

“More Than Conquerors”

Sermons on Romans # 23

Texts: Romans 8:28-39; Psalm 139:1-17

When we step back from the details of Paul’s discussion of justification and sanctification in Romans 3-8 and look at the big picture, we see something that is truly amazing. In Romans 4:5, Paul speaks of God justifying the wicked. In Romans 5:1, Paul speaks of those same ungodly sinners having peace with God, because as Paul tells us in Romans 5:6, Christ dies for the ungodly, even while we were powerless to do anything to save ourselves. Then, in Romans 6, Paul describes how justified sinners die with Christ in baptism and rise in him to newness of life. In Romans 7, Paul describes an intense struggle with sin, both before and after conversion, while in Romans 8, Paul speaks of how sinners now walk in the Spirit and how God will redeem us as individuals, even as he redeems all of creation. And now, at the end of Romans 8, Paul’s heart soars as he considers how these same ungodly sinners are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ.

We now wrap up our treatment of Paul’s discussion of justification and sanctification by turning to the final two sections of Romans 8, Paul’s discussion of the “order of salvation” in Romans 8:28-30, and the glorious doxology which ends this discussion in verses 31-39. As we turn to the first part of our text, we need to keep in mind that although this 3 verse section of Romans is best understood as a continuation of the previous section (Paul’s discussion of the intercession of the Holy Spirit) these verses have played such a huge role in the Reformed tradition’s theological development, we will treat them separately before turning to the doxology which concludes the chapter.

In verses 28-30, Paul sets forth “the way the purpose of God is worked out in believers.”¹ Although Paul’s readers groan right along with the creation as they await personal and cosmic redemption, nevertheless in the midst of this groaning and suffering, we can take heart. For we are not suffering at the hands of a cruel fate or random chance which are beyond God’s control. Rather, we suffer because of the consequences of human sin and because of this sin, God has subjected creation to frustration. But God is in control of all of these things even while we suffer and while creation groans. Furthermore, God is directing all of history toward its appointed end. Says Paul, both the suffering and groaning as well as the coming heavenly glory, come to pass because God has willed it to be so. This is why we can take heart in the midst of the suffering associated with life in this world. The same God who brings all of this to pass as part of his decree, now tells us that he is working out all of this for our good. God never promises us to keep us from suffering. But God does promise that our suffering will be turned to our ultimate good, if not in this present evil age, certainly in the age to come when Christ’s eschatological glory is revealed. While the mere thought of God’s sovereignty moves many Americans to question God’s fairness, Paul sees God’s sovereignty as a source of great comfort.

This passage, along with others such as Ephesians 1:3-14 and I Corinthians 6:11, seems to describe a basic *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), in which salvation begins with God’s eternal decree which is executed in time through the administration of the covenants and is applied to individual believers at the time of conversion. This, of course, is where the Reformed, Lutheran and Arminian theological traditions diverge, and this is why these verses are so important for us to understand.

¹ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 330.

And so with this in mind then, let us turn to the first part of our text, Romans 8:28-30.

The close connection between this section and the preceding discussion of future hope in the midst of present suffering is seen in verse 28, when Paul states, “*we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.*” “*We know*” connects the following (God works for the good of those who love him in all things) to the preceding, *the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will*. But what are the things through which God works? And how is this connected to God’s will for which the Spirit prays? The answer is Paul’s source of comfort to suffering Christians anticipating future glory. God works through the very same things mentioned previously, present suffering in light of future hope and the groaning of creation as it awaits liberation from the curse. As God is sanctifying his people and renewing the cosmos, so too, he will turn our present suffering to good. While Paul doesn’t say what this “good” is, the context indicates that he is talking about sanctification and the renewal of the cosmos.

Although the translation of this verse is debated (the NIV is probably correct) Paul places the love that believers are to have for God forward in the sentence for emphasis.² This is an important Old Testament theme as seen in the number of texts which speak of the love that believers are to have for God. Paul certainly has this Old Testament background in mind as a couple of examples will demonstrate:³ Exodus 20:6/Deuteronomy 5:10—“*but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*” Deuteronomy 6:5—“*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*” Joshua 22:5—“*But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to obey his commands, to hold fast to him and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul.*”

Paul is saying that we (believers) know (from the Old Testament and from the suffering and resurrection of Christ), that those who love God (that is, who exercise faith in Christ and who die to self and rise to newness of life as a result) that in all things (present suffering and present groaning), God works these things for good (sanctification and renewal of the cosmos). The idea that God works in and through our sufferings is an important one. As Charles Cranfield reminds us, “nothing can really harm—that is, harm in the deepest sense of the word—those who really love God, but that all things which may happen to them, including such grievous things as are mentioned in v. 35, must serve to help them on their way to salvation, confirming their faith and drawing them closer to their Master, Jesus Christ. But the reason why all things thus assist believer is, of course, that God is in control of all things....This conviction that no evil which happens to the God-fearer . . . can really harm him, but that all things, even those which seem most adverse and are most painful, must somehow result in good for him, was very wide-spread indeed. But it is necessary to add that this traditional teaching is radically transformed, as it is taken over by Paul and other Christian writers, because it is now grounded in God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ.”⁴ We have hope while we suffer and as the creation itself groans under our feet, because we are

² See the discussion in Moo, [The Epistle to the Romans](#), pp. 527-530.

³ As Cranfield points out, this “suggests that [Paul] is stating in this sentence something which he knows to be generally recognized as true. The language used and the fact that Jewish parallels can be adduced make it likely that he is deliberately incorporating a piece of traditional teaching” (Cranfield, [Commentary on Romans](#), I.424).

⁴ Cranfield, [Commentary on Romans](#), I.428-429.

united to Christ through faith and God uses our sufferings to prepare us for the glories of the age to come.

But lest we think that any one of Adam's children can love God—in the sense of exercising faith in Christ and living a pious life—in their own strength, Paul asserts that the only reason why anyone “loves God,” is because they “*have been called according to his purpose.*”⁵ This is an important assertion for several reasons. Paul is not using the term “calling” here in a general sense, but in an effectual sense, “those who have not only heard the call but have responded.”⁶ For Paul calling precedes faith, a point he will make again in Romans 10:14-17. People who love God do so because God has called them and that the basis on which they have been called is God's purpose— not anything God sees in the creature which motivates him to respond. This is an important part of a Christian's hope for the future in the midst of our present suffering. “The purpose of vv. 28-30 was to underline the certainty of the hope of which vv.17-27 had spoken. This certainty is indicated by the first part of verse 28; but, had Paul said no more, its fullness would not have been expressed. This only begins to be seen, when it is realized that behind the love which those who are righteous by faith have for God—and far transcending it in significance is God's prior choice of them (compare 1 John 4:19— “*We love because he first loved us*”).”⁷

Paul says virtually the same thing in Ephesians 1:9-12: “*And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*” As Paul sees it, calling is based upon God's eternal purpose, not upon God's advance knowledge of what sinners will do under certain conditions. This is fatal to the popular notion found in so much of evangelicalism in which it is taught that foreknowledge *precedes* calling and that God chooses people based upon what the creature will do.

In verses 29-30, Paul writes, “*For 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.*” The five verbs of the so-called golden chain of salvation in verses 29-30 explicating God's saving purpose, [to “foreknow”; to “predestine”, to “call”, to “justify”, to “glorify”] are linked to the preceding verse by the use of [*hoti*], which introduces a reason, or an explanation. As John Murray reminds us, all of these are presented as acts of God, preserving Paul's emphasis on divine monergism.⁸ Our obligation is always response. In these verses, Paul explains what it means to be called according to God's purpose as stated in verse 28. Obviously, these verses play a huge role in the Reformed conception of God's salvation of sinners.

First, Paul begins by speaking of “*those God foreknew.*” This does not mean what so many Christians

⁵ According to Calvin, “it should be observed that Paul has included the whole of true religion in the love of God. The whole pursuit of righteousness depends upon this” (Calvin, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, p. 179).

⁶ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 332.

⁷ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.431.

⁸ Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 320.

think it means! The Greek word “[*egno*—knew] is to be understood in light of the use of [the Hebrew *Yada*] in such passages as Genesis 18:19— “*For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.*” Jeremiah 1:5— “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.*” Amos 3:2— “*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins;*” where it denotes that special taking knowledge of a person which is God’s electing grace. The thought expressed by the [*pro*—before] is not just that God’s gracious choice of those referred to preceded their knowledge of him, but that it took place before the world was created.”⁹ This can be seen in Ephesians 1:4— “*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.*” and 2 Timothy 1:9— “*who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*” To “foreknow” means much more than merely knowing the outcome of events in advance. There is no notion here of the contingency of future events in the divine mind. To see predestination as based upon foreknowledge i.e., knowing the outcome of contingent future events in advance, is nothing more than a practical deism.

But while this is true, Morris cautions us that “we must also remember that Paul’s next verb is predestined and we must be on our guard against making the two say the same thing. Moreover, Paul is describing the saved, and God’s foreknowledge of them is not the same as his foreknowledge of all mankind. Perhaps, ‘choose beforehand’ is as good as we can do, viewing this is a reference to election.”¹⁰ Thus *proginosko*, and Paul’s reference to foreknowledge, must be understood in light of texts like Psalm 139 (our Old Testament lesson). In fact, a translation such as “foreloved,” is probably acceptable. It is also possible to understand this as, “entering into relationship with before,” since the verb has a person, not an event, for an object, the key point in understanding Paul’s argument here, especially in light of the context—present suffering while we await future glory.¹¹ Paul does not say, “God knew what we would do before we do it.” What Paul does say is that God knew us before we were born! Thus *proginosko* is not a general knowledge of the course of human history, or even a knowing in advance of what will come to pass. Rather, the term refers to an intimate knowledge of God’s elect, the personal objects of this knowledge. He knows us. He knit us together, the Psalmist says.

Second, the next verb Paul uses is predestine—God *also predestined* those foreknown, *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* The Greek word is *proridzo*, and means to “set a boundary beforehand.” According to Morris, “this is an important concept and one which some people find difficult because they are so sure that we have free wills....It must suffice to notice that the meaning of the word is plain. We must not allow to be sidetracked by modern notions of what is or is not possible for God. Paul is saying that God is the author of our salvation, and that from beginning to end. We are not to think that God can take action only when we graciously give him permission. Paul is saying that God initiates the whole process.”¹² This is important for Paul, because

⁹ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.431

¹⁰ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 332.

¹¹ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 532.

¹² Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 332.

predestination lies at the foundation of *sola gratia*. How can our salvation from the guilt and power of sin be all of grace, if salvation begins with an act of the human will, rather than in God's decree? To affirm *sola gratia* in a consistent sense, we must also affirm that our salvation begins with something good in God, which motivates him to save guilty sinners, and not, as so many teach, that God responds to something good he sees in the creature, faith or a positive response to the gospel.¹³ Foreknowledge, then, refers to God's intimate knowledge and choice of the individuals he intends to save, while predestination refers to the goal for which they have been chosen— *to be conformed to the likeness of his Son*.

The goal, then, to which those God has chosen are to be brought, is conformity to the image of Christ. Says Cranfield, "Behind the words [*to be conformed to the likeness of his Son*] there is probably the thought of man's creation [according to the image of God] (Genesis 1:27— "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*"), and also the thought (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4— "*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*" Colossians 1:15— "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*") of Christ's being eternally the very [*ikon*, image of God] (not, it be noted, just *according to the image of God*). The believer's final glorification is their full conformity to the [*ikon*-image] of Christ glorified; but it is also probable . . . that Paul is here thinking not only of their final glorification but also of their growing conformity to Christ here and now in suffering and in obedience—that [*summorphous*, conformity] is meant to embrace sanctification as well as final glory, the former being thought of as a progressive renewal of the believer into that likeness of God which is God's original purpose for man (cf. Colossians 3:9-10— "*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*")."¹⁴ Thus Paul is indeed speaking of sanctification, for we are called according to God's purpose, foreloved by God before the world began, and now predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Very likely, this is a reference to progressive sanctification in this present evil age, which culminates in future glorification glory to which Paul repeatedly pointed us in the previous verses. Our present sufferings, as we await future glory, are part of our sanctification. This echoes what Paul has earlier stated in Romans 5:1-5.

But there is a corporate aspect to this as well.¹⁵ As individuals, we are together conformed to the image

¹³ As Cranfield sees this, the key here is the relationship between foreknowledge and predestination. "Whereas [*proegno*] denoted God's gracious election, [*proridzen*] denotes His gracious decision concerning the elect, the content of which is indicated by the words which follow [*to be conformed to the likeness of his Son*]. For *proridzen* compare Acts 4:28— "*They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*" 1 Corinthians 2:7— "*No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.*" Ephesians 1:5; 11— "*he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will,*" and "*In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.*" This divine predestination or decision which appoints for the elect their goal is, like their election, to be thought of as taking place [*before the creation of the world*]" (Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.432).

¹⁴ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.432.

¹⁵ Morris also reminds us that "we have been admitted to the heavenly family; we are *brothers* in that family and we call God 'Father.' We are accordingly to live as members of the family, and that means

of Christ, as a church, i.e., all of those chosen in Christ. Thus sanctification must be seen as having a corporate aspect as well an individual one. This becomes plain in the next clause of verse 29— *that he might be the firstborn among many brothers*.¹⁶ All those called according to purpose, foreloved before time, and predestined, become Christ's brothers in the heavenly family to which we belong by adoption. Predestination has a specific goal (conformity to the image of Christ), which is sanctification, a point Paul makes in 2 Thessalonians 2:13— *“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.”*

The third verb used here is “calling” [*kalein*], which, as we have seen, clearly refers to the effectual call in this instance, since calling is said to be preceded by foreknowledge and predestination. Paul puts it this way in verse 30, *“those he predestined, he also called.”* This time Paul moves the sequence from God's decree in eternity past into history, because calling occurs in connection with the preaching of the gospel, a point made clear in Romans 10:13-15— *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”* As Cranfield puts it, “when God thus calls effectually, a man responds with the obedience of faith. Indeed, calling in this sense and conversion might be likened to the obverse and reverse of the same coin: they are the same event seen from two different points of view.”¹⁷ It is God who calls sinners through the preaching of the gospel. Those thus called, respond with faith, which issues in justification.

This leads to the fourth verb Paul uses here, *“those he called, he also justified.”* This great doctrine we have already treated extensively. But it is clear that the right standing given us by God comes through faith alone, and flows from God's calling his elect to faith through the preaching of the gospel. And justification leads to glorification, as both the forensic and ethical aspects of salvation take us to the same wonderful goal which is the redemption of our bodies.

The fifth verb Paul uses here is glorification— *“those he justified, he also glorified.”* “The use of the aorist [tense] here is significant and suggestive. In a real sense, of course, their glory is still in the future, still the object of hope and this ‘not yet’ with regard to their glory is certainly not to be explained away or glossed over. But their glorification has already been foreordained by God (cf. v. 29); the divine

being made like our elder Brother. This is all part of God's predestination; he predestined us not only to be released from an unpleasant predicament, but in order that we might become like his Son” (Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 333).

¹⁶ As Cranfield points out, this “indicates God's purpose in foreordaining His elect to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. It was in order that His only-begotten Son might not be alone in enjoying the privileges of sonship, but might be the Head of a multitude of brothers, of the company of those who in, and through, Him might have been made sons of God. It is as their conformity to Christ is perfected in glory that believers finally enter into their full enjoyment of the privileges of their adoption in fellowship with Him. The word [*prototokos*—firstborn] expresses here at the same time both the uniqueness and pre-eminence of Christ and also the fact that He shares His privileges with His brethren” (Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.432).

¹⁷ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.432-433.

decision has been taken, through its working out has not been consummated. Moreover, Christ, in whose destiny their destiny is included, has already been accomplished. So it can be spoken of as something concealed which has yet to be revealed (cf. v. 18—the glory to be revealed in us).¹⁸

With this, we complete the golden chain of salvation. As John Stott so aptly puts it, “here then is the apostles’ series of five undeniable affirmations. God is pictured as moving irresistibly from stage to stage; from an eternal foreknowledge and predestination, through a historical call and justification, to a final glorification of his people in a future eternity. It resembles a chain of five links, each of which is unbreakable.”¹⁹ To summarize, it is clear from these three verses that, God is working all things for good for those who love him—this is to comfort us in the midst of our present suffering as we await the glories of age to come. Calling is based upon God’s purpose, not his foreknowledge of contingent future events or the positive response of some to gospel preaching.

In fact, foreknowledge does not merely mean to “know in advance,” but instead, is better defined in terms of “to forelove” before time. The object of God’s foreknowledge is not events, but people, namely the elect, those called according to purpose (cf. Psalm 139). Those predestined are those chosen according to God’s purpose. Specific individuals are chosen (those called according to God’s purpose) not merely “categories,” i.e., “those who will believe in Christ,” or those who are members of Christ’s church. All those predestined are predestined unto conformity with the image of Christ. Thus the goal [*telos*] of God’s graciousness to us is that Christ will be the firstborn among many brothers.

God is the initiator and guarantor of this process. Our role is the response of faith and its fruit, which is obedience. Paul’s use of the aorist tense indicates that God’s decree renders these things certain, even though they have not yet occurred in time. The elect not yet born are already glorified according to God’s purpose. And yet, Paul clearly speaks of events in eternity past (foreknowledge and predestination) in the present (calling and justification) as well as future (glorification). Our God is a great God. For he saves sinners, he doesn’t wait for sinners to save themselves with his help.

It is clear that those called according to God’s purpose, and who are foreloved, predestined etc., are also

¹⁸ Cranfield points out that “We may compare the use of the aorist [*esotheamen*] in v. 24. The fact the sanctification is not mentioned as an intermediate link between justification and glorification certainly does not mean that it was not important to Paul: the earlier part of this chapter— not to mention chapter 6 and 12:1-15:13— is clear evidence to the contrary. It may be he felt that sanctification has already been sufficiently emphasized in the course of the section for it to be unnecessary to refer to it again less explicitly—an implicit reference is of course present, since, according to what has already been said in this epistle, sanctification is both the natural sequel to justification and also the earthly road which leads to heavenly glory. He may perhaps have felt that [*edoxasen*—glorification] covered sanctification as well as glorification, since there is a real sense in which it is a beginning of glorification (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18— “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit*”, and also the way in which— if our interpretation was right—*conformed to the likeness of his Son* in v. 29 referred not only to conformity to Christ’ glory hereafter but also being conformed to him here and now in sufferings and obedience).” Cf. Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.433.

¹⁹ John Stott, Romans: God’s Good News for the World (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), p. 253.

preserved by Christ unto final glorification. This means that none of God's elect can fall away and be lost and that the number of the elect is therefore "fixed." As Paul will go on to say in his doxological statement in verse 39, this all stems from the love of God that is in Christ, and not because of anything good in the creature which God sees and causes him to respond to us with grace.

Having described this gold chain of salvation, we now come to one of the true heights of the New Testament, the so-called "Triumph Song" of Romans 8:31-39.

Though there is some debate among the commentators about the role of this doxological section of this epistle (does it wrap up the preceding or introduce the discussion about Israel to follow in chapters 9-11?) I think the evidence is clear that these words spontaneously spring from Paul as he contemplates the amazing grace of God as the answer to the predicament of present suffering in this evil age. It is contemplating the glories of the age to come which moves to Paul to compose these words known to us as "the triumph song."²⁰ Unlike all other world religions, Christianity seeks to praise God for what he has done, instead of speaking of the triumph of the human spirit or the accomplishments of humanity. Paul himself is marveling at the hope which we as Christians have in the midst of present suffering.

Suffice to say, to even comment on these words feels like we are interrupting a great speech or barging in on someone in the midst of prayer. So we will proceed quickly, and try not to break up the unity of Paul's thought. Paul begins with a question, "*what, then, shall we say in response to this?*" that is, to the wonderful declaration in verse 18, that our present sufferings cannot be compared with the glory which will be revealed in us, and which Paul has been setting forth in the following verses. By the time Paul completes the "golden chain" of salvation in verses 28-30, he cannot contain himself and launches into this "triumph song," hence, his question, "*what, then, shall we say in response to this?*" The rest of the verses in this chapter serve to answer the question.

The first thing Paul declares is that "*if God is for us, who can be against us?*" Since the promise of personal salvation and cosmic renewal does not depend upon human works, or human co-operation with God's grace, but instead, depends upon God's resurrection power, Paul reminds his reader of this most fundamental point, God is for us in Christ. And if God is for us, how can any earthly and/or human power, or even Satan himself, prevent God from bringing to pass that which he has promised. This perhaps echoes the famous words of Psalm 23:4: "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*"

In verse 32, Paul moves from the general affirmation of God's power to do as he has promised, to a much more specific reason as to why we can count on him to do this for us (even in the midst of our present sufferings). "*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?*" Here, there is an echo clearly drawn from Genesis 22:16—"I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son." Paul's point is simply this—if God's own Son died for our sins—the supreme sign and portrayal of God's love for sinners—we can be fully confident that God will give us all things, i.e., the

²⁰ Says Leon Morris about this section of Romans, "Paul rounds off the first half of his letter with a passage which Christians have always regarded as one of the most wonderful parts of a wonderful epistle" (Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 334). According to Cranfield, "what distinguishes this passage . . . [is] the fact that the confidence expressed in it is confidence not in the power of human virtue but in the grace of God in Christ" (Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.434).

renewal of the earth and the bodily resurrection from the dead which culminates in future glory. After all, Christ did not die for himself, but for all those given him by the father, those who will be his adopted brothers and sisters, and for whom he died. The key here is Paul's notion of "union with Christ."

Since Christ has died for us and was raised for our justification, Paul now asks rhetorically: "*who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*" The pattern of Old Testament echoes continues, this time the echo comes from Isaiah 50:8-9— "*He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.*" As Paul has said, all those foreknown (those chosen in Christ), are predestined to be conformed to Christ's image, and are then called through the preaching of the gospel. These same people will also be justified, and ultimately glorified. Since God provides the means necessary to ensure our justification in the person of his Son (namely an all-sufficient payment for sin and a perfect righteousness) how can anyone (i.e., Satan, and "Job's counselors") bring charges against those whom God declares to be "not guilty." We have been vindicated in Christ, therefore, God will entertain no charges against us.

In verse 34, Paul asks yet another question: "*who is he that condemns?*" In Paul's theology, Christ is the final judge before whom we will appear—2 Corinthians 5:10 states, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*" If Jesus is judge, how can Jesus turn around and now condemn those given him by the father, those for whom he has died, bearing the wrath of God, and for whom he is now interceding? In fact, Paul states as much in the very next phrase, "*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.*" Jesus Christ is at this very moment at the right hand of God (the place of highest honor) interceding for God's people, preventing the kind of judgement spoken of in the question Paul has asked to open the verse. We will not be condemned because Jesus is no longer our enemy, but our friend and intercessor (Romans 5:1-11).

Since Christ is the judge or intercessor (depending upon whether we are "in Christ," or not) in verse 35, Paul now asks the critical question for those of us who suffer in the present age, while we await the glories of the age to come. "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*" Paul's answer is obvious. Nothing on this list, or any other list for that matter, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ, because, Jesus Christ himself as triumphed over all of these things, and as Lord and intercessor, he himself will ensure that we remain in him and that we will participate in future glory. Paul's confidence stems from Christ's faithfulness, not the sinner's ability or worth.

In verse 36, Paul cites Psalm 44:22, as a means of reinforcing what he has just stated in the previous verse, when he mentioned trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword, "*It is written: `For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*" Psalm 44 is a Psalm describing the perplexion God's people feel in the midst of their of suffering. The love of Christ (from which we cannot be separated) does not mean that we will not suffer, but that nothing will be able to separate us from God's love in the midst of our suffering. Again, God never promises to relieve suffering, but to see us through our suffering. Instead of being consumed by our trials, Christ ensures that we triumph in the midst of them. Says Paul in verse 37, "*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*" This is a most amazing assertion, since this is affirmed about those same people, who were described by Paul in Romans 4:5 as "ungodly." It is the supreme source of comfort to those who presently suffer, that in Christ, they are more than conquerors!

In verses 38-39, Paul concludes by giving a litany of those things from which Christ Jesus has promised to deliver 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.”* These words should be left to stand on their own and to comment upon them only weakens their impact.

But nevertheless, this glorious doxology serves a very important purpose. In the midst of our present suffering, God has not abandoned us nor left us on our own. Our suffering has a purpose and a goal. And our suffering will give way to a glory which is beyond our imagination! For although we are guilty sinners, God in Christ is for us, and therefore nothing can be against us or separate us from God’s love. God justifies the wicked through faith in his son, and we are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. Amen!