapter and the next one as well.

We see this when he starts v. 31 by asking: *“What, then, shall we say in response to this?”* That is, what shall we say in response to the revelation Paul’s just shared? That if you’re a Spirit-born believer, it’s because God foreknew you, predestined you, called you, justified you, both sanctified and is sanctifying you, and will one day glorify you!

What does one do once they come to grasp that truth? A truth that was surely just as new to the Romans of Paul’s day as it has been to some of you. What do you do with it?

How do you apply it to your life, or incorporate it into your thinking and living? What should be different now that you know that’s the invisible untold story behind your story?

And here, let me say from experience, it should affect and change us in many, profound and precious ways, starting **FIRST** with the confidence it breeds in our relationship with God and the anxiety it takes away from the believer's heart, mind and soul.

In my church in Honduras (inter-denominational as it was) there were people (some of them missionaries) who came from denominational backgrounds that believed you could lose your salvation if you fell into sin, and others who believed that if you died with even one sin unconfessed, you would not go to heaven.

And I can testify from my personal involvement with them, that although it worked in them a very real fear of sinning (which more believers could use!), it also (in a bad sense) made them anxious, caused them to view trials as punishments from God, made them more likely to question God's love, and hesitant to truly believe God was always *"for them."*

And when compared to those who hold to what Paul shares here, they seemed to lack the peace that passes understanding and inner rest of soul that comes from a deep inner sense of God's acceptance and the assurance of their salvation.

For instance, I ended last week's message at v. 30 by pointing out how the word "glorified" there, is in the past tense, even though for all of us it is something that's yet to come.

And I also pointed out that's surely because it is so unquestionably guaranteed or sure to come to pass (because of all the preceding actions God carries out on our behalf) that Paul can speak of it as if it's already happened, even though it's still a future event.

It's similar to what he says in Phil. 1:6 where we are told that Paul is confident that: "He who began a good work in us **WILL CARRY IT ON TO COMPLETION** until the day of Christ Jesus."

The work GOD started in us will NOT go unfinished! He *WILL COMPLETE* that which *HE* decreed, *HE* initiated, and *HE* determined to carry out in us from all eternity past!

And there are many other similar verses. I Cor. 1:8 states: "God will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, for God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." He *WILL* do it, says Paul! Not because we're faithful, but because God, who has called us into union with His Son, is faithful!

Faithful to His Word, faithful to His work, faithful to His promises, faithful to carry out His own eternal decrees. And ever-faithful to the people He has foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and both has sanctified and is sanctifying and will glorify!

The book of Jude likewise concludes with this promise: "To Him who is able to keep you from falling and present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now, and forever more. Amen."

What do all those verses tell us? God *WILL* do it! *HE* started it, and *HE* will finish it! / *HE* will keep you strong, and *HE* will keep you from falling – because *HE* is both faithful and able! *NOT US!*

That's where our confidence lies!! Not in us, but in HIM and His unchangeable purposes, unmatched power and unthwartable promises! In the unwavering faithfulness of God to His foreknown and predestined

people whom He graciously calls and both lays hold of, and holds on to, by His unequalled power! (John 10:28-29). IF I am to have the confidence and peace and assurance and the rest of soul the Gospel promises I dare not trust in anything less!

Which brings us to the **SECOND** thing we can say in response to the revelation that we were foreknown and predestined and called and justified and sanctified and are destined to be glorified.

It's the unwavering conviction that IF HE DID ALL THOSE THINGS to bring us to possess salvation, and has infallibly promised to glorify us, He must, without question, be FOR US!

Paul frames it in the form of a question, but it's a question which assumes that it has to be true in light of the previous verses! "*If God is for us,*" he says, "*then who can be against us?*" And he states it in such a way that the clear implication is that there is no way we could even begin to think He is not "*FOR*" those He foreknew and predestined to partake of such a glorious salvation!

So what's the response Paul expects to his rhetorical question that "*if God be for us, who can be against us?*" He expects us to reply by saying, "*No one!*" If God is for us then NO ONE can be against us – at least, no one can be against us and win! Or no one can come against us in such a way as to prevent us from experiencing all of God's saving purposes for our lives!

It simply cannot happen when you have the Almighty, All-knowing, and All-powerful God on your side, determined to do whatever it takes to see that His eternal decrees are carried out in you!

So yes, there are obviously those who are "against us" and always will be – to one degree or another. As we see from Scripture itself, Satan is always against us!

And at his instigation the unbelieving world frequently rises up against us to persecute, block, or attempt to thwart – ALL who seek to further the saving purposes of God.

But, they will NEVER SUCCEED! That's what Paul wants us to know! They may TRY to come against us, and TRY to thwart God's saving purposes for us, but they'll never prevail!

As Chrysostom once wrote (when reflecting on the severe persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire just before his own death in 407 A.D. by exile and starvation: *“Yet those that be against us, so far are they from thwarting us at all, that even without their intending it, they become to us the cause of crowns and procurers of countless blessings, in that God's wisdom turns their plots into our salvation and glory. See how no one is really against us!”*

He's right, for in this passage Paul comes about as close to absolute determinism as one can get. Because he basically says that nobody – not Satan, not people, not governments, nor anything any of them can do. Nothing can thwart God's saving purposes for those He foreknew and predestined to salvation!

It all goes back to what he said in verses 28-30! Because He predestined it, it WILL HAPPEN! And NOBODY and NOTHING THEY EVER DO will ever be able to stop it from happening.

You see, that's what the doctrine of predestination is meant to do! Give us hope beyond all hope, and abundant confidence, and the blessed assurance that come what may, NOTHING can ultimately thwart God's predestined purpose to conform them to the likeness of Christ and bring them to glory. Not trial or trauma or persecution or illness or imprisonment or suffering or starvation or the confiscation of all we have (which did actually happen to the people he was writing to, in 49 A.D., when

the Roman Authorities confiscated their houses and all their possessions and they were banished from Rome with only the clothes on their backs).

In fact, because God has predestined it, far from thwarting His purposes, HE will (as Chrysostom noted) take and use all those things to actually bring about His purposes for us.

That's why I noted when I started this topic four weeks ago, that whenever Paul speaks of this topic of predestination to *BELIEVERS*, it's *ALWAYS* for the purpose of encouraging them, and giving them an unshakable hope and confidence and assurance.

It's *NEVER* (as some who wrongly understand Paul's intention in sharing this truth, have suggested) for the purpose of making us lax, or lazy, or unconcerned about our sin, or fearful and distressed and anxious.

That's what Paul wants you to know by sharing all these things. That because God did all those things to bring you to Himself, and cause you to partake of His salvation, there is no way to miss the fact that *HE MUST BE FOR US!*

And because He's *FOR US*, nothing will ever be able to prevail against us or thwart God's saving purposes for us! Not Satan, not people, not circumstances – NOT EVEN YOU!

Take great comfort in it my friends, that's why Paul shares this truth! God is for you. He's on your side. He's your Friend and Ally and Advocate. Your Supporter, and Helper, and Benefactor. Your High Tower and City of Refuge. Your Mighty Fortress and Lover of your soul, who set His affections upon you, and decreed your everlasting salvation, before the foundation of the world! He's for you, and thus **NO ONE** can prevail against you!

Which brings us to the **THIRD** thing we can “say” in “response to all this.” That God will withhold no good thing from those He has chosen and saved.

Verse 32: “He who did not spare His own Son (that is, that is, the gift most precious and valuable to Himself) but gave Him up for us all (and here “us all” means “all believers” since he is writing to the church, not to everyone on earth), how will He not also along with Him, graciously give us all things?”

And what’s Paul’s point? Simply this: If God gave us Christ – the most valuable gift in all the universe – how could we ever think that He would withhold the lesser gifts of grace that we need or require, on the path to the consummation of our salvation.

Whatever we need to ensure that we ultimately arrive at our eternal destination, God will provide. Why? Because He who ordains the end, also ordains the means to bring about that end! He ordains everything in between!

Did we need to be convicted of our sin? We sure did! And so God made sure we heard the moral precepts in His word, and sent His Holy Spirit to convict us of our guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment – *instilling a needed fear of God.*

Did we need to hear the Gospel? Absolutely! As Paul says in II Thess. 2:13: *“From the beginning God chose you, brothers loved by the Lord, to be saved, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and belief in the truth.”*

Note what Paul DOES NOT say. *“Well, because you were “chosen” God would have saved you anyway, even if you never heard or responded to the Gospel message.”*

NO! The God who ordains the end, also ordains all the necessary things in between! And one of those necessary things is exposure to, and belief in, the truth -- the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. That's what the Holy Spirit uses to do His work of convicting and calling and saving and sanctifying those God chooses!

Those who are saved are those who believe in Jesus, and in order to believe in Jesus, one must be exposed to the truth about Him! Thus, God graciously ensures that at some point in their lives they are somehow exposed to it – through radio, or TV, or a tract, or a Bible, or magazine, or evangelist, or friend, or some other means!

It's because God ordained that His chosen ones be saved, *“through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and belief in the truth,”* that He will at some point ensure they are exposed to it. He gives us all things!

What did you need to bring you to where you are today? Did He not supply it? And what do you need now? Do you think He will now STOP supplying it and leave the job half done?

Do you need 'faith'? Ask Him! Like the man in John's Gospel who cried out, “Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief.” Or Thomas who said, “I will not believe unless...” and Jesus supplied what he needed.

What about grace? Do you need grace to stand against temptation? Grace to persevere? Grace to endure? Grace to love? Grace to forgive? Do you think He will not also give you that?

Do you need comfort, hope, or assurance? The removal of fears? The assurance of pardon? Greater wisdom? More understanding? More love? More power? Have you asked for it from the One who promises to “graciously give you all things?”

Whatever you need along the way, says Paul, God will supply it! For, *“if He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for you, HOW WILL HE NOT ALSO, along with Him, graciously give you all things?”* That is, all things that are needed to bring about the saving end He has ordained for you.

Octavius Winslow once put it this way, in reference to this verse: “God, so to speak, has bound himself to withhold no good thing from you. (“Good” that is, as Paul already defined it in vv. 28-29!) He (has) pledged it and from that pledge He will never refuse to grant you all you need... Will He bestow the higher blessings of grace and withhold the lower ones of providence? Can you press to your believing heart the priceless, precious, unspeakable gift of His Son, and yet think that God is unwilling or unable to supply all your need?... He always bestows more, and never less, than we need.”

So go to Him, my friends! Go to him knowing that if you need it as part of what is necessary to bring about His predestined end of conforming you to the likeness of Christ, and bringing you to glory – He WILL supply it!

If He gave you Christ – the greatest and most valuable of all gifts – why would He withhold anything of lesser value? And hear me well – everything else you can ever think of is of lesser value!

So, go to Him now and ask. What is it you need to get to where God wants you to be – conformed to the likeness of Jesus? A will that obeys? Freedom from some addiction? Faith to overcome some fear, strength to persevere or a friend to stand by you?

What do you need? God says that if He didn’t withhold Christ from you, “He will graciously, with Him, give you all things.” Because He’s “for you” my friends!

So go to Him now in prayer and ask for it! For if you truly need it to bring you to where you need to be, you will receive it! He will not keep it from you! If He gave you Jesus, He will surely give you all lesser things – and all other things are “lesser”!