

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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What Will We Say?

by Dan Trygg

“What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He did not even spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; how will He not also with Him freely-give us all things? ³³ Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect? God is the One who justifies. ³⁴ Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the One who died, but even more, has been raised; He also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: Because of You we are being put to death all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered. ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than victorious through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!”

Romans 8:31-39

We come to a summary section of Paul’s argument. He is about to shift gears, to deal with another area of concern, so he chooses to rehearse and summarize what he has established in this section of his letter. **He had used this exact same question, “What will we say?”, three other times in the book**, in a similar way (4:1; 6:1; 7:7). In each of those scenarios, **this question served as a way to either summarize the argument, or to give voice to potential objections** which Paul deals with in ensuing verses. Here, he adds the phrase, “to these things”, which would seem to focus the questions on summarizing or commenting on things *he has already expressed* in his argument.

“**If God is for us, who is against us?**” – vs. 31. The word translated as “for” here is literally “on behalf of”. God is on our behalf. If God is “on our behalf”, who could possibly be against us? Paul’s question here is almost a word-for-word translation from Psalm 118:6, “Yahweh is for me, I will not be afraid, what can man do to me?” In this verse, David was concerned mostly about human enemies. As we will later discover, Paul’s thinking goes beyond just the human level of opposition. He also is considering the resistance and attacks of spiritual powers that are set against us. **If God, the Almighty Creator of the universe, is on our side, ...well, who would be able to successfully attack us?** God’s power certainly far outstrips any other power in the cosmos, so **with Him on our side, we can have confidence.**

“**He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely-give us all things?**” -- vs. 32. If verse 31 recounts the superiority of God’s strength, **verse 32 expresses the depth of God’s commitment on our behalf.** If God was willing to sacrifice His Son for us all, **is there anything we could imagine that He would not do for us?** Note that this sacrifice was made for “us all”, that is, for all people, not just for those who will respond. God did the most extreme and extensive thing imaginable for human beings, when we had done nothing to deserve it, or to indicate our interest. **Would He not do much more than this, now that we are His?** He demonstrated His love, and the level of His commitment, so we would have confidence in Him.

“**Who can bring a charge against God’s elect?**” **We are the chosen-ones of God**, the ones who have responded to His invitation, and thereby enjoy a special approved-status with Him.

Unfortunately, this word, “elect”, is another word that has been misinterpreted, **turned into a “technical term”, ...a “loaded expression”**..., employed by purveyors of a particular theological point of view. Unfortunately, this misinterpretation has colored much of the discussion, and has bled into even some of the Bible translations and reference tools available for Bible study. **The main Greek term is “eklektos”** (from “eklegō” [to select by speaking-out]). **It basically means “select”, “choice”, or “excellent”, “outstanding”, as in the “best of its kind or class”.** (*eklektos* -- Matt. 22:14; 24:22, 24, 31; Mk. 13:20, 22, 27; Lk. 18:7; 23:35; Rom. 8:33; 16:13; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:4, 6, 9; 2 Jn. 1:1, 13; Rev 17:14. Another, related form is *eklogē* – Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:10. In our modern English, we might refer to something as “choice, prime, grade-A, approved”. The idea is that it meets certain requirements, not that it is chosen without regard to qualitative standards. We speak of an elite group of soldiers as a few “chosen” people. Were they indiscriminately chosen when they first signed up, or did they have to go through extensive training, and pass certain requirements to achieve their “choice” status? *Because* they passed these stringent standards, they were asked to become part of this “chosen unit”. They were “nominated” or “spoken-for”, because they had met standards.) This is an important part of understanding the nature of this word picture. **It is true that the word could mean either “choice, select, approved-quality” or “chosen-ones”, or “selected-ones”.** **So, how can we know how the term was used in the NT?**

If you go to Matthew 22:1-14. There, Jesus tells a parable. He said that the Kingdom of heaven is like a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. When the feast was ready, he sent his servants out to call those who had been invited to come. They were unwilling to come. They paid no attention to the king’s repeated invitations, and went their own way. Some even began to mistreat and kill the king’s servants. The king was enraged, and sent his troops to kill those murderers, and burn down their city. Then he sent his slaves out into the highways and byways to invite

people to his wedding feast. Rich and poor, evil and good, were invited, and attended. Each one was given a festive party robe for the celebration. When the king entered to inspect the assembly, he noticed a man who had rejected his party-hospitality in favor of wearing his own clothing. When confronted by the king, he had no defense, and was thrown out. The party went on as planned, without those who had rejected the king's invitation or his gracious hospitality. **The punch line for Jesus' parable was, "For many are *called* (invited) but few are *chosen*."**

In Calvinistic theology, God's calling and His election are thought to be *unconditional and effectual*. There is nothing you do to earn them, and when you are "called", you *will* come. When you are "elect", you *will* respond. **In this parable, by the Lord Jesus Himself, *neither of these claims are fulfilled*.** Those who were originally *called/invited* did *not* come, and those who had originally been on the "chosen-guest list" were disqualified. Others, who had *not* been either *invited* or *chosen* before the feast was ready, eventually were *included*, because they responded to the servants' invitation. Even then, however, one person who had come at the servants' invitation was rejected by the king, because he dared to reject the king's grace. In the end, **those who were the "chosen-ones", the "choice", "approved-ones", were those who responded to the king's invitation, and accepted his gracious hospitality.** In a similar way, ***WE* are God's elect, because we have responded to *His* invitation, and are clothed in the grace of *His* righteousness.** WE have met the standard, ...NOT the standard of OUR righteousness, but we are clothed in the righteousness of HIS grace.

Since that is true, how could anyone bring a charge against *US*, ...the choice-ones of God, the select, approved-ones who have responded to God's invitation and provision? God is the One who justifies, who acquits us, ...who is the one who could condemn us? Obviously, this is a rhetorical question. The implied answer is, "No one!" Furthermore, Christ died for us, was raised for us, and now sits at the right hand in victory, ...and intercedes for us. John tells us that He is our Advocate, or Defense-Attorney, with the Father (I Jn. 2:1). **No one is going to get an accusation against us to stick, when Jesus, the One defending us, is the very One who shed His blood to cover and remove our sin.** In Revelation 5, Jesus stood in the presence of His Father as a Lamb having been slain, a continual reminder of His blood shed on our behalf. Every charge that anyone could try to bring against us has already been taken away, nailed to His cross (Col. 2:14).

The final question for our consideration here is, "Who, or what, will separate us from the *agapē*-love of Christ?" The word for "separate" here, means to "distance us from". **Paul's unequivocal answer is: "Nothing and no one!"** He goes on to make a list of possible challenges we might face: Oppressing-afflictions? Narrow-and-restrictive-distresses? Persecutions? Deprivation from food? Nakedness? Danger? Sword? Paul pauses in his list to expand on this last faith-challenge. He quotes from Psalm 44:22, "For Your sake we are being killed all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." **The list starts from everyday stresses and challenges and deepens in intensity and cost to extreme hardship and even martyrdom for the faith.**

"But in all these things," the apostle assures us, "...we conquer-above-and-beyond by means of the One loving us" (vs. 37). "For *I have been persuaded* that neither death, nor life, nor angels, or powers, nor present-things, nor future-things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created-thing *will be able to distance us from the *agapē*-love of God which is in Christ Jesus* our Lord."

It is important to remember that Paul is writing this letter from Corinth, at the conclusion of his third missionary journey, about 57 A.D. **He had *experienced* nearly all of these hardships and faith-challenges.** In 1 Corinthians 4:11-13, he wrote, "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now." In II Corinthians 11:23-29, "Are they servants of Christ? -- I speak as if insane-- I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" When you read this list, you can better appreciate what Paul wrote in Romans 8:38, "I have-been-persuaded..." **This is Paul's firm experientially-based conviction, something he had been convinced of through life-experiences. *NOTHING* can distance us from God's Love in Christ, ...and it is possible to radically-and-overwhelmingly-overcome-in-glorious-victory in all these circumstances through the Love of God in Jesus Christ.**