

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, September 11, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 437, 377:10, 381, 372, 51.

Lessons: Genesis 22:1-18, Galatians 3:15-22, Luke 10:23-37

Sermon Text: Romans 8:31-39.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ Jesus, our only Savior, Fellow Redeemed:

What do you do when you really want to convince someone of the truth of a certain matter? Answer: You bring every possible argument. You leave nothing to chance. You tell them everything you can think of. You tell all the facts.

How do you speak when you have absolutely accepted something as the truth? Answer: you speak with such conviction that everybody knows your words come from the heart.

That's how Paul speaks in our text which is a portion of God's Holy Word that cannot be excelled in providing comfort and assurance for us. Of what does Paul want to convince us? He wants to tell all believers in Christ:

OUR SALVATION IS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN IN CHRIST.

- 1. God is for us, as proved by what he has done for us in Christ; and,**
- 2. Nothing can or will separate us from God's love in Christ.**

In the verses before our text the apostle Paul has set forth the great doctrine of the election of grace in Christ Jesus. He writes: *"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."* Romans 8:29-30. Here we learn the fact that God, purely out of grace for Jesus' sake, chose us to be his own in eternity. His love and grace is the cause of our salvation, the cause of our being called, converted and justified. The fact that we now believe in Jesus is the result of our election in eternity, and is our guarantee that we are one of God's elect and shall have eternal glory.

In our text Paul asks: *"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"* The answer to this question is: "If God is for us, no one can possibly be against us." Why are we so sure of this? Paul answers: *"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 did not spare his very own Son, his one and only Son. *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son."* John 3:16. In the first Epistle of John we read the same truth; *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."* 1 John 4:9. God gave up his Son for us. He sacrificed him for us. This is a far greater sacrifice than when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Why was this sacrifice of God's son such a great thing? This was done out of love for sinners, for people who despised the holy God and his holy commandments. Paul says: *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* Romans 5:8. God delivered up his one and only Son to suffer and die for our sins, which otherwise would have resulted in eternal punishment in hell. And all this God did for us without any merit or worthiness in us, purely by grace.

If God did this for us, Paul asks, *"how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* Now there is nothing that God won't do for us to make our salvation in heaven a certainty. He will as a free gift grant us all those things that are needful for our eternal salvation.

Therefore, we can now also ask with Paul: ***"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?"*** This question is not intended to suggest that no one will try to bring charges against us. Satan, for one, will always accuse us. He will always make us to think that our sins are not forgiven. Even though it plainly says in the Bible that our sins are forgiven, Satan, we have to remember, is the great deceiver. The Bible calls him ***"that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."*** Revelation 12:9. Furthermore, our own guilty conscience may bring charges against us, for we know the sinful deeds of which we are guilty. Nevertheless, Paul's question in our text has to be answered with the positive fact: ***"It is God who justifies."*** No one can bring charges against us because God has declared us just and righteous. ***"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them."*** 2 Corinthians 5:19. All sinners alike, no matter who they are or what they have done, the Bible says, ***"are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*** Romans 3:24. That's a Gospel fact! And who is going to successfully bring any charges against those whom God chose as his own elect way back in eternity? This is what makes us certain of salvation.

Another similar question is asked by Paul and answered in our text: ***"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."*** Our certainty of not being condemned is based on the fact that Christ died for our sins. But, more important yet is the fact that Christ rose from the dead. It was by raising up his Son that he declared the whole world of sinners justified. It was like saying to sinners: "I have accepted Christ's death for your sins and now declare you to be free from guilt and sin." So, who can possibly condemn us? Paul says: ***"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*** Romans 8:1. In addition, now when we do daily sin, the Bible assures us: ***"If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."*** 1 John 2:1 The Book of Hebrews also assures us: ***"He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."*** Hebrews 7:25. Our great High priest Jesus lives to plead for us, to always and again ask the Father to forgive us for the sake of his suffering, death and resurrection.

All these precious facts of the Gospel put together make one mighty, convincing source of certainty for the fact that we have eternal salvation. If we have all this that has been done for us already in Christ, how can we wonder or be uncertain about the future? We can say: "Nothing can or will separate us from God's love in Christ."

2.

The apostle begins this part of our text with one more question: ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"*** The love of Christ is that great love he showed when he gave himself for us. This love is no more tenderly spoken of than when Christ as the Good Shepherd says: ***"I lay down my life for the sheep."*** John 10:15. Isaiah tells us why this was necessary: ***"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*** Isaiah 53:6. We believe this precious truth of the Gospel. By God's grace we have accepted this truth by faith. Faith is the tie that binds us to Christ and his love.

There are many ways in which Satan attempts to separate us from Christ and his love for us. But no one can separate us and rob us of our faith, Paul asks: ***"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.'" Paul quotes from Psalm 44:22. We may never actually suffer death as a martyr like Stephen did. But as Christians we have to face all kinds of tribulations and distresses. There is pressure, trial and affliction. There is persecution. It can go so far that we are deprived of food and clothing and finally of our very life. The point is that so long as we confess Christ and cling to him by faith, we will have a difficult time of it on this earth. The one word Paul uses here, "hardship," literally means that being a Christian means to be in very difficult straits, pressure on every side, as we would say today like being between a rock and a hard place!***

Yet, Paul speaks with the greatest confidence and positively expresses his convictions: ***"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."*** Faith in Christ is our victory over the evils that threaten us. So long as we remain strong in faith, trusting Jesus as our Savior, nothing shall ever separate us

from God's love in Christ. Jesus himself has said to his believing followers: ***"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*** John 16:33. It is important for us to remember that a strong faith and persevering in faith is something the Holy Spirit must give. He gives it when we use the Gospel in word and sacrament faithfully. John writes: ***"See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us - even eternal life."*** I John 2:24,25

In a final burst of triumphant confidence, Paul says: ***"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."*** Isn't it refreshing to hear words like that? We live in an age of wishy-washy statements, when some people don't know what they believe, some are afraid of confessing the truth because they don't want to suffer, and still others just don't care. So it is most refreshing and strengthening to hear Paul say: ***"I am convinced..."*** He speaks with absolute assurance of faith and has no doubts. That is also the language we can speak as believers in Christ so long as we keep our ears open to hear the truths of the Gospel of Christ. Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. This is the assurance the Lord gives us through Isaiah: ***"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*** Is. 54:10

When we have heard such assurances from the Gospel, it would be a serious mistake for us to think that God's grace is cheap and forget that Christ laid down his life for us. The assurances of the Gospel do not go together with careless sinning. Paul exhorts: ***"...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."*** Philippians 2:12 Always be aware of the deceit of Satan and the weakness of our own flesh.

Trusting in ourselves and failure to use the means of grace faithfully will always result in doubt about our salvation. But if we look to the Gospel, put our trust in Jesus and His Word, then we will overcome the world, Satan, and our flesh, and say with Paul's conviction: Our salvation is absolutely certain in Christ! Amen.

Preached September 13, 1981.