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Who Can Be Against Us?

Romans 8.31-32

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. **The Ascent of Romans**

- A. Aside from the Bible, the most-read book in the English language is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*
 - 1. It has never been out of print since its initial publication in 1678
 - 2. It has been translated into more than 200 languages, and made its way to North America within three years of its initial English publication
 - 3. Literary critic Robert McCrum, who in 2013 listed *Pilgrim's Progress* as number 1 of the 100 best English novels, wrote, "... there's no book in English, apart from the Bible, to equal Bunyan's masterpiece for the range of its readership, or its influence on writers as diverse as ... C.S. Lewis, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Charles Dickens, Louisa May Alcott, George Bernard Shaw, William Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Mark Twain... [and] John Steinbeck."
- B. Written during one of Bunyan's imprisonments as a non-conformist pastor in England, it recounts the journey of Christian in the form of an allegory
 - 1. He makes his way from his hometown of the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, which is an emblem of heaven, which sits atop Mount Zion
 - 2. His journey is begun as he recognizes his sin which he realizes will cause him to sink into Hell
 - a. He seeks deliverance, meeting Evangelist who directs him to the Wicket Gate where the truth of the gospel is capable of leading him to his true heavenly home
- C. Nevertheless, his journey is cluttered with a menagerie of dangers and deceptions, marked by a variety of places and characters
 - 1. The Slough of Despond seeks to plunge him into an overwhelming sense of his guilt
 - 2. Mount Sinai is the place of misdirection in which the Law is presented as his means of salvation, which turns out only to multiply his guilt
 - 3. Paths of Difficulty, Danger, and Destruction vie for his pursuit, only one of which would prove to be the way to the true Celestial City
 - 4. The Valley of the Shadow of Death is a veritable house of horrors through which the King's Highway must pass in order to reach the glorious destination

5. Doubting Castle is the home of the Giant Despair and Despair's wife, Diffidence, and it captures Christian until he discovers the key to open its doors, the key of Promise
 6. Vanity Fair is a city through which the King's Highway passes, containing every form of temptation, distraction, and enticements, and the place where Christian is arrested because of his rejection of its worldly allurements
- D. Some of the characters encountered along the way are named for their particular contributions to either Christian's challenges or encouragements
1. Like Formalist and Hypocrisy, two false believers whose approach to religion will lead as directly to Hell as Atheist
 2. There is Timorous and Mistrust, along with Watchful and Discretion and Prudence who have their own roles in either laying obstacles or enabling progress on the road to the Celestial City
- E. It is quite a journey, and one, if you might use your imagination, might find abundant parallels in our own journey through the book of Romans
- F. We began the book of Romans, our series entitled The True Gospel, nearly two years ago
1. We interrupted it, of course, over that period of time
 - a. Using a different series for our communion Sundays
 - b. And, of course, our seasonal observances as in Advent, Holy Week, Global Impact Week, and so forth
 2. But it has been a journey
 - a. One that has led us through many of the places that Christian had encountered
- G. We began in the same place as Christian – in our hometown of sin
1. Where we recognized in Chapter 1 that the fundamental human condition is that humans are by nature suppressors of the truth about God
 - a. And as such are under the wrath of God due to our inherent unrighteousness
 2. That unrighteousness exists in spite of the fact that God has made His nature and character plain to every human
 - a. Revealing His eternal power and divine nature through His created world
 3. Humans, in rejecting the plain revelation of God about Himself, turn out to express their rejection in their ungratefulness to God for His living gifts to all humans
 - a. And one thing leads to another, so that humans become fools
 - b. Their hearts become darkened
 - c. And they become idolaters, substituting all kinds of paltry human inventions for the One True God
 4. God, then, judges them by letting them go their own way
 - a. In which they are given over to impurity and dishonorable passions
 - b. Engaging in acts which in themselves reject God's created order for humanity

5. It is a dismal picture of humanity
 - a. And any honest appraisal would lead one, like Christian, to want to escape this whirlpool of destruction
- H. In Chapter 2 religion and morality are presented as forms of escape
 1. But neither are successful
 - a. For humans, in and of ourselves, are incapable of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps
 2. Whether religious in the form of seeking to fulfill the demands of the Jewish Law
 - a. Or religious in the form of Pagan, secular, Gentile forms of law concocted in some pretentious form of human wisdom
 - b. Are both shown to be futile
- I. In Chapter 3 this human predicament is shown for what it is
 1. Human sin is universal and pervasive
 - a. Universal – in that every human being is infected by sin
 - b. Pervasive – in that sin affects every aspect of the human personality – mind, will, emotions, even the body
 2. So that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - a. And in which humans find it impossible, operating from a base of sin, and having no resource of righteousness in themselves
 - b. Cannot possibly escape from the downward spiral of degradation and despair
- J. Nevertheless, just as Christian, through the ministry of Evangelist, discovers hope through the narrow Wicket Gate
 1. The good news of the Gospel is presented in Chapter 3
 2. The gospel – that God has provided His righteousness through the righteousness of Jesus Christ
 - a. And makes that righteousness available to us humans through faith in Jesus Christ
- K. **Romans 3:23–26** (ESV) —
 1. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
 2. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
 3. 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.
 4. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
 5. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- L. So salvation comes to us – as it did to Christian – through an alien righteousness
 1. Alien – not that it comes from a space invader
 - a. But alien in that it comes not from our own paltry, sinful resources
 - b. But that it comes from another – from Jesus Christ – who alone lived the righteous life consistent with the nature and character of God

- c. For Jesus Himself is the incarnate Son of God – the God-man
- M. We were treated in our journey through Romans of a preview of the glorious benefits of this salvation in Christ through faith beginning in Chapter 5
 - 1. Like one of those scenic rest stops on the highways of America, we're given a glimpse of the blessings of the gospel
 - 2. Peace with God – no longer enemies of God, we find God to be our friend, our comrade, our compatriot – one who is for us and not against us
 - 3. Access to God – no longer separated from God by our sin, we commune with God through faith in His Son
 - 4. Hope of the glory of God – in which we have every reason to look forward with expectation of the heaven that awaits us
 - 5. Even joy in the midst of sufferings, knowing that God is using every challenge to conform us into the likeness of His Son
 - 6. And the love of God, which is said to be poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit
 - a. A love of God which overflows to others – our brothers and sisters in Christ
 - b. But also our neighbors, for whom we become living testimonies of God's grace
 - c. Even our enemies who might find our love melting their objections to the God who will ultimately make all things right
- N. And yet, our journey through Romans took us through yet more challenging hills and valleys
 - 1. As the opposite twin errors of legalism and antinomianism loom like Scylla and Charybdis, seeking to suck us into one or the other of its moral dead-ends
 - 2. Legalism – the threat that the righteousness of Christ is not enough for our salvation
 - a. That it would be necessary for us to follow the man-made rules which have the pretense of righteousness, but are, in fact, impossible to achieve in our sinful flesh
 - 3. Antinomianism – the threat that if we are saved by Christ alone through faith alone, we no longer have any moral responsibility
- O. So Paul leads us through Chapters 6 and 7, showing how that having come to Christ by faith, we have died to sin and self, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are recreated in newness of life
 - 1. And are able by the Spirit to actually live the righteous life of Christ
 - 2. As we live in submission to the ministry of His Spirit who indwells us
- P. The outcome of our journey has led us, as it led Christian, through the hills and valleys toward our destination of glory
 - 1. And in Chapter 8 we have begun to ascend to the summit
 - 2. In which we can view the destination to such a degree that our hearts are lifted and our spirits thrilled

- A. As we approach the summit we find, once again, that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
 - 1. That we have been set free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death which operates in us
 - 2. And that the very Spirit of God actually dwells in us
 - a. Giving us, not just spiritual life, but even life to our mortal bodies
- B. This same Spirit also makes us God's adopted children – heirs of God and fellow heirs of Jesus Christ
 - 1. Not a spirit of fear leading us to fall back into slavery
 - 2. But a Spirit of adoption through whom we call God Abba Father!
 - a. Our expression of deep intimacy and affection
- C. Further, we are reminded that even our sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us
 - 1. For God has plans to redeem – not just us, but the whole of creation, which had been subjected to futility and self-destruction
 - 2. So that the creation and we who believe will experience release from bondage and corruption
 - a. And experience the freedom of the glory of true children of God
 - 3. We thus hope for a redemption which includes our bodies
 - a. Which, once we understand it, enables us to wait for it with patience
- D. All this is because the Spirit, who indwells us, intercedes for the saints according to the will of God
 - 1. And His prayers are fruitful beyond our imagination
 - 2. Through His prayers on our behalf, we're reminded that God works all things for good, for those who are called according to His purpose
- E. And God's purpose cannot be thwarted
 - 1. For as we approach the summit we learn that God has determined the end and destination for all who would ever believe in Him
 - 2. For those whom He foreknew – that is, those who were known and loved by God before time began – he predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son
 - a. So that Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren
 - 3. And those whom He predestined He also called
 - a. Called in the sense of a personal, Spirit-driven, regenerating encounter leading to faith
 - 4. And those whom He called He also justified
 - a. Declaring righteous those whom He foreknew, predestined and called
 - 5. And those whom he justified He also glorified
 - a. Looking ahead to the destination – the Celestial City as it were – as if it were already accomplished for all those who would ever believe
- F. What an amazing journey!
 - 1. From our degraded and corrupt beginning

- a. Through every conceivable challenge and obstruction
- 2. Through the ministry of the gospel
 - a. In propitiation
 - b. In justification
 - c. In sanctification
 - d. Leading to glory!

III. **The Compelling Conclusion**

- A. So we have reached the gospel summit
 - 1. And can now begin to appreciate
 - a. Indeed, to be struck with the magnificence of the view
 - 2. The glories to which we have been brought
- B. **Romans 8:31** (ESV) — 31 **What then shall we say to these things?**
 - 1. Such a journey compels us to respond
 - a. And how shall we respond?
 - 2. If all of this journey has left you nonplused
 - a. Left you feeling nothing
 - b. Left you looking at your watch, wondering if this fellow will ever shut up
 - 3. If all of this journey has left you saying, “So what?”
 - a. You’re no Christian
- C. No! Genuine Christians cannot help but respond to these truths
 - 1. Respond with mind and heart
 - a. Respond with exalted thoughts of God and His glory
 - b. Respond with humbled hearts in recognition that we all depend only on His grace to have led us on this incredible journey!
- D. As we reach the summit of this journey a compelling conclusion is called for
 - 1. “What then shall we say to these things?”

IV. **For or Against?**

- A. **Romans 8:31** (ESV) — 31 **What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?**
- B. Well, let’s just take the last phrase first: “Who can be against us?”
 - 1. Lots can be against us!
- C. This makes me think of Jonah’s conversation with God after he has reluctantly returned to his mission, preached to the Pagans in Nineveh, observed their repentance, and then sulked in depression because he hated the Ninevites
 - 1. God grew up a plant for Jonah to shade him from the sun
 - a. Which made Jonah happy
 - 2. Then God appointed a worm to attack the plant so it withered
 - a. And when the sun rose and the scorching wind and sun beat on Jonah, Jonah was angry with God
 - 3. God engaged in a rhetorical conversation
 - a. **Jonah 4:9** (ESV) — 9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?”

4. Jonah replied:
 - a. And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.”
- D. Maybe you have the same response when Paul asks his question, “Who can be against us?”
 1. And you say – all kinds of people and things are against us!
 2. Boice: Who can be against us? Why many people and things, of course! And not only *can* they be against us, they are.
- E. The **World** is against us!
 1. The world in the sense of the anti-God system of antagonism toward God and His people
 - a. Boice: The world is against us because Christianity is an offense to it and is opposed to it and is opposed to its God-rebelling ways. The world will get us to conform if it can; failing that, it will try to do us in.
 2. **John 15:18–19** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.
 - b. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
- F. The **Flesh** is against us!
 1. The flesh is the residue of our sinful nature, seeking to incline us to act in rebellion against God and against Christ
 2. **Romans 8:7–8** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.
 - b. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
 3. And the flesh and the world work together to try and derail us on our journey
 - a. Just as illustrated by Christian in Pilgrim’s Progress
 4. The flesh is naturally responsive to the world’s distractions and enticements
 - a. And seeks our destruction
- G. And if that weren’t bad enough, the **Devil** is against us!
 1. Satan is our great adversary
 2. **1 Peter 5:8** (ESV) —
 - a. 8 ... Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
 3. Satan orchestrates events so that the world’s enticements work with our flesh to self-destruct before we can reach the Celestial City
- H. So, who can be against us?
 1. Lots of stuff can be against!
 - a. The world, the flesh and the devil
 - b. And anything and anyone those three enemies of our souls can throw at us

2. They can be against us!
- I. Of course, that's not the response Paul is looking for
 1. Because he doesn't pose that question in isolation
 - a. He prefaces the question, and frames it in an "if-then" relation
- J. **Romans 8:31** (ESV) — 31 What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?**
 1. It's a syllogism
 - a. With a major premise, a minor premise, and an unstated conclusion
 2. The major premise is this: "If God is for us..."
 - a. That's the driving force behind his argument
 - b. It is truly the major premise
 3. If God is for us, everybody can be against us...
 - a. But everybody doesn't matter!
 - b. Everybody can be against us, but they don't count
 - c. Everybody can inflict all kinds of pain and tribulation and hate
 - d. But none of that matters
 - e. Because God is for us!
 4. Boice: It is as if Paul is challenging us to place all the possible enemies we can think of on one-half of an old-fashioned balance scale, as if we were weighing peanuts. Then, when we have all the peanuts assembled on the scale, he throws an anvil onto the other side of the balance. That side comes crashing down, and the peanuts are scattered. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Who can stand against God? The answer is "nobody." Nothing can defeat us if the Almighty God of the universe is on our side.
- K. Calvin
 1. "If God is for us, who is against us?"
 2. "This is the chief and therefore the only support to sustain us in every temptation.
 3. "If God is not propitious to us, no sure confidence can be conceived, even though everything should smile upon us.
 4. "On the other hand, however, his favor alone is a sufficiently great consolation for every sorrow, and a sufficiently strong protection against all the storms of misfortune."
- L. Calvin then cites several passages of scripture
 1. **Psalm 23:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
 2. **Psalm 56:11** (ESV) —
 - a. 11 in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?
 3. **Psalm 3:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.
- M. Calvin

1. “There is no power under heaven or above it which can resist the arm of God.”

V. **God’s Proof**

- A. Now I think that simple statement, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” is sufficient to compel the transformation of our entire worldview
 1. It is a rhetorical question so compelling that Paul doesn’t even have to provide an answer, which is clearly, “If God is for us, who can be against us? Nobody and nothing!”
 2. And yet Paul is not completely satisfied
 - a. He wants drive more nails in the enclosure so that the believer will never fear for any incursion into the sacred space of his or her soul
- B. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 1. 32 **He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**
 2. The question Paul addresses in this statement could be expressed like this
 - a. “If God is for us, who can be against us?”
 - b. “Nobody or nothing.”
 - c. “But, how do I know God is for us?”
 3. So God gives us a proof that He is for us
 4. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
- C. Before we unpack this, I think it’s notable that God’s proof revolves around, well, God
 1. God Himself is the proof that He is for us!
 - a. He alone is the operative agent in His proof
 2. If you say to God, “Ok, prove it to me”
 - a. He doesn’t do what we would need to do and develop evidence from a bunch of other sources
 - b. He doesn’t have to appeal to some higher authority
 - c. Argument like that are too paltry for God
 3. If you say, “Ok, God, prove to me that you are for me”
 - a. He will say, “What! Have you no sense of who I am and what I have done?”
 - b. He will say, “Just think about what I have already done for you – which you already know quite well.”
- D. **God’s Active Offering**
 1. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 2. God is the active agent in demonstrating His love
 - a. It’s not as if Christ has had to coax and cajole His Father into acting on behalf of His children

- b. No! He – that means God Himself – is the sole active agent of love!
 - c. **God** who did not spare **God's** own Son but **God** gave him up for us all, how will not **God** also with him graciously give us all things?
 - 3. This is one of the most God-dominating verses in the whole Bible!
 - 4. The offering of God proving His love for us is God's own active offering
 - a. He did it!
- E. **God's Personal Offering**
 - 1. But then, even more, see how personal is God's offering
 - 2. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 He who did not spare **his own Son** but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - 3. This is God the Father giving His own Son
 - a. His own Son, of whom He said, "This is my Son, my beloved!" (**Luke 9.35**)
 - 4. This is tantamount to God saying, "I've given Myself for you!"
 - a. This is personal to God
 - b. God has not given us stuff
 - c. He had not given us material possessions
 - d. He has given His own Son
- F. **God's Unsparing Offering**
 - 1. And listen to how He expresses this grand offering of His own Son
 - 2. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 He who **did not spare** his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - 3. He could have spared His Son!
 - a. But He didn't spare His Son
 - 4. But remember – if He did spare His Son
 - a. He wouldn't have spared you!
 - b. He couldn't have spared you!
 - 5. Every Jew would have recognized Paul's language here
 - a. Because every Jew knew of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac
 - b. How God told Abraham to take his son Isaac – his "only son" according to the promise
 - c. And take him to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him there
 - d. And how when the altar had been prepared, Abraham bound Isaac, laid him on the altar, and just when he was about to plunge the knife into Isaac, the Angel of the Lord interceded
 - 6. **Genesis 22:15–16** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven
 - b. 16 and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son..."
 - 7. Abraham did not spare his own son

- a. God intervened just before Abraham was about to offer up Isaac
 - 8. But God didn't intervene at the cross
 - a. He didn't spare His only Son
 - b. So that you, believer, would be spared
- G. **God's Giving Offering**
 - 1. And then look at His offering in its positive dimension
 - 2. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 He who did not spare his own Son **but gave him up** for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - 3. Not only did God not spare His Son
 - a. He gave His Son
 - 4. Christ's death was not the machinations of His human enemies
 - a. His death was not ultimately the result of a conspiracy of Jewish leaders and feckless and opportunistic Roman politicians
 - 5. Christ's death was the result of His Father's giving of His Son
 - 6. **Isaiah 53:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on him** the iniquity of us all.
 - 7. **Isaiah 53:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 Yet it was **the will of the LORD** to crush him;
 - b. **he has put him** to grief...
 - 8. God not only spared His only Son
 - a. He gave Him up
- H. He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up
 - 1. **For us all!**
 - 2. He did it for everyone who would ever believe in Christ
 - a. He did it for you!
- I. Have you trusted in Jesus
 - 1. Who died in your place?
 - 2. Who was not spared by His Father?
 - 3. Who was given by His Father?
 - 4. For us all?
- J. I had a friend – here at Shell Point – who was a brilliant man; well educated, successful
 - 1. But resistant to the gospel
 - 2. He had been a church-going person through much of his life
 - a. But he did not believe in Jesus for his salvation
 - 3. And he was dying
 - a. He had cancer and decided to pursue no further treatments
 - 4. I, and others, had numerous conversations with him about trusting Jesus
 - a. Many were praying for him
 - 5. I went into him in the old Larsen a few weeks before he passed
 - a. And my final argument to him was this

- b. “When you meet God, which you surely will and shortly, are you willing to say to Him, ‘God, it was not enough for You to give Your only Son to die in my place. You could have done more, should have done more, than give Your only Son to die for me.’”
- c. “Are you willing to say that to God?”
- 6. I prayed for him and left
- 7. A couple of days later I received a phone message on my office phone
 - a. He said, “I just want you to know that I’m thinking seriously about what you said.”
- 8. Then a week later, another phone message:
 - a. “I want you to know that I have trusted Jesus as my Savior, and now know that I will be with Him in heaven.”
- 9. What about you?
 - a. Is it not enough that God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all?

VI. **God’s Argument**

- A. Two more observations – but they are important
- B. The question is, “How do I know God is for me?”
- C. God’s argument is this
 - 1. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all,
 - b. **how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**
- D. This is an argument from the greater to the lesser
 - 1. The greater – He did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all
 - 2. The lesser – how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?
- E. If God was willing to do the great thing
 - 1. Indeed – the greatest thing – Jesus Himself
 - 2. Why can we not trust Him to give us everything we need?
 - a. Everything needed to carry us to the Celestial City?
- F. This is Paul’s argument
 - 1. No, it’s God’s argument!
 - a. Paul is only the messenger
 - 2. If God gave His only Son, will He not also graciously give us all things

VII. **God’s All Things**

- A. Ok, so, what’s the catch
 - 1. What are God’s “all things”
- B. We’ve already seen it, haven’t we
 - 1. Back in 8.28
 - 2. **Romans 8:28** (ESV) —
 - a. 28 And we know that for those who love God
 - b. **all things** work together for good,
 - c. for those who are called according to his purpose.
 - 3. All things work together for our good

- a. Not all “good things”
 - b. No – “all things” (good or bad; pleasant or painful) – work together for good
- C. Boice: It means that God will overrule everything for our benefit, so that even evil will somehow be worked into God’s great purpose, which is to make us like Jesus. Whatever your circumstances, whatever trials, whatever pains, whatever persecutions, whatever hardships—God will use all of these things to make you like Jesus. Beyond that, he will provide all true necessities for your growth in holiness and perseverance in faith until the very end.
- D. How do we know that?
 - 1. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 - a. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?