

The Reason for Our Confidence
Romans 8:31-39
#34th in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – June 252006

Objective: *to bring this section of Romans to a conclusion by encouraging our church to rest in the certainty of God's love for us. We win!*

Introduction

Laura and I enjoy watching Law and Order. In fact, there are so many different spin-offs of the original program and so many seasons of each that you can probably catch it just about any time of day or night.

One of the characters I like watching is Sam Waterston's portrayal of Assistant District Attorney Jack McCoy. He doesn't win every case, but I love listening to his closing arguments. Sometimes with great emotion, and sometimes almost subdued, he nevertheless wraps up the facts of the case in a very convincing way.

We're at the end of the second major section of Romans. Two down, two to go. And in this section Paul wraps up not only the argument of chapter 8, but of this whole section, with the intent of encouraging us that those who have trusted in Christ can have every confidence that God will do what he has promised. Let's look at what he says.

The Reason for Our Confidence

1. We can have confidence because God is for us (31-32).
 - a. What does Paul mean by "these things" - probably best seen as a summary of what he has written about in chapters 5-8. Note "inclusio" in 5:1-10 (visual).
 - b. Paul answers his question – "What shall we say to these things?" – with two more rhetorical questions that make these points:
 - i. If God is for us, nothing or no one can stand against our ultimate destiny.
 - ii. If God went so far as to sacrifice his Son, he will certainly fulfill his promises to us. (All things = these things)
2. The Evidence that God is for us (33-39).

In the rest of this paragraph, Paul offers proof of these claims. He gives us two proofs:

 - a. The first proof offered is the sufficiency of Christ's work (33-34).
 - i. I'm not persuaded that the questions asked in verses 33 & 34 are different, but I'm not persuaded that they are the same. In other words, I'm not sure how far Paul intended to press the distinction between the phrase "bring a charge" in verse 33 and the word "condemn" in 34.

- ii. Regardless, the focus of both questions is guilt and judgment. And the point of both answers is that the only ones who are in the position to judge us have already acted on our behalf in this matter.
 - 1. Vs. 33 - God has justified us. Explain: on the basis of faith alone, through Christ alone, by God's grace alone, God declares us to be "not guilty" and credits Christ's righteousness to our account. He has already judged us.
 - 2. Vs. 34 - Christ has died for us, and not only that, he is alive and reigning as our mediator. Our potential accuser is our loving defense attorney.
- iii. This issue of being justified by faith – being declared not guilty before God – is something that has been woven through the entire book of Romans so far, and with all that is in me I want you to grasp what this is and what it means, that we are not saved from our sins because of anything we do, but only because of what Christ did.

While I was thinking the other day about this great theme, I recalled a time when I was in college when my friend Bob and I went to Tennessee for a week. We were in Nashville, and we attended a mid-week church service, and just as it was beginning Johnny Cash and his wife walked in, Bibles in hand. It's my tendency to not want to bother someone like that, but Bob is a bit more aggressive, so after the service, we both went up to him, and after we had introduced ourselves (an exciting moment for him, no doubt), he said, "We're having an open house tomorrow at the House of Cash (*his new publishing company offices and recording studios*). If you would like to come, please feel free." So the next day we went over.

You have to visualize this: We arrived in my beat-up 1964 Ford Custom, complete with a big dent in the fender. "They" arrived in luxury cars and limos. We're dressed in vintage JC Penney. Let's just say that the others were used to a bit higher standard. We were two dopey college kids from New Jersey. They were all music industry insiders. We clearly did not belong. They did.

As I was recalling all of this, I realized that I couldn't remember how we ended up actually getting in to the party. I remember being inside, having a coke, seeing people I recognized from the music world, talking to Johnny Cash for a few moments, but I don't remember how we actually gained admission. So I emailed Bob and asked him if he recalled how we got in. He wrote back, "We pulled into the parking lot and the kid who was taking care of the cars asked us what we were doing there. We told him that we

had met Johnny at church last night and that we had invited us. And the kid let us in.”

I’m not telling you this story to impress you with how I hob-knob with celebrities (I actually ended up getting bored and going out to sit in my car with the windows rolled up in 95 degree heat because of the bees that were swirling around), but because in some ways it is a picture of the Gospel.

There was nothing about us that made us suitable to be included with that group of insiders. We were, after all, clearly outsiders. But a gracious man changed our status for that afternoon. And we were granted access because we believed what he said when he said, “If you would like to come tomorrow, feel free.”

In the same way none of us deserve forgiveness and eternal life. We couldn’t begin to do enough to earn either. But a gracious father qualifies us for both when we believe his promise through faith in Christ alone, and he changes our status from being guilty to being not guilty, from being children of wrath to being children of God. See Colossians 1:11-14.

- iv. Let me talk a moment about the meaning of the idea of Christ interceding for us.
 - 1. You may have heard this explained in such a way as to visualize a courtroom in which Satan accuses us before God when we sin. In that picture Jesus steps forward to indicate that he has paid the penalty already. I’m not sure that’s the best way to understand this. In fact, based on what Paul has just said, if we have to visualize some kind of courtroom scene, it would be more accurate to visualize a trial in which the accuser doesn’t show.
 - 2. The heart of the verse focuses on Jesus’ resurrection and his being at the right hand of God – both of which demonstrate that his sacrificial work was completed. He does not need to keep reminding God of what he did. However, he is in heaven as our advocate, praying for his people, probably in the same sense in which he prayed in John 17.
 - v. In summary, how do we know that God is for us? Because on the basis of the death of his son for us, we have been brought into an eternal relationship with him in which our guilt is removed and the penalty of our sin is paid for.
- b. The second proof Paul offers is the unfailing nature of God’s love (35-39).
- i. There are things that make us wonder (35-37).

1. Paul has already talked about the reality of present pain. We looked at that two weeks ago, and that is actually the purpose of Paul's quoting Psalm 44:22.
 2. While we all have different ways of responding to trouble in our lives, it is one of the things that often brings people to question God's love. "If God loves me, why does he let this happen."
 3. What is interesting about this list is that most of them are things Paul experienced. Look, for example, at 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 and 12:10. I would venture to say that it would be hard for any of us to come close to that.
- ii. But Paul does not question God's love. He knows that God is working in all things (8:28) so he is able to affirm God's love. (38-39).
1. The point – "I don't care what you can think of, it can't separate you from the love of God.
 2. But why won't God stop loving me? Because his love for us is grounded in the ultimate sacrifice and suffering of his son for you.
 3. Really knowing this involves having the right perspective on life and its meaning, as well as on eternity. John Chrysostom was one of the leaders of the Church in the late 4th Century, was brought before the Roman Emperor who threatened him with banishment if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied, "You can't banish me, for this world belongs to my father." "So then I'll kill you, said the Emperor. "No, you can't, for my life is hid with Christ in God." "I will take away your treasures." "No, you won't be able to do that because my treasure is in heaven and that is where my heart is heart is." "Then I will drive you away from all people and you'll have no friends left." "That won't work either, because I have a friend in heaven and you can't separate us. So I defy you; for there is nothing that you can do to hurt me."¹⁰
 4. Tough words, but they came from someone who clearly understood what it means to be "more than conquerors."

How Should We Respond to What God Says in This Passage?

There are several things that I would like to see us take away from this passage.

¹⁰ 10. Alan F. Johnson, *The Freedom Letter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 136, who quotes from Henry Hart Milman, *History of Christianity*, Volume 4 (New York: Crowell, 1881), p. 144. Quoted in Hughes, R. K. (1991). *Romans : Righteousness from heaven. Preaching the Word* (171). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books [I have paraphrased it]

1. A deeper understanding of what the Gospel is. Do you understand it? Have you believed it?
2. A greater sense of confidence that no matter what happens, God will bring you home. Neither your sin nor your circumstances stand between you and God if you belong to Him.
3. A growing gratitude for what God has done for you.