

**WHERE IS GOD WHEN IT HURTS?**  
**THE LOVE OF GOD OVERCOMES SUFFERING**  
**Romans 8: 31-39**

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

Did you meet anyone new after last Sunday's worship service?

**INTRODUCTION**

A story: Jessica and Noel have been close friends for many years. When Jessica's husband left her for another woman, Noel was there day and night offering comfort and prayer and biblical wisdom. For almost an entire year Noel gave of her time with the support of her husband and children in order to help Jessica through the horrible pain. The years have passed since those dark and terrible days and Jessica has come safely through the pain and loss with her faith intact. However, right now, a new sadness has entered her life. Noel has seemed distant and unconcerned for her in recent weeks. She hasn't called her and it seems to Jessica as if she is avoiding her at church. She is wondering if she has done something to offend Noel or if perhaps Noel has simply grown tired of their friendship. She feels she ought to talk with her but she is afraid her fears will prove true and she will be rejected by Noel. If Jessica came to you and told you this story, how might you help her to find the courage to talk with Noel?

*I'm not looking for profound, spiritual reasons here. The simplest thing to remind Jessica of is Noel's past, sacrificial love for her. She should not be afraid to talk with Noel now or fear that Noel does not love her because of the great love that Noel has shown her in the past. She should be confident to approach Noel and should presume that the seeming distance between them is not due to a lack of love in Noel but some other reason.*

When suffering comes to Christians it seems to call into question God's love for us. In Romans 8: 31-39 Paul is attempting to show give reasons why we should be confident of God's love in spite of suffering and so persist in going to him in the midst of the suffering.

**We can risk pain and endure suffering in faith.**

**STUDY**

**1.** In the first question of v. 31, what does the "this" refer to? What is Paul asking?

*The main thing the this refers to is the amazing love of God that has been poured out on undeserving sinners like us, who he determined to love before the world began, determined through his Son to conform to the image of his Son by effectually calling us to himself, then justifying us by faith in Christ and then so working in us that we make it safely to heaven (are glorified). And he is doing this gracious work not only in the midst of suffering but also, through the suffering that we endure in this world. He's asking, how should we respond to this amazing love coming to us in the midst of such profound suffering?*

**2.** How does Paul's second question answer his first?

*His answer is that we should risk the pain and endure the suffering because we know without a doubt that God is for us. And, if God is for us, then no one is against us.*

**3.** Is it really true that because God is for us, no one is against us? Is Paul saying that God has conquered all our enemies and so we are not in a war and will never be opposed again? Why or why not? CLUE: See Romans 8:18 & 23, Eph. 6: 10-13, Romans 7: 19-24, 2 Cor. 4:8, 12: 1-14, 2 Tim. 4: 14-15.

*Paul is not saying that God has already conquered all our enemies so that we are no longer in a fight, we are no longer opposed. It is quite clear from the context of chapter 8 and from dozens of other passages that Paul views himself in as in a war against sin, Satan and the powers of unbelief in this world.*

**4.** If Paul does not mean that there is no more war, no more suffering, what does he mean by saying, "If God is for us, then who can be against us?" CLUE: Rom. 8:28

*If God is working all things for your good, then he is making even your adversaries serve your good. It is as though no one is against you because when people or sin or Satan or disease opposes you God merely turns all their opposition into good for you. If God is on your side, then it really is true that “...no weapon forged against will prevail....” (Isaiah 54:17)*

5. How do we know that God is for us while we are in the midst of this battle with sin and suffering?

*He did not spare his own Son but he gave him up for us all. You can know, no matter what suffering you are enduring, no matter what risk you are taking, no matter what opposition you might be facing, that God is for you because he handed over his Son for you already. You need never doubt that God has an infinite love for you and that he is at this moment exercising his omnipotence on your behalf because he handed over his Son for you. God, seeing you in your sin and rebellion and helplessness, handed his Son over into the hands of his enemies to be treated with contempt in order that you might be delivered from the just punishment of your sins and given the very righteousness of Christ. If God has done this, why in the world would you ever wonder if he would give you everything else that you need to make it safely to your heavenly home? There is no part of the “all things” that can “be harder” or “greater” for God to give you than the giving of his Son.*

6. What does Paul mean by saying the way that God is “for” us is that he gives us “all things” along with Christ?

*First, he has given us the best thing, Christ. He has given us Christ through Christ’s being handed over. Second he gives us everything we need to live out the life he has ordained for us and to make it safely to heaven where we will have Christ in all of his glory, without any opposition from sin, Satan or suffering, to keep us from enjoying Christ.*

7. Honestly, do you think there is anything greater that God could do for you than hand over his own Son to be executed for you?

8. How does God giving his Son over to be executed so you could possess him, fill you with joy and hope when you are suffering?

9. Can you think of a time when the knowledge of Christ’s death for you has given you courage to take a risk to love another person?

**We can risk pain and endure suffering in faith because God did the greatest thing already.**

10. Verses 33-34 are full of the language of the courtroom. What judicial proceedings does Paul have in mind? See Romans 2: 5-6.

*Paul has in mind the “day of God’s wrath” or the day of final judgment when Christ comes back to save his people and punish the wicked.*

11. In v. 32 Paul asks “who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?” Who will (or could) accuse us of sin and guilt in that great day? Why does Paul ask this question?

*Satan, my own sins, my own words, my family, God, my enemies, my co-workers, my neighbors, other Christians. Every Christian knows that there could be many just accusations of sin leveled against him or her on the final day of judgment. Every Christian agrees with the Psalmist, “My sins are more numerous than the hairs of my head” and so rightly fears that final day when the motive of every heart will be laid bare before God the judge.*

12. What two reasons does Paul give as to why those who are called by God, who love God do not need to fear these accusations?

*As Christians, we look forward to that great Day of Judgment without fear for two reasons. We are “those whom God has chosen” and the one who is our judge is also our justifier. We know that the love that God has for us is a very specific love. He freely, for no reason in us, chose, before the world began, to love us and save us, i.e. those who love him. He pledged himself to us in love before the creation of the world and so we know that when we face him he will not go back on his own choice of us. But also we know that God is the one who justifies. When we are accused we will not need to answer one word. God, who is our Father through Christ, will declare us not guilty but perfectly righteous. He will command our accusers to be silent, not because they are making false accusations but because he has determined to declare us not guilty but fit for heaven.*

**13.** Paul next asks who will condemn us? Isn't he being redundant? What is the difference between being accused and being condemned?

*Condemnation is the end result of accusation. Condemnation is what happens when the accusation is proven to be true. Paul wants to assure us that no accusation is going to "stick". We know that we are guilty and so we are afraid that when we are standing there being accused that God will finally be persuaded by all the accusations and change his mind and condemn us.*

**14.** Why do we need to not fear being condemned for our many sins? Trace out Paul's logic in the second half of v. 34.

*First Paul reminds us that Christ died. He wants us to remember statements he has already made like Romans 5: 6, "You see, at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." As we contemplate our sins and our impending trial we think of how Christ was condemned for our sins. Second, Paul reminds us that not only did Christ die, but also, even more amazing, God raised him from the dead. The reason the resurrection is "much more" than Christ's death is because everyone dies. We only know that God counts Christ's death for us because God showed his approval by raising Jesus from the dead. The resurrection is God's declaration that he has punished all the sins of all his people in Christ and that for the sake of Christ he will credit us with his very own righteousness. Paul goes on to describe Christ's present position and occupation. He is now God's right hand man. He is currently living in the place of ultimate influence, at God's right hand. He is more highly esteemed by the Father than all other creatures. He is the one who executes all of God's decrees. Whatever Jesus says or does is what the Father says or does. This Jesus, who is at God's right hand, is right now interceding for each and every Christian. He is not at God's right hand simply carrying out God's decrees but he is also right there as our representative. He continually asks the Father to care for us and accept us and watch over us. How does Jesus' present intercession give us confidence as we look forward to the final judgment? If he died, was raised and is now interceding for us at God's right hand, how will he not also intercede for us when we stand before God and face our accusers? Will God the Father who has listened to the intercession of his Son throughout the course of your*

*whole life, fail to listen to his Son when you finally come before him at the last day?*

**15.** How does the fact that we will escape condemnation at the final judgment because of Jesus enable us to endure suffering in hope and risk comfort to love others?

*First, the greatest danger that you or I will ever face is coming into the very presence of God at the final judgment. "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." If it is an absolute certainty that you have been delivered from this great danger, how much more certain is it that you will be delivered from all lesser dangers, i.e., the sufferings of this life and the risks of love. We've escaped the greatest danger therefore we will escape these lesser dangers. Second, when we suffer it feels like God is condemning us, that he is angry with us. When your life is full of pain it feels as though God has rejected you because of your sin. But that is not true because God has chosen you, God is the one who justifies, Christ died and was raised to life and is now seated at God's right hand interceding for you. God is not condemning you now because he is not going to condemn you at the last day. As a Christian, the suffering you experience is never due to God's condemnation and anger with you. He may be disciplining you as a parent disciplines a child but he is never expressing his anger and opposition to you because of sin.*

**We can risk pain and endure suffering in faith because God delivered us from our greatest danger.**

**16.** Based on v. 35, what would you say is Satan's ultimate goal in and through suffering and sin?

*It is the goal of Satan to separate us from the love of Christ. He sends suffering and tempts to sin so that we will forsake Christ, that we will be separated from the love of Christ forever.*

**17.** According to v. 36, why is Paul confident that no suffering can separate us from the love of Christ? You will need to read Psalm 44 to get the Paul's point.

*The psalmist says throughout the psalm that God is the one who is causing the nation Israel to suffer by giving her into the hands of her enemies. He says he does not understand why this is happening in light of God's past deliverance of Israel and in light of the fact that the nation is not sinning but rather being faithful to God. He basically is asking the perennial question that Job asks about his suffering, "Why am I, who am being faithful to you, suffering?" The psalmist answers his own question by saying that it is for the sake of God that his faithful people suffer.*

*What does it mean that we suffer "for the sake of God?" It can mean "because of God." Some of our suffering is because of God, in other words we are persecuted because we belong to God. We endure the pressure of resisting temptation because of God. However, there is more to it than that. When do we use the phrase, "for your sake"? We use it when we mean that we are doing something for the benefit of someone else or to give someone else pleasure. How does our suffering "benefit" God or give God pleasure? (I am using the word "benefit" in an analogical way because we are not necessary to God in any way. We never give God something that he needs and does not have without us.) What this means is that when we suffer we display the greatness of Christ's love for us in ways that being thankful for the good things he does can never do. When we suffer in faith and continue to love God we prove that God's love is better than a life of comfort, free from all pain. When we choose to suffer in the cause of God we show his sufficiency and love in far greater ways than when we give thanks for the good things he does for us. God ordains our suffering for his sake.*

**18.** How does that feel to you? How does knowing that God ordains suffering "for his own sake" strike you?

**19.** How does v. 37 show that God's causing us to suffer for his glory is not cruel? CLUE: What does it mean to be a conqueror? What does it mean to be "more than a conqueror"?

*First, the use of the word "conqueror" shows that we are in a battle. Satan designs the trouble to cut us off from Christ. It is his goal in the suffering to destroy our faith and to keep us from risking anything for the sake of Christ. John Piper says it so well, "What must happen for you to be called a conqueror? Answer: you must not be separated from*

*the love of Jesus Christ. If the aim of the attack is to destroy you and cut you off from Christ and bring you to final ruin without God, then you are a conqueror if you defeat this aim and remain in the love of Christ. But what must happen in this conflict with famine and sword if you are to be called more than a conqueror? I would say that a conqueror defeats his enemy, but a "more than conqueror" subjugates his enemy. A conqueror nullifies the purpose of his enemy; a "more than conqueror" turns his enemy to his own purposes. A conqueror strikes down his foe; a "more than conqueror" makes his foe his slave." So you see, God is not cruel in sending the suffering for his sake because not only is he glorified as we joyfully endure the suffering but also we get the joy of seeing our enemies serve us by making us more fit for heaven and by making heaven more glorious for us. God gets the glory and we get the benefit as God makes our enemies, all the suffering we endure in faith, serve us.*

**20.** Verse 38 begins with the word "for". Therefore these two verses give us the ground for why we are more than conquerors. What is the reason we are more than conquerors?

*The reason is because nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. It is God's love for us in Christ that motivates God to work all things for our good. It is his love that caused him to give his Son for us and his love moves him to give us "all things" necessary to live in faith to the end. It is his love that guarantees that our accusers will be silenced and we will not be condemned. It is his love that causes him to make our enemies, our suffering, serve our good. Paul is returning us to v. 29 and the word "foreknow". The reason all the suffering cannot harm us, but is actually doing us good is because God loves us in Christ with an eternal love and he is determined to love us to the end.*

**We can risk pain and endure suffering in faith because God ordains suffering for the display of his love**