

God is for Us!

Romans 8:31-39 (NIV)

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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.

“God is for us!” (verse 31) What does that even mean? Does that mean that God is some kind of cheerleader or life coach, that he calls out inspiring statements from the sidelines of life like “You can do it!”, that he claps his hands and whistles for you to encourage you while you do all the hard work and drip with sweat, that he pats you on the back once you’ve completed the task at hand never actually doing any of the work for you?

If that’s all “God is for us” is, then that’s sad. In fact, that’s a sad God. Encouragement is good, but what about when we have given are all, our best, and it wasn’t enough? How do we deal with the failure and the disappointment that our best wasn’t good enough? When we lose, is God for us just a shoulder to cry on, an ear to listen to my failure?

What does God do when seemingly everything is going wrong, when it feels like the world is against me? You get over one hurdle in life, then there’s another one thrown your way. You are working to solve one thing, and then something else breaks down. You get past one instance of life drama to only have another episode air in your life. Just look at my last vacation. A prayer request went out on behalf of my family the day before we left that God would watch over and protect us and rejuvenate us. Well, I spent that day throwing up. The next day, our first day of travel, we got a flat tire about an hour away from our destination. Our GPS was giving us bad information so that the tow truck couldn’t find us. Two hours later, we finally had our tire changed and went searching for another full-sized tire. Six miles down the road we got another flat tire. It’s now about 10 at night and road side assistance says that they can’t get a tow truck out to us until midnight. Everyone in the car is breaking down, just wanting this day to be over. The next day, I go to a tire place, get two new tires, while Wendy is now sick with what I had. Two days later, James is running a fever. Two days after that, we couldn’t find a gas station out on the coast because our GPS wasn’t working again and we nearly ran out of gas. Two days after that, William got an ear infection. Then we came home. God, were you really on my side for that vacation? That was a pretty stressful vacation. Didn’t you hear all the prayers? And I know that you all have stories like that.

What does God do when you are facing financial hardship? You think you have enough to get you through, but then another thing comes up and another thing and another thing. How will I pay for this? You sort through all the recent medical bills, add the numbers, and you know that you do not have enough in savings to pay for it. God said not to worry, that he will provide, but where is that going to come from? Were those just words, God, or are you actually going to do something to get me through all these needs?

What about when there is a death? Your beloved, your friend, your companion is gone. Your world just crumbled before you. What do you do? How do you go on? Where do you even start? I’m lost, God. The sadness overwhelms me. I can’t stop crying. I can’t stop feeling guilty over not treasuring the time I had with this person, not taking more time to appreciate them. God, I don’t see how I can keep going. How are you going to help me?

How about when you experience persecution? Maybe not physical persecution, but how about when you are ignored by people who are of another faith of you, who don’t interact with you or your family, whose conversations all seem to center around their religion and their faith and their gatherings - conversations that exclude you. It becomes clear that you are an outsider, that you are not welcome in this group. You are ostracized because of your faith. God, why do you let people treat me this way? I follow you, give up things for you, hurt for you, and what do you do? I feel just as ignored by you.

How about the guilt that eats at you in the middle of the night, guilt over things that you said, things that you have done, things you have left undone? Guilt for not being the example, the follower of Christ, that you ought to be. Guilt as I feel like I’m not a good enough believer. The accusations don’t go away, God. Why don’t I feel forgiven? Why do I feel so distant from you? I want to believe in you, but what’s the point if you don’t actually do anything for me?

Is “God for us” just a platitude, just words? Or does God do something for us, especially when life is too hard to handle and I encounter problems I can’t overcome? Yes. Yes he does. Paul wrote these words to tell us what it means that God is for us.

Take all those troubles, the “world is against me” feeling, the travel woes. God for us means that he is on my side. He is not a disinterested party, not a fair-weather fan of my life. He declared just a few verses before our section of Romans that he works all things for my good, for your good. These are actions that he backs up with his power. He is at the right hand of God, a position of power, power that he uses to control every event in the world for our good. Flat tires, sicknesses, car trouble, health trouble, constant problems – I don’t know how any of them are for my good, but God knows and sees the whole picture. He knows exactly what I need and when I need it. So he allows these things in my life for my benefit, not because he stopped loving me. He allows these things because he loves me, because he knows that he will work them for my good. It may not be my version of what I think is good, but he knows the best version and the best way. Maybe it was a lesson in patience or perseverance or to lean on God even more when everything goes wrong and that no matter how much planning and prepping I do, it is only God who is in control and he is for us; he works all things for our good. (Side note: Even with all the troubles, it was also a pretty awesome vacation where we got to enjoy a lot of wonderful things in California.)

What about when the financial side of things looks dire, something akin to experiencing famine or nakedness? What does God do then? “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?” (verse 32) You’re worried about bills, about money, about stuff. God for us resulted in him giving up his Son for us. Who of us would do that? Would you give up your child to someone who didn’t even like you, someone who cursed you, who hated you, who accused you of never caring and never being there for them? God did for us. He gave up his own Son who died, more than that, who was raised to life, for us. He did this to take away our sins, to draw us to him, to bring us into his family, to conquer sin, death, and the devil for us.

If God gave up his Son for us, do you think he will passively watch us go hungry and homeless? No! If he gave up his Son for us, what would he ever withhold for us? It’s like a story Wendy’s parents told me. In high school, her Dad offered to her boyfriend to take his classic 1978 25th anniversary Corvette to drive Wendy to a school dance. The boyfriend responded, “You would trust me with that?” Wendy’s Dad said, “I’ve already entrusted my daughter to you. Why wouldn’t I trust you to drive one of my cars?” God gave up the greatest thing he could for us by giving us his Son. How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (verse 32)

But what about when I’m so lonely and depressed because my loved one passed away? What about when I feel persecuted and neglected and lonely? God for us acted in this way: “I called you by my Word. I brought you to me. I took care of you for your whole life, from the moment you were conceived. I loved you even before you were born. No matter what happens to you, the acts of my love for you are a fact that took place in history and continue today. You couldn’t save yourself. I knew that. That’s why I gave up my Son for you. I saved you before you could even think of loving me. I gave you a belonging with me when I called you to faith, when I washed you clean in the waters of baptism, when I gave you my body and my blood for you to eat and drink in, with, and under the bread and the wine. I adopted you into my family and I continually give you my grace to keep you there.”

And when my conscience continues to accuse me and torment me? God for us says, “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.” (verses 33-34a) Yes, Satan accuses us, constantly reminds us and God just how sinful we are, how many times we have fallen short, how many times we have acted as hypocrites. But Satan does not get to judge us. He can accuse us all he wants. People can accuse us all they want to point out that we are not worthy of God and of living with him in heaven. We can accuse ourselves in the same way. But none of these are our judge. Our judge is God. Because he did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, he has declared us “Not guilty.” This is what it means that God justifies us. He is the Judge. He knows the charges. He has put the charges on his Son and declared us not guilty. No one can take that away from us because no one else is the Judge. No one else justifies. That’s God for us.

God is for us. Who can be against us? No one. Can anything separate us from God? No! Nothing! We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. No one can take away the victory God has won for 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.” (verses 38-39)

God for us is not just inspiring words. God for us means that he does all these things for us to keep us connected to him. God for us means that he constantly works to do this, that he works all things for our good, that he answers all our needs in the best way possible. He will never walk away from us. He will never look at us with disinterested eyes. He will never put us down. He defeats all things to keep us with him. God is for us. Nothing can separate us from his love for us. Amen.