

“The ultimate assurance.” Romans 8:26-38

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted 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, 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

This is what we all need to hear. Again, and again. Every day. That you are so loved by God who is your Father in heaven, that He has chosen you long before you were born, that He has called you into this wonderful fellowship with Himself.

That He has forgiven you everything and that you are acceptable and wonderful in His eyes, that nothing will separate you from His love and that when your days here on earth are over, He will bring you into His heavenly glory, to be with Him forever.

Yes, we need to hear this every day. For we tend to forget it. It goes in through one ear and straight away out through the other. And our life in this world isn’t of any help to believe that this is indeed true and to rejoice in this Good News.

You know what our lives here are like. We all have our challenges, only you know what all yours are. Our lives are anything but perfect. But isn’t that what we all would like to have? Perfect and happy lives, perfect health, relationships, finances.

This is what the society preaches tirelessly, that the purpose of our lives is to be happy. False religions, and even false Christians sing along in that choir – if you have faith and if your God loves you, then everything will be fine. Everything will be as you dream about it...

The worst thing is that our own old nature wants to cling to this belief as well. As spoiled and foolish children we believe that ‘if our Dad who is in heaven loves me, He will give me what I want, and if He doesn’t give it, then He doesn’t love me.’

We tend to believe that we know what is good for us. We often are like children. They can be so passionate asking and arguing for what they think they need and what will make them happy, and then those stubborn and unloving parents don’t give them it... and hopefully after while they learn to appreciate that their parents were right.

But still... whenever hardships and suffering come, in our hearts we often are unhappy and question our Father. “Why?!” Why don’t you heal me, why don’t you take away my anxiety or depression?

Why did you let this sickness to come upon me, why don’t you spare me from this ongoing financial insecurity, why do you allow me to suffer the loss of loved ones, or breakdown of relationships, why don’t you grant me relationships that I so much long for, why did you not spare me from this or that screaming injustice, why don’t you help me to pull my life together, and so on... I am sure, you could add more.

Does it look like God loves us and cares for us? Does it look like He is on our side, that He actually wants to bless us? If we want to find the answer only by examining events and situations in our lives, I don’t know what answer we may get.

This is why He speaks to us directly, using His faithful servant Paul to bring us the ultimate assurance that nothing, nothing in entire creation will separate us from His love in Christ Jesus, and when we die, we will see His friendly face and will find rest in His welcoming arms.

So, how can we be assured of this? Because the whole Trinity, God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are “for us”, for you. What does this mean? Does this mean that they are on our team, on our side?

That they sympathize with us and help us on our journey through this age towards the one that is to come? Actually, it is about somethings much more assuring. We sort of know the Biblical truth that God deals with us “by grace alone”.

Here we can see to what extent this grace goes. When Paul says that God is “for you”, He means the same reality that Israelites experienced when Yahweh lead them out of Egypt. Remember, what happened after their departure?

The pharaoh sent his elite forces to bring them back. And there they were, the nation of slaves, builders and shepherds, cornered between the rock and the hard place and suddenly facing the fiercest of Egyptian military. They couldn’t help themselves.

Imagine how comforting for them it was to hear the words of Yahweh that Moses delivered them: “The Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.” (Ex 14:13-14)

The same is true for us. The Triune God is not just on our side, He is acting on our behalf, He is accomplishing His plan of salvation, He is fighting for you, and that is why Paul says that we are more than conquerors in everything that comes our way. No external enemy will ever take God's favour from you.

But then surely there are not only external trials and tribulation, we ourselves are part of the problem. We are not some innocent and pure people under the attack by the sinful world. We are the sinful world. The same sin that dwells in the worst of the living, also dwells in us.

We daily fail to love our God, to trust Him, we fail to fear Him and therefore to avoid displeasing Him, we fail to respond to His love and to care for our neighbours, and many other things... That gives Satan good ground to whisper in our ears: "You are not good enough, you are nothing, why would God even care for you?"

To this the Holy Spirit through Paul replies: "If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us."

See, Satan has no say is what God's verdict for you is. Even your guilty conscience has no say. For it is God who justifies. And He has spoken His verdict on you in your Baptism: "Not guilty, come and receive your inheritance, my dearly loved!"

He didn't withhold His Son, but gave Him up for you, will He not with Jesus give you also everything else? Most certainly He will. Then who can condemn you? Jesus could, but instead of condemning you, He agreed to walk into death in our place.

Even now He is not silent. He sits at the right hand of God, in the position of trust and power, and what does He do? Does He condemn you? Does He reveal your secret sins? Does He put your hidden shame in open? No! He intercedes for you!

This is God's grace in action for you. He Himself chooses you, calls you, justifies you, intercedes for you, He Himself will overcome every obstacle that may hinder you on your journey to your true home, the great future city of God, where you will live in divine fellowship with all God's people.

But there is more. We not only are called and brought into the fellowship with God by His grace alone, even now as Christians we live and breathe by grace alone. God's grace goes deeper than we realize.

The Holy Spirit. He dwells with us. He unites us with the Father and with Jesus, His Son. But He also helps us in our inner being, in all our weaknesses. Even as we have received new hearts, we are still too weak because of our sinful condition.

Even as Christians we still “do not know how to pray as we ought [we don’t know God’s mind, we don’t know His purposes], but the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words [so that our prayers with His help are] according to the will of God.”

As Christians we are called, we live, we exist by God’s grace. Even now without Him we can do nothing, and we don’t have to, for we have God who is “for us”, who acts on behalf of us, who knows what we truly need and who will take care of us.

The truth of Christian life is that we won’t be spared from the hostility of this world. Especially if we want to remain faithful to Jesus, if we want to keep confessing His truth in the world that prefers lies, and inviting people to repent, to stop trusting and relying on created things and to return to the living God.

Then we will face the oppositions from all the powers that Paul listed, for pretty much everything in this sinful world will join hands to destroy our faith and to steal our inheritance in the age to come. It may seem dark and hopeless at times.

But so that we are not deceived by how things may appear for God’s people outwardly Paul assures us with the famous verse: “all things work together for good for those who love God.” We need to be careful, he doesn’t say that only good things will happen, but that our Triune God will use everything for our ultimate good.

Our ultimate good is not about this-worldly goodies, something we may crave for. It doesn’t mean that bad things in this life happen to bring out good things in this life. Not at all. Paul’s main concern is that you inherit God’s Kingdom, eternal life, New heavens and New Earth, not happiness and comfort in this life.

When we are faced with sufferings and challenges of this life, when they break our hearts and spirit, we may wonder how can they work together for good? We don’t know the exact answer to every situation. But it is enough to look at Jesus to see that it is indeed what our God does.

He is in control of everything. He not only can create something out of nothing, He can also bring good out of things that are meant to do harm, and even things that are evil. Jesus’ death on the cross was the most unjust, the most terrible event in the history of humanity, but it was through Jesus’ cross that the Triune God brought forth the cosmic victory over sin and death and the evil one. The greatest good!

On the cross He was “for you”, and though the cross of Jesus He rescued you from the chains of death, and transferred you into the Kingdom of His Son. When this sinks in, we can face whatever comes with the ultimate assurance that exactly as our faithful brother Paul proclaimed:

“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.” Amen.