

Romans Chapter 8 v 31 Part1

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[0 : 00] One of the good things, in one sense, that we do have to replace the Bibles because they're tatty means they've been well used. And actually it's a very good sign if your Bible's a little bit dog-eared and a bit worn. Mine isn't because it's brand new, so that's my excuse. Because I've had to buy one of the 2011s as well. But use your Bible, read your Bible through the week. So I'm going to be checking all Bibles next Sunday that I brought to church. There'll be a door inspection. Only if you've brought a new one will you be allowed to have one which isn't got a bit of tatty and dog-eared. Otherwise, I expect them to look well-worn and well-read. Well, let's read God's Word. It's Romans 8, beginning at verse 12, reading through to the end of the chapter. And here is what God has to say to us today and every day. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it is not to the flesh to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you receive does not make you slaves so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.

And by Him we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we might also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he has already, who hopes for what he has, sorry, who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. Those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified.

Those he justified, he also glorified. What then shall we say in response to these things? 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? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? 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. No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.

[5 : 17] Well, let's sing again. We are a people, O Lord, who have been so greatly blessed by you. We are a people, O Lord, who have received from your hand again and again such incredible gifts of love.

Just as we were thinking a fortnight or so ago of the gift of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, so again we thank you for him, the greatest gift. In one sense, the gift through whom all other gifts come. For without Jesus we could never know you, we could never be forgiven, we could never have life, we could never have light. And Lord, we do want to stop for a moment, and in the quietness of our hearts give you particular thanks for the blessings that you've given us, and those particular blessings that we can call to mind from the past 12 months.

Help us to give you the praise that you deserve. We do remember again, O Lord, those who are still suffering from the fallout and the heartache of 2015.

We think of those still grieving over loved ones who have been killed in warfare in Syria, in terrorism in France, and in other parts of the world.

Lord, we think of those people executed in Saudi just recently.

[6 : 58] We pray again, O Lord, that those who mourn as they enter the new year may turn to you, the God of comfort, and receive from you the comfort that alone you can give, the peace that you alone can supply.

We thank you for new birth in the previous year. Those children that have been born to us as parents and grandparents, and uncles and aunties, we thank you for safe delivery of them. Richly bless those children. We pray for our own children now in Sunday school and creche, and again, our prayer and longing is that this year of 2016 may be the year in which they come to truly know you personally for themselves.

We long, Lord, not only for them, but for many who we love within our own families, perhaps even our own spouse, our own children, grandchildren, parents, O Lord, who do not know you and started this new year in the same bleakness and blackness of sin.

O please, may this year of 2016 be a year of salvation for them, a year of grace for them. O make it be a year, O Lord, in which you speak to their hearts powerfully and effectually.

[8 : 25] May we be pleased, O Lord, to rejoice with the angels in heaven, because some have been saved, lost sheep have been restored.

O Lord, we ask this for those that we love, and for the people of this town of Whitby again. May it be a year in which many are saved. Lord, again, we do look to you for ourselves as a church.

We do not know what you will do with us in 2016, how you will guide and lead us, how you will change us, how you will mold us more and more into the likeness of your son.

But Lord, at the beginning of this year, we ourselves want to personally and individually commit ourselves to you. We want to reaffirm our faith in you, reaffirm our devotion to you, and reaffirm our desire, O Lord, to live for you and do your will in the coming months.

We know that we will fail. We know that we will sin. We know we will get it wrong. But with your grace and your help, then, O Lord, we know that you will work in us and through us, and you will transform us more into the likeness of Jesus.

[9 : 57] Hear our prayer, then, of commitment to you. And so, Lord, we come and ask once more that you would speak to us in your word.

We ask that you would give us hearing ears, attentive minds, soft hearts, these things that can only come by your Holy Spirit working in us.

We pray again, O Lord, that we might not be resistant to him, that we might not be rebellious against his gracious work, for he only comes to do us good as your word comes to do us good. Lord, apply and change us by your word even now. Speak, O Lord. Bless us, your children, because of your good grace.

In Christ Jesus we ask. Amen. Amen. If you do have a Bible to hand, please turn there to Romans in chapter 8.

[11 : 11] That's where we read a few moments ago in the Church Bible, page 1134. New Year's a good time to not only make resolutions and set goals, plans, perhaps for the future, it's also a good time for confessing things.

So I've got a bit of a confession to admit before you this morning. I'm afraid of the dark. My family know about this, and so now you know about it.

Ever since I was very young, I've always had that sort of a phobia and fear. I've got a few others as well, but we won't list them just now. But fear of the dark is one of them.

Since I'm an adult and grown up, at least in my body, if not in my mind, I've managed to cope with that quite well and overcome that fear, and it's no longer too much of a problem.

But it's still there, and I'm sure I'm not alone as the only person who's afraid of the dark here this morning. And of course, those of us who are afraid of the dark, it's not really the dark we're afraid of, is it?

[12:20] It's what's in the dark that we're afraid of, or what we imagine might be in the dark, or think might be in the dark. You know, that mugger that might be just around the corner, or that open manhole, or that scary monster because we watched Sherlock the other night and had to hide behind the cushion.

I did anyway. For many people, the coming 12 months, of course, is a scary thought. It's a dark place. The future.

But it's not really the future that we're afraid of. It's not 2016 we're afraid of. It's what we imagine might happen to us in the coming year. That's what's so frightening.

And of course, we have a self-defense mechanism to cope with these things, this fear of the future. It's a sort of coping mechanism which imagines the worst that could possibly happen in any situation.

And so we imagine that if we imagine what could happen, what's the worst that could happen, if we prepare ourselves for the worst that could happen, that if it does happen, sorry, if it doesn't happen, we'll be happy.

[13:31] Yeah? But if it does happen, it won't be too much of a shock. But really, in the end, we are just living in a sense of fear. So what can deliver us from that fear of 2016?

What can deliver us from that anxiety of what's in the dark in 2016? Or what's in the future? Well, of course, there's only one thing that can dispel the dark.

There's only one thing that can drive away the fear of the dark, and that's light. That alleyway, or that street, which in the dark is full of muggers and monsters, is in the daytime a very pleasant, enjoyable place to walk.

And so, too, that unknown 2016, that year ahead of sorrow and loss and pain, can actually be transformed into a very pleasant place of expectation when the right light is made to shine upon it. But what, of course, can light the future? What light can be shed upon the coming year? Can a horoscope give us light? Can a tarot card reading or a crystal ball or some palm reader?

[14:47] Or perhaps just sympathetic words of it'll all be fine, everything's going to be okay, can they make our fears disappear?

Well, no, of course they can't. All those things, whether they are horoscopes or whether they are just words of positive thinking, are really just words of ignorance.

They're just dark, dressed up in different clothes. They have no light in them at all. No, the lonely place where we find light in every circumstance is in God's Word.

That's why the psalmist writes in Psalm 119, verse 105, Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

As with every situation, we've got to turn to God's Word to give us light. Light that scatters fear and darkness, light that brings peace to the most troubled imagination.

[15:50] And at the start of this year, I want us to be illuminated by God's Word here in Romans 8 and particularly verse 31.

Particularly Romans 8, verse 31, if you have it. The second part, this is what we're going to be thinking about this morning and tonight as well. If God is for us, who can be against us?

This is God's Word to us for 2016. The whole of the Bible is God's Word to us. But this I want us to take hold of this morning as God's light, His illumination, His truth to us for all that is ahead.

If God is for us, who can be against us? The words are of course the words of the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit and they are a conclusion to what he's been writing previously.

That's why, of course, we have in the first part of the verse, what then shall we say in response to these things? Or as he uses in other places, therefore this means that this statement is now true.

[17:05] Paul is the master in the art of the logical argument. All of his letters are full of that sort of teaching style. He sets forth a clear truth. He then proceeds to support that truth with all sorts of

arguments from the Old Testament, from daily reality, even from secular writings, until he brings us to a point where the argument has a conclusion with only one possible outcome that we cannot escape from, but a truth that we have to accept is reasonable.

That's one of the wonderful things about the Bible and about the truth of the gospel. It is reasonable. It is the only thing that makes sense of life. Nothing else in this world makes sense of why we're here, how life was created in the world, why we live these years and then die, what our life is about.

Nothing makes sense apart from the reasonableness of the gospel and God's word. God's word. And so Paul has come to a conclusion, a practical conclusion.

If God is for us, who can be against us? See, that's the truth with everything that we believe as Christians, everything that Paul taught and the Bible teaches and our Lord Jesus Christ teaches. Everything about the truth is practical. It is not some airy-fairy thought. It is not theoretical mathematics that I know anything about theoretical mathematics at all.

[18 : 45] But it's not just theory. The Christian life and the Christian truth is practical application. It digs down into the very reality of our daily living.

It is not hypothetical. It's not something we simply assent to in our minds. In fact, I would say that the only way that we know truth is truth is if it works. And the gospel works.

And I'm sorry to say that all other proclaimed truth is false truth because it does not work.

It does not affect. It does not bear fruit. And so all through the letter, up until this point, Paul has been arguing for the reliability the faithfulness, the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you go back to chapter 1 and verse 16, he says this, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

[19 : 51] And so through his letter, he's been arguing for this truth, explaining the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. he explains why is it so necessary that Jesus came into the world to save us.

Well, because of God's wrath against human sinfulness. He talks about what God did for us in the person of Jesus Christ. His coming into the world. His taking on our humanity.

His going to the cross. He's been talking about explaining the outworking of what Jesus did for us as part of God's plan. Resurrection from the dead.

Salvation and forgiveness from our sins. And so when we get to chapter 8 and verse 31 where he's been talking about the outcome of these things that we are brought into a relationship with God and have the hope of eternal life in glory, he then comes to verse 31.

What should we say then? What's the response? What's the proper reasonable reaction and conclusion to what we've been saying about God's grace to us in the gospel?

[20 : 54] This, if God is for us, who can be against us? If all this is true, which we know that it is, if all this is we've accepted and believed in, then God is for us, who can be against us?

And so Paul unpacks the meaning of that, a wonderful conclusion throughout chapter 8 and goes on beyond. But particularly in chapter 8, bringing us to that wonderful conclusion of verses 38 and 39, his conviction that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

So what I want us to do this morning is to briefly apply verse 31, to unpick it a little bit, and to see, hopefully, for ourselves, what wonderful light it brings to our minds, our thoughts, our fears for the future ahead.

So we're going to work through it almost word by word, beginning with the word if. If. It's a very small word, isn't it? A lot hangs upon it though, that word if.

We use it in all sorts of occasions. But really, of course, the word if is a doubtful word, isn't it? It's a perhaps word. It's a word that suggests possibility, maybe.

[22 : 11] It has no real certainty about it. It's a word that lacks confidence. It's what we use when we are not confident about something. When we're speaking about what might happen in the future, we speak about it in a vague sort of way.

We'll talk about if the summer is warm, that's a big if, I'll go for a swim in the sea. Or if I get my pay rise, then I'll look to upgrade the car.

Or if I feel better, I'll be able to take part in the marathon. If the recession stops, and so on. It's all ifs, isn't it? There's nothing concrete that we can say about 2016.

Not one politician, not one religious leader, not one person, not one columnist in the newspaper can say, this will certainly happen.

It's all ifs. But here, as Paul breaks into this verse, into this sentence, the word if is something that speaks of certainty.

[23 : 17] His use of the word if cuts through every other type of if. It is more of a since, or rather definite truth.

God is for us. Since, therefore, God is for us. Since we know this is true. That's the only conclusion we can come to when we've understood the gospel of Christ as described in this letter.

The only conclusion we can come to when we've understood what God has done in Christ is this. God is for us. Who can be against us? It's absolute.

It's certain. It's certain last year. It was certain for the two millennia before that. And it's certain in this year. God is for us.

Well, who is this God who is for us? If God is for us. He is the God who is the initiator and the author of the gospel. This gospel of Jesus Christ and everything that it brings into our lives was started by, planned by, purposed by, brought into being by this God.

[24 : 30] It doesn't happen by chance or accident. It's not something that has been brought together by men's scheming or religious intentions or good planning.

It's God who planned the gospel before the world was made. God who executed that gospel, brought it into fulfillment in the sending of his own son and who accomplished for us everything that the gospel promises by the life, death and resurrection of his son.

It's that same God who was motivated by nothing other than love for us who is for us. Every step of the way it has been God who has been steering history itself not only to bring about Christ's life, death and resurrection but steering history in our own lives to bring us to a place of hearing and knowing the gospel.

people. You and I dear friends are not here this morning by chance or accident, accident of birth or accident of marriage or accident of where we live or parentage.

We are here and we have been brought to hear the gospel by the engineered plan and the hand of a good God who is for us. The wonderful thing is if we are Christians this morning even the very faith that we have to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ was given us by God.

[25 : 55] And since that moment when Christ became the reality of our lives and we were born again of his spirit that God has been with us and he has been effectively working by his gospel grace in our lives changing us.

The God who does everything is for us. And what does that mean to be for us? Well it means to be on our side doesn't it?

It's the very opposite of being against us. God is not against us. God is for you dear Christian. The whole message of the gospel is summed up in that phrase.

God is for us. We've been celebrating Christmas with the thought of Jesus Christ Emmanuel. God with us. God is working for us.

We've read there that most famous of verses from chapter 8 verse 28. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose.

[27 : 05] God is working for us. He is our greatest supporter. He is our greatest fan. He is our most devoted friend.

He is the one above and beyond every other single person in the world who is rooting for you. And who is determined that you should be blessed.

There is not one tiny molecule in the character, nature, person of God that is against you dear Christian.

And I don't think that we believe that. But we need to. There is not one tiny percentage of his heart that is not totally committed to doing you good.

Every bit of God, all that he is in his infinite character and nature, and all that he does in every aspect of life is given entirely over to that soul goal of your good.

[28 : 15] God is for us. That's the conclusion.

That's the only conclusion we can come to when we understand the very heart of the gospel. when we understand the result of what Christ has done in us through faith in him.

The great and gracious work of God has been, will be, and always must be to be on your side, working in your life, and he will not cease in 2016 to be for us.

us. It's just the beginning. It's just the start. And every moment of every day, this truth is real and practical.

God is for us. But notice there's a second part to the verse, which perhaps in one sense helps us, because immediately in our minds, even when we begin to say God is for us, we immediately begin to say, yes, but what about?

[29 : 30] Don't we? Yes, but what about? If God is for us, who can be against us? That statement is very vast.

It's broad to cover every eventuality. Just the other day, I had to renew my car insurance, and of course, I know that coming through the post of our email will be great reams of, conditions, documents concerning the insurance policy.

And I will not read them, and I probably think most of us don't read them, but if I did take the time to read through the clauses and the exceptions and the exemptions and so on, the small print, as we call it, we'll find that there are various things, highly unlikely, that may potentially happen, which would mean that the policy was null and void.

The small print. The company would not have to pay out for a loss if such and such a thing happened, i.e. if a goldfish got stuck in your carburetor or something like that.

That's one thing they won't pay for. But when we read God's word and we read the promise, if God is for us, who can be against us, what we read is this, that there are no exceptions.

[30 : 56] There is no small print. There is no exceptions. In fact, the word that Paul uses, which is translated in English, the word who, is in the Greek a word which can also mean what, which, as well as who.

So Paul is not just talking about a person when he says who can be against us and we think of certain people, but he's talking about every circumstance that we face, every conceivable possibility or event that may come into our lives.

He is saying if God is for us, there is nothing that can be against us, no matter what it is, whatever shape, size or situation. There's nothing in 2016 that we can experience, no matter how much it may appear to us at that time, to be working against us, there is nothing which indeed can defeat God's purpose of love and goodness to be for us and for our good.

That's our struggle, isn't it? Things will happen, things will come which are sad. Things will come which are not in keeping with what we planned, what we want, what we desire, and in our minds, sadly, and the devil helps us as well, there will come the thought, well, how can God now be for me?

This goes against his promise. No, it doesn't. Because we do not understand that God is for us and how he accomplishes that blessing for us does not mean that God's word changes.

[32 : 40] We have to conform our thinking to his word rather than allow our thinking to be shaped and molded by the things that happen in our lives which are changeable. This truth is the antidote to every malicious or grievous force that we will face.

If God is for us, who can be against us? It's not some mantra that we have to chant. It's not some sort of magic spell that we have to say when we face trouble.

But if we find that we are facing things that are difficult and our minds are drawn again to God's word, it will be to us that place of comfort and of peace and confidence and reassurance.

It will remain that one unshaking truth upon which we can stand in a faltering and shaking world. When the storms batter, when the floods rise, God is for us.

And if God is for us, says Paul, who can be against us? He gives a bit of a list of things that can happen and that do happen that seem to be against him.

[33 : 55] Think of what he says there in verse 35. Trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword.

He then gives another list of those things that he's convinced that though they will come, cannot separate us from the love of God. Death, life, angels, demons, present, future, powers, height, depth, anything else in all creation.

All of these things and we can create our own list. Redundancy, illness, loss, bereavement.

We can make our own list of the things that we experience. The trials, the testing, the discomforts. But none of those things alter, change, remove. If God is for us, who can be against us?

[35 : 01] God is for us, dear friends. And in the solidity and power of that truth, we can face 2016 and determine to live for Christ and follow him.

Let's pray.