

Conquering Christians in the Age of Coronavirus

Romans 8:31-39

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Here's a question: *Do you see the Bible as a collection of stories or as one story?* If we see the Bible as simply disconnected stories, our tendency will be to make the Bible all about us and how we're supposed to behave. If we see the central narrative of Scripture as the story about God's glory, we will find our place in light of who He is. In that sense, the Bible is not about us, it's about God's unfolding story of what He is doing in the world through Christ.

I like what Nancy Guthrie said in a recent podcast: *"We've taken little bits of Scripture and made them about us and what we are supposed to do. What Biblical Theology has done for me, is it's helped me see its about who Christ is and what He's done, and that changes everything."*

I sometimes hear pastors say we should avoid delving too deeply into theology because it might drive people away. Actually, it's only by growing more deeply in our understanding of God that we will grow in our awe and worship of Him. Unless we dive deep into doctrine, we won't be able to anchor our souls in times of great turbulence like we're going through now.

There are a lot of questions related to the Coronavirus right now. Here's some I've heard...

- How much longer is this going to last?
- Am I going to get sick?
- Who should I believe about the pandemic?
- Are we running out of meat?
- When will we be able to gather for worship again?

Or, maybe you've asked this question: *"When are you going to stop preaching sermons with coronavirus in the title? I'm tired of hearing about it."* Well, I have good news for you. Beginning next weekend, we're kicking off a new series called, "Family Matters." Because next Sunday is Mother's Day, we'll focus on "Mothers Who Mentor."

One of the most effective ways to teach is by asking questions. It's difficult to determine the precise number of questions used in the Bible because ancient Hebrew and Greek did not use punctuation marks, but Bible scholars estimate there are over 3,300 questions. Jesus asked over 300 questions in the Gospels. Likewise, the apostle Paul made use of multiple questions, especially in the Book of Romans. His favorite kind were rhetorical questions because they're intended to persuade and to make powerful points.

As we come to the end of Romans 8, we're faced with a crescendo of questions with answers that are anchored to deep doctrine. See if you can spot the questions as I read verses 31-39: ***“What then shall we say 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 with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

What Shall We Say?

The first question helps to frame the entire passage. As a preacher Paul has been teaching life-transforming theology in the first eight chapters of Romans. In these closing verses of chapter 8 he moves from information to application for the believer: ***“What, then, shall we say in response to these things?”*** Here's some of those ***“things”*** he's referring to:

- You have been justified by faith and have peace with God through Jesus Christ (5:1)
- God's love has been shed abroad in your heart (5:5)
- There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (8:1)
- You are an heir of God and a fellow heir with Christ (8:17)
- God will work all things out for His glory and your good (8:28)

- He is conforming you to the image of His Son (8:29)
- Your glorification is so certain God speaks of it as having already been accomplished (8:30)

Two thoughts come to mind in response to this question: ***“What shall we say?”*** First of all, ***“Nothing.”*** Paul is stunned and speechless. Have you ever received a totally undeserved gift you couldn’t even find words to express how grateful you were? In light of all God has done, what really can we say?

A second response to the question, ***“What shall we say?”*** is ***“Everything.”*** I should never stop thanking God for all He has done. How can we not give Him everything we have, including our very lives?

In context, Paul is especially focused on how new believers can endure hardship. His answer goes something like this: ***“The God who loved you so much that He sent His own Son to die for your sins, will give you what you need to conquer whatever crisis you go through.”*** Like water cascading over a waterfall, these questions serve to celebrate a born-again believer’s security in Christ.

Here’s what we’re going to see: ***Conquering Christians lock into the love of Christ.*** No truth will transform your life more than God’s gracious love for you in Christ.

I’m going to summarize five FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) and respond with a corresponding FAP (Faithfully Answered Promise) for each one.

FAQ #1: Who Opposes Us?

FAP #1: God Protects Us!

This first question is found in verse 31: ***“If God is for us, who can be against us?”*** The meaning is not so much ***“if”*** but is rather ***“since”*** or ***“because.”*** In the Greek the question reads more like an exclamation and goes something like this: ***“Because God for us, who against us!”*** When faced with foes he didn’t know how to fight, Elijah reminded his servant of God’s angelic army in 2 Kings 6:16: ***“Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*** 1 John 4:4 says, ***“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”***

What is your first reaction to this statement? *God is for you!* Be honest. Does this truth make you smile or squirm? Do you say, “*Right!*” or do you say, “*Yah, right!*” Listen. This is true whether you feel it or not.

Since God is for us, what difference does it make who is against us? Others may intimidate us, but we have the Almighty on our side. I was pretty small in elementary school and would get picked on by some of the bigger guys. I learned quickly that if I hung out with Dave Thieder, the rest of the guys would leave me alone. Why was that? Because Dave was the BMOC (big man on campus).

Listen, with God on your side, there is nothing anyone can do to you. Psalm 118:6: “***The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?***”

This is not to suggest we have no opposition because we all have adversaries. The point is every opponent is puny compared to how big God is. Unfortunately, some of us conclude whether God is for us by how events or circumstances turn out. If something goes south, it’s easy to think God is against us and when things go well, we think He’s for us. If you’re a born-again believer, God is *always* for you, no matter what happens.

In order to make this promise more personal, you could say something like this: “*Since God is for _____, who can be against me?*”

Conquering Christians lock into the love of Christ.

God is your proponent and He is bigger than any opponent you may be facing. In the midst of opposition, claim the first Faithfully Answered Promise: God protects you.

FAQ #2: Who Withholds from Us?

FAP #2: God Provides for Us!

The second frequently asked question is posited in verse 32: “***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?***” The gift of the Father’s Son is the promise and pledge that He not only protects us – He also provides for us. Notice the word “*own.*” This emphasizes the Father freely gave His one and only Son to die on the cross for us. The phrase “*for us all*” means, “*on behalf*”

of,” meaning Jesus died as our substitute, in our place, for our benefit. Romans 4:25 says, Jesus was **“delivered up for our trespasses.”**

This argument is from the greater to the lesser. Since God did not hesitate to give His greatest gift, certainly He will give us lesser gifts. One pastor said it this way: *“If God did the unimaginable greatest thing possible for us by not sparing His own Son, then won’t He do that which is far less demanding?”*

If God would pay such a high price to save us, why would He abandon us? It would be like a dad building a full-length basketball court for his children and then refusing to give them a basketball to use. 2 Peter 1:3 is one of my favorite verses: **“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.”**

Conquering Christians lock into the love of Christ.

God protects and He provides. That leads to the third frequently asked question.

FAQ #3: Who Accuses Us?

FAP #3: God Purifies Us!

Check out verse 33: **“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.”** The word for **“charge”** is taken from the legal world and refers to an accusation which leads to an arraignment. A Christian can feel attacked from a number of directions.

- **From the Devil.** According to Revelation 12:10, Satan, whose name means *“Slanderer,”* brings charges against Christians **“before our God day and night.”** He constantly brings every flaw, every sin, and every shortcoming up before God.
- **From the world.** Jesus said in John 15:19: **“I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”**
- **From a fellow follower of Jesus.** Galatians 5:15 tells us Christians often **“bite and devour”** each other. Some of you are experiencing this right now.
- **From ourselves.** Many of you hear the accusing anthem of guilt and shame playing in your mind on a daily basis. If so, put Romans 8:1 on repeat in your head: **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

If you know Jesus Christ through the new birth, none of these charges stick, because you have been justified before God. It's common to hear "justified" defined as, "*Just as if I never sinned.*" That's OK as far as it goes, but it's more than that. In your wretched sinfulness, God has forgiven you and declared you to be righteous. He took all the sin in your account and transferred it to the account of Jesus, and He took the spotless righteousness of His Son and transferred it to you. As a result, you are pure in position before Him.

FAQ #4: Who Condemns Us?

FAP #4: Jesus Prays for Us!

God protects us, He provides for us, and He purifies us. We see in verse 34 that Jesus also prays for us: "***Who then is the one to condemn? 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.***" Our sins deserve condemnation, but Christ now commends us. This verse is a short course on Christology:

- His CRUCIFIXION: "***Christ Jesus is the one who died...***" The cross of Christ is the basis for our confidence.
- His RESURRECTION: "***...more than that, who was raised to life...***" The resurrection is proof God the Father accepted the payment of His Son, who conquered sin, Satan, and death. Remember, Jesus didn't come to make bad people good; He came to bring dead people back to life!
- His ASCENSION: "***...who is at the right hand of God...***" This is the place of exaltation and honor. 1 Peter 3:22 says, Jesus "***has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.***"
- His INTERCESSION: "***...who indeed is interceding for us.***" Jesus functions as our divine defense attorney, pleading on our behalf. Hebrews 7:25: "***Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.***" This makes me think of the prophecy found in Isaiah 53:12: "***Yet He bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.***"

Because of the price Jesus paid on the cross, the power He displayed at the tomb, the position He holds in Heaven, and the pleas He makes to the Father, no

one can condemn the follower of Christ because we have an Advocate who is interceding for us.

I like what Tony Evans said: *“The devil was disarmed and defeated on the cross. Live like it!”* I’m reminded of what Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery in John 8:10-11: ***“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.’”***

Whatever problem or struggle or fear or concern or addiction you are experiencing, hold on to the truth that Jesus Christ is praying for you! In addition, Romans 8:26 says: ***“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”*** Write this down: *The Holy Spirit intercedes in our hearts and the Son intercedes for us in Heaven.* The perfect one is praying for those He has purified.

Isaiah 54:17: ***“No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD.”***

Conquering Christians lock into the love of Christ.

We’re protected, provided for, purified, and prayed for. There’s one more promise...

FAQ #5: Who Separates Us?

FAP #5: Jesus Preserves Us!

Listen and soak up verses 35-36: ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’”***

The word ***“separate”*** is strong. It means to place a wedge between, to divide asunder, or to sever, and was used as a synonym for ***“amputate.”*** Absolutely nothing can get in the way of the Lord loving us with agape love. We will never be cut off from Christ, no matter what we go through.

Let's be honest. Often, we see things on this list as reasons to believe God is displeased with us. Let's look at each situation threatening to separate us...

- **Tribulation** refers to *"being squeezed or crushed"* externally.
- **Distress** is to feel like the walls are caving in internally.
- **Persecution** is to be pursued with hostility because of your faith.
- **Famine** is the idea of scarcity which leads to hunger.
- **Nakedness** is to be so destitute you don't even have clothing.
- **Danger** is to be in peril.
- **Sword** refers to an instrument of war known as a slaughter-knife.

Then, Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 to show he faced death so constantly that he felt as if he were a sheep headed to the meat-packing plant (if it was still open).

We all face torment within and trouble without. None of this can separate us from the Savior. Nothing can break the bond between us and God. He delivers us from the things we dread. Those who are persecuted for their faith will never be severed from the love of Christ. Even those Christians being persecuted during this pandemic in other countries by withholding food and aid from them simply because they are Christians.

Many of the Romans who heard these words would see them come true in their own lives as Emperor Nero threw Christians to the lions and burned believers at the stake.

None of these things can sever us from the love of Christ! If you struggle believing you are loved by God, you might want to memorize Jeremiah 31:3: ***"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."*** Hold on to the promise made by Jesus in John 10:28: ***"No one will snatch them out of my hand."***

God's unchanging covenant love for us is the ground for our joyful praise of Him as stated in 1 Chronicles 16:34: ***"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever!"***

During these turbulent times, hold on to the unchanging and unshakable reality of God's love for you! This was true before COVID-19 and will remain true long after, and forever. One pastor captured this well: *"The only things that*

trouble can take away from you are the things that don't ultimately matter. The things that really matter, trouble cannot touch."

C.S. Lewis put it like this: *"Why do the righteous suffer? Why not? They're the only ones who can take it."*

More than Conquerors

Conquering Christians lock into the love of Christ because He protects, provides, purifies, prays, and preserves us.

Based upon this doctrinal certainty, verse 37 says we should be more than just survivors, we must be thrivers: ***"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."*** We're not called just to be copers; we're called to be conquerors. The idea is we are *"super-conquerors through Christ."* One translation captures it like this: *"Keep on being conquerors to a greater degree."* 1 Corinthians 15:57: ***"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."***

Expositor Alexander Maclaren helps us figure out if we are living as a conquering Christian: *"Has the world helped me lay hold of Christ? Then I have conquered it. Has the world loosened my grasp upon Him? Then it has conquered me. The worst of all afflictions is a wasted affliction, and they are all wasted unless they teach us more about the reality and the blessed necessity of the love of Jesus Christ."*

If you're still doubting God's unfailing love and commitment to you, listen to verses 38-39: ***"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** The items mentioned here are things people dread. This list of extreme elements is designed to show nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Notice, Paul is personally persuaded and completely convinced about this. The words ***"neither"*** and ***"nor"*** are absolute negatives and can be translated *"not even anything."* Paul lists some things that will never be able to separate us from the love of God, starting with death itself.

On Easter Sunday, Pastor Buddy Duggins was doing what he did for more than five decades—preaching the gospel. But his Easter message to those watching the livestream of Forest Home Baptist Church in Kilgore, Texas, was different from all the rest because it was his last sermon. Shortly after preaching about the hope of the resurrection, Duggins died of a heart attack.

He closed his final sermon with a personal testimony of struggling to cope with his wife’s death less than three months earlier. Duggins shared how he cried himself to sleep for several nights after losing his wife of almost 60 years. He said the couple wanted to “go together,” so he kept asking God why he was left here. He sensed God gave him an answer, *“I’ve left you here to do nothing more than preach the gospel of Jesus Christ you’ve been preaching for 55 years.”*

So, the pastor did just that. I watched a clip of his sermon and heard him say these words as the conclusion to his message...and to his life: *“I stand...this resurrection day to tell you, ‘Jesus Christ is alive.’ He has helped me. He has blessed me. I bless His holy name today. All for Jesus. He’s the true, living Savior. He’s alive. He was born of the virgin. He lived a perfect life. He was crucified out on Mount Calvary, put in a borrowed tomb, but on the third day—on God’s schedule—up from the grave He arose. And He lives to help us. And He lives as our blessed hope. Trust Him today. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”*

He closed his sermon in prayer, walked into his office and woke up in the arms of Jesus.

In reflecting on this, one pastor said, *“Don’t you know it delighted the Lord to watch that servant preach with such passion knowing He was about to give him his desire to see Jesus and his wife within moments? Glory!”* Trevin Wax added, *“Just think, instead of the staff saying, ‘Good sermon today,’ when he got back to his office, it was Jesus who said, ‘Well done!’”*

You too can be totally convinced of God’s unfailing love! Theology and doctrine matter because *unchanging realities produce unshakable Christians.*

Let’s go over the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) and the FAPs (Faithfully Answered Promises) once again so they go down deep in our hearts. If you’re saved, savor the security you have because of what the Savior has accomplished.

FAQ #1: Who Opposes You?
FAQ #2: Who Withholds from You?
FAQ #3: Who Accuses You?
FAQ #4: Who Condemns You?
FAQ #5: Who Separates You?

FAP #1: God Protects You!
FAP #2: God Provides for You!
FAP #3: God Purifies You!
FAP #4: Jesus Prays for You!
FAP #5: Jesus Preserves You!

Conquering Christians lock into the love of Christ.

This week I watched a clip from the movie, “*The Bear.*” The story traces a bear cub who lost its mom and is cared for by a grown male bear. In one scene, they get separated and a mountain lion sees his chance to attack the cub. As the lion gets closer, the young bear scampers away, falls into a fast-moving river, and eventually climbs onto a large rock.

As the mountain lion prepares to pounce, the baby bear stands up and begins to roar. The sound is deafening, causing the lion to freeze in fear and run away. Then, the camera pans to the right to show the resounding roar actually came from the huge male bear standing upright in full attack mode. When the cub realizes what is happening, he runs to his protector for assurance and comfort.

If you know Christ, you are more than a conqueror, you are cared for and loved by the One who conquered death, and nothing can ever separate you from Him. Nothing. Not a thing. Never. Ever.

I close with one more question...and it's a big one. It's actually *the* question. Have you ever repented and received Jesus Christ as your Savior? If you haven't and if you don't, God will be against you. Romans 2:4-5: ***“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.”***

If you are in Christ, God is for you.
If you are not in Christ, God is against you.

Don't delay. Receive Jesus Christ into your life today.

If you're ready to do that now, pray this prayer with me: *Jesus, I admit I'm a sinner. I repent by turning from how I've been living and trust what You did on*

the cross when You died in my place, shedding Your blood to pay the price for all that I've done. I want to be at peace with You. I believe You died on the cross and rose again on the third day, showing Your victory over sin, Satan, death and fear. Now, I receive You into my life. I open the door to You. Save me from my sins. I want to be born again. Now, give me resurrection power to live the rest of my life for You and under Your leadership. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

If you trusted Christ today, tell someone and send us an email at info@edgwoodbaptist.net.

May God be with you until we meet again.