

Reflection for Sunday 26th July 2020 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?
The words of St Paul in Romans 8.

Over the last few Sundays, the lectionary has been encouraging us to read and reflect upon the opening chapters of St Paul's letter to the Romans and today we reach the end of chapter 8 where the apostle sums up the thrust of what he has been saying. As he does so he brings the section to a climax by saying with boldness and confidence: Nothing can come between the believer and the love of God. What a great statement! What a source of strength!

If we want to truly live out the Christian life with boldness and confidence; if our light in the world is to be seen clearly and our ministry for God to be effective, then we need to be able to echo St Paul's words. More than that: we also need the confidence that comes with those words to be a living reality.

Confidence is important in many areas of life; without it we struggle. That may well be true at present especially for some of those who have been shielding. The confidence to go out to the shops or church may not be there yet, and that is very understandable.

Or, to give some other examples:

An employee may be trying to improve their performance and skill level – but if all they hear from their manager is negative criticism, rather than their performance improving, the worker's confidence may well go down. They become downhearted and this may well reflect in their work. Positive, not negative criticism is what is needed to build up confidence.

Illness can have the same effect. Things that a person was able to do before becoming ill may become difficult, and one factor in that may be lack of confidence. The person has had a fall and, although they have recovered in a physical sense, they find themselves asking: what happens if I am out and it happens again? The result is they do not venture out – their confidence has gone.

Paul, in this passage, is seeking to encourage those to whom he writing; to build their confidence by looking not only at the world around but also spiritual

reality. You may be coming under pressure, hardship, even persecution, but nothing can separate us from the love of God - you can be confident of that.

Where does Paul's confidence come from? Within himself? No, rather from the love and grace of God. If our faith, like Paul's, is grounded in that love and grace it should give us an increased sense of confidence – confidence that lies in God, not in ourselves. It does not matter what happens to us - God does not change.

Look closely at the way Paul makes this point and you see very clearly what he is saying. I suspect as Paul writes (or dictates) these words, he is thinking back to Isaiah 50:7-8

*Because the Sovereign LORD helps me,
I will not be disgraced.
Therefore have I set my face like flint,
and I know I will not be put to shame.
He who vindicates me is near.
Who then will bring charges against me?
Let us face each other!
Who is my accuser?
Let him confront me!*

The image of the courthouse, of someone on trial for their faith. Who will accuse the believer when God himself has declared the believer not guilty?

If God has declared us not guilty who can stand up and accuse us? No one.

When it comes to confidence, it helps if you know that those around especially the leader, the team captain will hold nothing back. It helps you to go forward. A general who leads from the front can often inspire his army to new heights. We see that at times with King David in the Old Testament. Even as a boy with the whole army cowering at the sight of Goliath. David steps forward with no armour, only a sling, and kills the giant. Even at such a young age, he is inspiring a generation to follow him.

Our spiritual confidence is founded very much on the love of God, a love that has given his own Son for us.

Paul's confidence is based not just on the hope of what will be, but also on the reality of what Jesus has already achieved. *Christ Jesus, who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right-hand side of God, pleading with him for us!* This is not just about Christ giving everything including his life, it is also about the way he defeated the greatest enemy of all - death - in the resurrection and then was exalted to the right-hand side of God in glory.

So where does Paul's confidence lie, where does our confidence lie?

Confident not in ourselves - but in God.

Confident not only in our ability to be found not guilty, but in what God has done for us in giving his son.

Confident, too, in the great victory that has already been won through Christ's death and his resurrection and glorification.

It is about assurance and confidence that God can give us the strength we need each day, each hour to serve Him.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ... No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: