

**Sermon Love of God**  
**Romans 8:26-39**  
**Rev Dr Jos M Strengholt**

The love of God is our anchor in life. Not how good we are. We are not that good. The love of God gives us hope. Not how great we are at keeping the laws of God. We do not keep them that well.

We human beings can be so incredibly religious, but that does not bring us closer to God. We do not even know how to pray!

**1. How to pray**

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, is saying that because of our weakness, we do not know how and what to pray. This has two reasons, says St Augustine in his commentary on Romans (54):

First, it is not yet clear what future we are hoping for or where we are heading, and second, many things in this life may seem positive but are in fact negative, and vice versa.

Tribulation, for example, when it comes to a servant of God in order to test or correct him may seem useless to those who have less understanding... But God often helps us through tribulation, while prosperity may be negative if it traps the soul with delight and the love of this life.

We are often in a position of a little child who just doesn't know what is good - but God our Father knows.

With our finite minds we are not able to grasp what we need to ask of God; we do not know his plans; we do not know what is good for us. In the final analysis, all we can bring to God is an inarticulate sigh which the Holy Spirit translates to God for us.

Paul realised that we come to God with empty hands; even our prayers are imperfect and do not justify us for God.

Paul said this to Jews who had become Christians, and I guess they prided themselves in knowing how to pray. They had the most beautiful prayers ready and believed that this was their great advantage over those former pagans who had no clue about good and beautiful prayers.

As even in church now, and you find them in all churches, some people pray so much, in beautiful words, while others do not know what to pray and how to pray.

Paul says: No-one knows how and what to pray, only thanks to God the Holy Spirit your prayers have value for God. No-one is able to justify himself by his actions, and how much and how beautiful we pray is also rather irrelevant for God.

Our prayers only have value because God through His Spirit makes something of it. He takes our babbling and by the time it reached God, the Spirit of God has transformed it in what is good and acceptable for God.

When the disciples came to Jesus so that he would teach them how to pray, Jesus said important things.

Jesus said that we should not be repetitive. That is how the pagans pray - they think that by saying the same thing often, the gods will be convinced of the sincerity of those who pray.

Do not repeat yourself, God is not forgetful. He remembers your request.

Shouting by the way is also useless. God's ears are quite okay.

Also, do not pray in order for people to think 'wow, she can pray well...'

And Jesus then taught his followers the simplest of prayers, what we now call The Lord's Prayer.

This is our Christian prayer. We should never stop using these words that Jesus literally taught us. As we do each week at the time of Holy Communion.

The Lord's Prayer creates the parameters for what proper prayer is. It keeps us on the right track. It is simple, basic, to the point.

Surely it does not mean we do not pray other prayers, but Jesus gave us the format for prayer.

We speak to God as Father, we focus on his glory, we ask him to help us to live for him. That is prayer.

Ah yes, we also ask him to give us. Many Christian prayers focus on this. Lord give me, give us, help us, give me, more, please, now.

What does Jesus teach us to ask for? For our daily bread. For forgiveness. Our basic needs. Not houses, cars, stuff we like and love to have. Just our bare needs.

The Lord's prayer is how Jesus teaches us how to pray. But even when we know the right words, the right things to do, our prayers are still a soft whispering... because we, as limited humans just do not know how to come to God... what to ask... how to behave in his presence.

But the holy spirit helps. He even "groans" in his intercession for us. Amazing. Last week we saw that all nature "groans" because it desires for its renewal. Here we see that God shares in this pain; he so much identifies with his children that he feels our pain and prays our prayers.

When you are speechless in regard to God, The Spirit takes even your silence to communicate with God for your well-being. He takes your groans and God knows what you need.

## **2. God makes our lives well**

We are very limited in our ability to pray; we often do not know what to ask, but we do know that God takes care of us. We may be clueless, but God is not.

In all things he is at work for our benefit. Those who love God may have many problems in life, but in the midst of all that God is at work through his Spirit, to make all things well.

The sentence Paul uses is complicated, well that happens more often with him... the NIV translation, says:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

This strongly suggests that all things that happen, are good and are willed by God. And some people take this so seriously that they say, we must thank God for all things that happen to us.

I think this is both untrue, and also very unpastoral.

'Thank you God for my baby who died'?

'Thank you God for how ISIS in Iraq is killing Christians'?

'Thank you God for that car accident I was in'?

I find this hard to accept.

Some other Greek manuscripts of the letter of Paul lead to another translation, namely:

God works all things together for good, or God works in all things for the good of those who love him.

I assume this last translation is better. The idea that all things that happen to us are good, we find nowhere else in the Bible. The idea that God is with us in the midst of all things that happen to us, to help us grow stronger for instance, we find everywhere in the Bible.

There is much evil that we must resist and reject.

We may not know what to pray, and we depend on the work of the Spirit to present our situation, our needs, to God, but God surely hears the prayers of those who love him; he makes sure that whatever happens to you, he is there with you, he stands beside you, he helps you.

Misery, sadness, adversity can be strong but they cannot permanently stop God's plans with your life.

From this perspective we do not need to embrace all misery that comes on our path; it is good to reject evil and to try to undo it. But because we know that God is present in all circumstances, we are able to live with the problems and headaches that we cannot get rid of.

And we trust in the wisdom of God; he knows what is best for us. He is always and everywhere working for your best.

### **3. Nothing separates us from God's Love**

If God is for us, who is against us? Nothing is able to separate us from the love of God.

The Jews in the church in Rome always believed it was the Law of God that kept them safe; if only they would stick to all God's precepts, then their life would be secure.

Paul points at another reality. It is the love of God that gives us all we need. The love of God, not our love for him, is the beginning and the end of our salvation, the ABC of our assurance of eternal security. God is for us.

God did not spare his own Son; this is the ultimate guarantee that he loves us enough to also supply in all our needs. We are in Jesus Christ through faith, so we are God's children and he will take care of us.

The words Paul uses here of God are the exact words that God used of Abraham when Abraham proved his loyalty - he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command: 'You have not withheld your son, your only son from me', God said to Abraham. That is why Abraham was justified before God.

We are right with God, not because of what we do, but because God gave his son. God is on our side and will give us all things.

God has acquitted us - that is the central issue. No one can take that away from us. No one can condemn us. So do not allow the good Laws of Moses to make you feel so guilty that you think you have lost God.

And if God has pronounced the verdict, 'you are righteous', why listen to people who tell us we must do all sorts of things in order to be in the good book with God?

Surely we are imperfect - we stumble much. But God has acquitted you. He has announced: you belong to my righteous people, you are part of my kingdom. Do not let anyone, not even other Christians, talk you into feeling divorced from God. You are his child.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Paul gives a long list of many bad things that surround us, and he underlines - they cannot separate you from the love of God.

Paul mentions tribulation, persecution, famine, all sorts of deadly dangers. They happen to us - but they cannot separate us from all that God gives to us. So the focus here is not on a comfortable life - but on our relationship with God.

Not even angelic powers can separate you from the love of God and your eternal relationship with God. The rabbis and most Jews in the time of Paul saw angels behind every stone. Literally. The rabbis believed that even every blade of grass had its own angel.

These rabbis had a legend that when God appeared on Mount Sinai to give Moses the law, there was a host of angels, and the angels were jealous that God was to give the law to Israel. So the angels assaulted Moses on his way up the mountain and they would have stopped him if God had not intervened.

So Paul here says, in terms of his own days, even if the angels try to stop you from reaching the love of God, they cannot. Because God takes care of you.

Mind you, Israel tried to live the laws, to reach God.

Paul turns it around. God reaches us, he loves us, and nothing, not even angels, can come between us and this love of God.

## **Conclusion**

So concluding, you have been acquitted if you are in Jesus Christ by faith. That means, you are part of Him and his body, the church. By faith, you belong to him and therefore God tells you: I am okay with you.

We totally depend on God's grace, and he showers it on us. We do not know how to pray - but God helps us. We do not know what we need, but God gives it.

Whatever we have done and whatever we experience - God is on our side. The law of God made us see our shortcomings but the love of God draws us to him. With him we are safe and sound, now and forever.

**Amen**