

The Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Romans 8:28-39 (NIV)

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. ³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He 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? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who 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. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither 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.

Theme: In Christ, We Know that God Is for us

Is God for you or against you? When we are going through difficult times in life, it is tempting to think that God has something against us. When we have sinned, we might wonder whether God could ever accept us back again. On the other hand when things are going well, we might be tempted to think that it must be because God favors us. Sometimes we might look at people who are more healthy and prosperous and think that God favors them more than us.

However, the answer to the question of whether God is for us or against us doesn't depend on the outward circumstances of our lives. It depends on whether we are connected to our Lord Jesus Christ. It is only in Christ, that we are confident that God is for us.

I. Without Christ there is no love of God.

John 3:16 tells us, “*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*” The way that God has shown us His love is by sending His Son. If we reject the greatest act of love there ever was, then we are rejecting the love of God. If we reject God's love in Jesus Christ, God is not for us. In fact, the Scriptures describe Him as a “consuming fire.” Isaiah 33:14 says, “*The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?”* (See also Is 30:7, Heb 12:29)

Yet people often look at the external things. The people of Amos' day thought that they had the favor of God because they had nice homes, beautiful furniture, expensive perfume, and even vacation property. However, they took advantage of the poor and tried to go to God on their own terms. Amos has an interesting way of telling Israel that they should not long for God's help while also sacrificing to other gods. He wrote, “*Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day*

of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, only to meet a bear.” (Amos 5:18,19) At the end of his life Moses warned the people that the Lord is a jealous God. If they serve any god besides Him, He would be a consuming fire that would bring judgement rather than mercy. (Dt. 4:24)

The same applies to us today. Without faith in Christ, God should terrify us, and His judgement will consume us. Yet when things are going well, many people think that they have all that they need. Some people will say that when you have your health, you have everything. Others look at their wealth for security. Some even look to immorality for happiness. Many people talk about God’s blessings, but it is on their terms without any repentance for their sins. But those words of the Scripture still apply to us. God has shown His love by sending His Son. If we think that we have His favor in any other way, we are just fooling ourselves. When times of trouble and hardship come, our fall will be great if we don’t have Christ.

II. With Christ, we are confident that God is for us.

This confidence is based on two things. The first is God’s love in Jesus Christ. Paul writes, *“If God is for us, who can be against us. 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.”* God showed that He is for us when He gave His own Son for us while we were still sinners. It was then that Christ died for us. He paid for every single one of our sins on that cross. But He rose, and Paul writes that He now intercedes for us before our Father in heaven. Paul asks, *“Who is he that condemns?”* The devil can accuse us as much as he wants, but he has lost his power to accuse. Our consciences might plague us. Other people might tell us how worthless we are. But Christ gave His life for us. In baptism, He washed away all of our sins. We are confident that God is for us because He gives us the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Our confidence is also based on predestination. There is a widespread false teaching especially among American Christianity today. It is that we can and must make a personal decision for Christ. However, the Scriptures make it clear that we are not saved by an act of our will, but by God’s will. In Ephesians 1 Paul writes, *“[God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will— to the praise of His glorious grace...”* That is also the thought of our text. Paul writes in verse 28, *“who have been saved according to His purpose.”* The thought is that we have been saved according to God’s will. Our salvation is not grounded in our will to choose God, but in His will to choose us. His will is much firmer and surer than ours. That is explained in verse 29 and 30. In verse 29 Paul writes about things that God already did **in eternity**. He writes, *“For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the first born among many brothers.”* Before the world was ever created, God knew your name. He already knew and chose those who would believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior. (Cf. Eph 1:4, 1 Tim 2:4, 2 Tim 1:9) This doctrine of predestination is not meant to explain why some are saved and others not. It is meant to give Christians confidence that our salvation is sure. God knew us and chose us before the creation of this world. Then in verse 30 Paul writes what God has done for us **in time**, *“Those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified He also glorified.”* Those who have been predestined have been called by the Gospel. At some point that message that Jesus Christ is our Savior has come

into our lives. The Lord called us, “Repent and believe that Jesus is Your Savior.” Those He called, He justified through faith. In Ephesians 2:8 Paul writes that even our faith is a gift of God. Through faith in Jesus Christ all of our sins have been forgiven, and we are justified. It’s interesting that Paul writes that we are already glorified. That will take place when we are taken into heaven, but Paul writes as though it has already happened. That is how certain our eternal life is. The point of those verses is that those who love God, do so because God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified them. Our confidence rests on God’s gift of Jesus Christ and His will and purpose for us, not on our will. If God loved me so much that He gave His Son for me and called my name, I can be sure that He is for me.

This confidence in God’s gift in both the good times and the difficult times. Paul writes, “*We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.*” He isn’t just for us when things are going well. He is for us in the most difficult times of our lives. We have times of trouble, hardship, persecution, nakedness, danger and sword. There are people who consider us to be sheep about to be slaughtered. On the outside there are times when life seems hopeless. But we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us because nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love in Jesus Christ our Lord. When we trust in Jesus Christ our Savior, there is nothing that will ever be able to come between us and God’s great love in Christ.

In today’s Gospel lesson, having Christ is compared to a treasure in a field or a pearl of great value. There is nothing more valuable than having Jesus Christ as our Savior, because in Him God is for us. May God grant us that confidence in Christ in both the happiest and the most troubling days of our lives, that we may know that in Christ God is always for us.

Amen.

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