

When I Wonder If I Belong to Christ | Romans 8:31–39

Introduction

Turning to God's Word this morning,
we are continuing our series called Fragile Faith.
The aim of this series is to see that in the hardest seasons of life,
fragile faith is not failed faith when it clings to a strong Savior.

Last week, in Psalms 42 and 43, we met a believer whose soul was cast down.
He knew that God was faithful, but he felt discouraged.
Yet he kept preaching truth to his own soul: "Hope in God."

This week, fragile faith takes a different form.
Sometimes what wears us down is not the discouragement *around* us.
Sometimes it is the accusation *within* us.
We remember coming to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,
but we also see the sins we still struggle with,
and we begin to wonder: "Do I really belong to Christ?"

Many of you know C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.
Edmund betrays his brother and sisters and joins the White Witch,
only to discover she is not the gracious queen she pretended to be,
and he becomes her prisoner.
Eventually he is rescued and brought back to Aslan,
Who is the great Christ figure of the story.
And after speaking with Edmund privately
Aslan leads him back to his brother and sisters and says simply,
"Here is your brother," and tells them there is no need to speak of what is past.

But shortly after, the White Witch enters the camp as an accuser.
She reminds Aslan that Edmund is a traitor,
and that by right his life belongs to her.
And here is the unsettling part: her accusation is true.
Edmund is guilty.
He cannot defend himself, and he cannot undo what he has done.

But the Witch does not have the final word over Edmund—Aslan does.
Aslan has already rescued him.
Aslan has already called him "your brother."
And in the end, Aslan answers the accusation
by giving his own life in the traitor's place.

And that is what an accusing conscience feels like.
Some of the charges against us are true, and we know it.
And so we wonder: "After all of that, do I really belong to Christ?"

But when our conscience brings its charges,
the gospel does not answer by helping us build a better defense of ourselves.
It points us to the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Because the question is not whether an accusation *can be raised* against us.
The question is whether any accusation
can overturn what God has secured for us in Christ.

Now, self-examination has a proper place in the Christian life.
Scripture calls us to confess our sin, examine ourselves, and pursue holiness.
But it cannot carry the full weight of our assurance.
If we look within ourselves long enough,
we will always find reasons to feel unstable.
So the foundation of our assurance must rest outside of us,
in the sovereign hands of our strong Savior.

And that is exactly where Paul directs us in Romans 8:31–39,
which stands as the climax of everything he has taught in this letter.

And the answer he gives is this:

God has so decisively saved His people in Christ
that no enemy can prevail,
no accusation can condemn,
and nothing in all creation can separate us from His love.

Which leads us to our central takeaway this morning:

When assurance feels fragile, rest in what God has secured for you in Christ.

And we will see that in three truths drawn from Romans 8:31–39:

- I. God Is for You (vv. 31–32)
- II. No Accusation Can Condemn You (vv. 33–34)
- III. Nothing Can Separate You (vv. 35–39)

I. God Is for You | Romans 8:31–32

Paul begins in verse 31:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

What does Paul mean by "*these things*"?

The most immediate connection is verses 28–30,
where God carries His people from His foreknowledge all the way to glory.

But Paul is likely looking back much further.

Standing at the summit of chapters 1 through 8,

Paul is surveying the entire landscape of the gospel.

And his answer comes as a question:

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

That is rhetorical, and the answer is meant to be obvious.

If God has already done everything Paul has just described
—foreknowing, calling, justifying, glorifying—
then *clearly* God is for you.

And if God *Himself* is for you, who could possibly take that away?

Now, that does not mean that believers have no enemies.

Paul will name seven of them before this passage is over.

His point is not that no one stands against us,
but that no one who stands against us *can prevail*
over the God who stands *for us*.

And that does not minimize the pain of opposition.

But this passage reframes the question.

The question is not simply, "Why are these things against me?"

The deeper question is, "Can these things defeat the God who is for me?"

And Paul's answer is no.

But how can we know that God is for us?

Paul answers in verse 32:

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all . . ."

If you want to know whether God is for you,

do not begin with your circumstances.

Begin with what God has given.

Unanswered prayer may leave us wondering if God cares.

Ongoing suffering may leave us wondering if God has turned against us.

So Paul, who was no stranger to suffering,
directs us to something more certain.

He directs us to the cross.

And let us not forget who this Son is.
He is the eternal Lord Jesus Christ,
who took on flesh and willingly gave Himself
for sinners like you and me.
And as we have seen throughout Pastor Brad's series through Matthew,
the cross was no accident.
It stands at the center of God's plan of redemption,
where God gave His own Son
to bear the judgment His people deserved.

And while all of that may sound very abstract, it is actually very practical,
because our feelings change, but the cross does not.
Our sense of assurance rises and falls,
but what the cross accomplished remains accomplished.

That is why Paul continues:

"How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Since God has already given His own Son,
will He now withhold what is necessary
to bring His people all the way home?
Of course not.

And to be clear, Paul is not promising comfort, health, wealth, or prosperity.
The verses that follow make that reading impossible,
because Paul goes on to speak openly
of deprivation, danger, suffering, and death.
His point is that God will give His people
everything necessary to finish what He has begun.
He will preserve us.
He will conform us to Christ.
He will sustain us through suffering.
And He will raise us from the dead and bring us into glory.
The God who gave His Son to secure your salvation
will not abandon that work before it is finished.

And this is where assurance has to begin.
 Not with our circumstances, but with God.
 Not with a clear conscience, but with the cross.

When our conscience accuses us,
 we begin to question the strength of our grip on Christ.
 But the decisive question is not,
 "How firmly am I holding on to Christ?"
 The decisive question is,
 "How firmly has *God committed Himself* to save those who are in Christ?"

So rather than point an accusing finger at yourself,
 reach out your hand to Christ.
 Even a trembling hand can cling to a strong Savior.

And perhaps you have wandered.
 Perhaps there is sin to confess and repentance to pursue.
 But the way forward is not to stay trapped in self-condemnation.
 The way forward is to return to Christ.
 Look to the cross,
 and behold the clearest evidence there is that God is for you.

Transition:

But perhaps you are thinking,
 "Yes—but if only you knew my sins, the charges against me are too great."
 Then keep listening, because Paul now takes us into the courtroom
 and asks whether any accusation can overturn God's verdict.

II. No Accusation Can Condemn You | Romans 8:33–34

Paul asks two more questions in verses 33 and 34:
*"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."*

Paul, who saw his share of courtrooms in the book of Acts, uses courtroom imagery here to make a simple point: we can trust God's verdict over every other voice.

But notice that Paul never says the charges are false. Earlier in Romans he has already established that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So his point is not that we are innocent, but that Christ has already borne our guilty sentence.

The wages of sin is death, and that death sentence is rightly ours. But it is God who justifies. It is God who is the highest Judge. It is God who renders the final verdict. Our sin is so serious that nothing less than the death of the eternal Son of God could answer it—*and that is exactly what God gave.* So if God justifies, who is left to condemn?

In our sin, we stand in that courtroom guilty. In Christ, we stand justified—not because there was nothing in us worthy of condemnation, but because Christ has already borne it in our place.

Now consider what that means when your conscience accuses you. The God who justifies you already knows everything about you, past/future. He did not justify you because He was unaware of your sin. He justified you knowing all of it.

So yes, your conscience may accuse you of real sin. And yes, that sin still matters, and it must be turned from. But for those who are in Christ, God's verdict gets the final word. Your standing before Him is not measured by the weight of your sin, but by the worth of the Son who bore it. And no lesser court can overturn the verdict of God.

And that tells us something about the conscience itself.
Your conscience is a gift, but it was never meant to be your judge.
Its convicting work, under the Word and the Spirit,
is to turn you from sin and conform you into the image of your Savior.

So when God's Word exposes real sin, do not defend it.
Confess it.
Turn from it.
Abide in Christ.
But do not let conviction curdle into condemnation.
Conviction draws you back to Christ.
Condemnation drives you away from Him—
and condemnation is precisely what Christ has already borne.

And as we turn from sin and turn to Christ,
let us not forget where He is now.
Paul adds at the end of verse 34
that 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."*

Christ died.
Christ was raised.
Christ reigns.
And Christ continues to intercede for His people.

Notice where He is: at the right hand of God,
the place of honor, victory, and authority.
The One who gave Himself for us
now reigns over everything that threatens us.

And notice what He is doing: interceding for us.
His sacrifice is finished,
but His ministry to His people continues.
And to be clear,
Christ is not trying to persuade an unwilling Father to love you.
The Father has *already* demonstrated His love by giving His Son.
Rather, the risen Christ continually represents His people
on the basis of His own completed work.

So Christ has justified you,
Christ reigns for you,
and Christ intercedes for you.
Who then can be against us?
Who shall bring any charge?
Who is to condemn?
No one.

In the face of an accusing conscience,
that is the answer we must give.

Sin will remain an ongoing battle,
but the war itself was already won at the cross.
You do not silence an accusing conscience by proving you are innocent.
You answer it by resting in the Savior who was condemned in your place.

The voice of accusation may bring genuine sorrow.
But do not let your sorrow silence what you know to be true of God.
Trust God's verdict: no accusation can condemn those who are in Christ.

Transition:

But that raises one more question.
What happens to assurance when life itself seems to be against us?
To answer that, Paul moves out of the courtroom
and into the hardships of ordinary life.

III. Nothing Can Separate You | Romans 8:35–39

Paul asks in verse 35:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Notice how the question changes.

In verses 33 and 34, the fear was condemnation.

Now the fear is separation.

And those two fears feed each other,

because when suffering comes,

an accusing conscience is quick to explain it as:

"This is what I deserve."

So Paul lists the experiences

that make the love of Christ hard to see:

*"Tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or danger, or sword."*

And Paul knew every one of them personally,

which means his own assurance was not formed in a life of comfort.

And that matters, because suffering often tries to interpret God for us.

When life is peaceful, we have no trouble singing,

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

But when life becomes painful, we may begin to think,

"Perhaps God has left me."

But circumstances are unreliable interpreters of God's love.

If comfort proves God's love, then suffering would disprove it.

And Paul *refuses* that conclusion.

The clearest proof of God's love is not our comfort. It is the cross.

The presence of suffering is not proof of the absence of love.

And Paul knows this from the Bible's own songbook.

He quotes Psalm 44 in verse 36:

*"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

Psalm 44 is the cry of God's people
 when their suffering does not seem to fit their faithfulness.
 And notice that Paul does not correct that psalm.
 He quotes it.
 Scripture gives God's people words for grief they cannot yet explain.
 Belonging to Christ does not exempt us
 from grief, illness, deprivation, persecution, or death.
 In fact, the psalm says these things come "*for your sake*" —
 Meaning that some suffering comes precisely because we belong to Him.
 But that does not mean God has hidden His face.
 We see His face most clearly in the crucified and risen Christ.

Then Paul declares in verse 37:

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Notice what he does not say.

He does not say "away from all these things."

He does not say "once the suffering has passed."

He says, "*in all these things.*"

God's victory does not always mean *deliverance* from suffering.

Sometimes it means His preserving grace *carrying us through* it.

We conquer not because suffering never touches us,
 but because suffering cannot destroy
 what God has made new in us through Christ.

And notice where that victory comes from.

Not from our own resilience, but "*through him who loved us.*"

The basis of our victory is not the strength of *our love* for Christ.

It is the unchanging strength of Christ's love *for us.*

Then Paul moves from argument to settled conviction in v. 38:

"For I am sure . . ."

That is not Paul being optimistic because he's in a good mood.

That is a verdict he has reached and will not revisit.

And there is real help for us in that:

assurance is not a feeling we wait for.

It is a conclusion we draw from what God has already done.

And from there, Paul begins to stretch language to its limits.

Neither death nor life can separate us.

Death may separate us from people, places, and everything familiar,
but it cannot separate a believer from Christ.

And life—with all its burdens, temptations,
disappointments, and uncertainties—cannot separate us either.

Neither angels nor rulers nor powers can separate us.

No spiritual power can overturn the work of Christ.

Neither height nor depth can separate us.

There is no height above you that Christ does not reign over,
and no depth beneath you that His love cannot reach.

Neither things present nor things to come can separate us.

No circumstance, good or bad,
can separate those who are in Christ from the love of God.

Paul then closes every remaining loophole:

"Nor anything else in all creation."

Consider what that means:

Everything that threatens you is created.

God alone is Creator.

Therefore creation cannot defeat the saving purpose of its Creator.

Your weakness is not stronger than God's love.

Your unstable emotions are not stronger than God's love.

Your accusing conscience is not stronger than God's love.

Your fears about the future are not stronger than God's love.

Nothing in all creation *"will be able to separate us
from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

And that final phrase is essential.

This inseparable love is found in one place:

"in Christ Jesus our Lord."

So the question is not whether your faith is strong enough.

The question is whether you are resting in Christ.

Our security is not found in the *quality* of our faith.

It is found in the *object* of our faith.

Once again: even a trembling hand can cling to a strong Savior.

So when suffering comes,

do not measure God's love by the pain of your circumstances.

Measure His love by the gift of His Son.

Conclusion

So let us return to the question we began with.

"Do I really belong to Christ?"

Notice that Paul never answers that question by pointing the believer inward.

He does not tell us to search our own hearts

until we have assembled enough evidence.

He points us outward—

to a Father who did not spare His own Son,

and to a love that nothing in all creation can reach past.

Belonging to Christ was never something you achieved.

It is something He secured.

Think one last time about Edmund.

Before the Witch ever entered that camp with her accusation,

Aslan had already brought him back to his brother and sisters

and said, "Here is your brother."

The accusation came after the declaration.

And the accusation could not undo it.

That is what the cross has done for you.

The charges against you may well be true.

You may not be able to answer a single one of them.

But you do not have to.

Christ has already answered them,

and He has already called you His own.

So, if there is sin you have been defending.
Confess it. Turn from it. Come home.
Conviction is not God pushing you away.
It is God drawing you back.

If there is sin you have already confessed,
and your conscience still will not release you,
then hear the verdict of the only Judge who matters:
God has justified you.
Your conscience is not a higher court.

And if you are suffering,
and the silence has begun to feel like abandonment,
do not second guess God's love for you based on your circumstances.
Know God's love for you through His Son.

And if you are here this morning and you are not in Christ,
Every promise in this passage is found in one place: "*in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"
And the door is still open for you.
The same God who did not spare His own Son
gave Him up for people exactly like you and me.
Come to Him, and every one of these promises belongs to you.

Church family, the accusations will come again this week.
Some of them will be true.
And when they come, do what the psalmist did last week.
Preach truth to your own soul.
Tell it that God is for you, because He did not spare His Son.
Tell it that no accusation can condemn you, because it is God who justifies.
Tell it that nothing can separate you,
because nothing in all creation is stronger than the love of God.

Your grip on Christ may feel weak this morning.
But your assurance never rested on the strength of your grip.
It rests on the strength of the One you are holding.
Fragile faith is not failed faith when it is clinging to a strong Savior.