

New Year's Eve
"God is for us in 2025 and eternally!" Romans 8:31
December 31, 2024
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this New Year's Eve is from our Epistle reading, Romans 8:31.

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

So far the text...

Cicero was considered the greatest statesman and orator in the Roman Republic in the years right before Jesus' birth. One of his famous quotes was "*A happy life consists in tranquility of mind*". Is that not what one wants in 2025? A happy life, a mind at peace? Many search for happiness and peace, yet how can one have a happy life and tranquil mind? You have come to where you will find it – to God's house ...to hear God's Word. Sneak peak: In Sunday's Gospel reading, that's where Jesus was found at the age of 12 when His parents were looking for Him.

If it was important to Jesus, then it's important to all of us to be in God's house on this last night of the year and in the new year! This night we want to thank Him for His many blessings, pray for His guidance and protection in this new year, and grow in our faith, happiness and tranquility!

Yes, as eloquent as Cicero was, any saying from man pales next to God's Word. Though Paul, himself, admitted that he wasn't an excellent speaker (1 Corinthians 2:1-3) But, the Gospel message was what shined! For he was determined to know and preach – Christ crucified..." **that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**" The Gospel message itself, God's message, persuades, convicts, comforts and saves the soul. And what a way to end the year ...by hearing God Word that tells us.

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

What then shall we say to these things? Our epistle reading doesn't include the question, just the answer. But Paul is actually posing us a question as we end this year of 2024 and enter 2025. What shall you say to the things that Paul spoke of in the previous verses that he had written in chapter 8...and the first 7 chapters of Romans for that matter where he lays out beautifully the teachings of being justified by Christ's work on the cross.

Yes, I commend to you that you make it your New Year's resolution to read all of chapter 8 as you start the new year...not just once, but often throughout the year, for there is so much comfort in these verses that will help you to stay strong in the faith and face with bold confidence in Jesus any hardship that you may face.

What shall we say to these things? Let me give you a quick summary. In this world you will have sufferings, Paul says vs. 18. Creation groans under sin vs. 22. We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our bodies vs.23. The Holy Spirit groans in prayer for us with words that cannot be uttered vs. 26.

A lot of groaning in this world. How was 2024 for you? Was there some groaning? No doubt. But groaning comes from the things that this sinful world, our flesh and the devil throw at us. Now for the things that God us through 2024, God's things, God's good news!

For Paul says: **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” vs.18**

And not only that...

“28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

God works all things together for good. He did that in 2024 and He'll do it in 2025 and beyond! Why because God calls a sinner into His Kingdom of grace with His great purpose of saving the person's soul and keeping a person's soul in faith, for the greatest good of entering eternal life! Those who are called have first been loved by God and spend their lives loving God in gratitude and service!

Paul takes a moment after this verse 28 to talk about “the things” from God's perspective. For Paul gives us the big picture of time. We like to look at time in bite size bits...a month at a time, a year at a time. Tonight when the clock strikes midnight, there is a Spanish tradition of eating 12 grapes as fast as you can in one minute. Each grape

signifies one month. So, if you eat them all under a minute, the year supposedly will bring you good luck. Well, Christians don't believe in good luck, but we do believe in God's good purposes! So if you want to eat 12 grapes tonight, you can make 12 prayers for the New Year or thank God for 12 things. Of course, you might want to write these down ahead of time so you can do it in under a minute!

But, back to God's big picture of time. Let me read for you the verses of the things of which we are to respond. Remember Paul just said **"to those who are the called according to His purpose"**. He continues...

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

"Foreknew" – that caused quite a bit of division in the Lutheran Church. The LCMS took the correct position that "foreknew" doesn't mean those that God knew would come to faith later. No, the Biblical position that the LCMS rightly proclaims is that God's foreknowing of a person is His willing them to be His son or daughter. His foreknowing is His making a person His own...way before a person is ever born.

What a thing to contemplate tonight! And also He predestined a believer, set His destiny for eternity to be with Him conformed to the image of His Son. Through His Son's sacrifice, God removed our sinful image and gives to us a new image, the Son's image – holy and righteous! For the Son was raised gloriously on Easter...the firstborn among many brethren. That means that we, His brethren, who believe in Jesus, will be also raised on the last day! What amazing things to think upon on this last day of the year!

Paul continues the timeline, your timeline and mine. Foreknown, predestined, and called in time...how? Through the power of the Holy Spirit in your baptism...and at that time justified...declared righteous! And God looks into your future which He already sees and says you are glorified! God's glory is in your possession right now. It's yours and will be fully seen when Jesus returns! What amazing things to think on as we end this year and look to our eternal future.

We are but pilgrims here, rejoicing pilgrims, as we will sing in our final hymn.

So, what was Paul's answer to these things? What say you? **"If God is for us, who can be against us?"**

God is for you! God is on your side! He has done all this for you! If God is with you, who or what can be against you in the coming new year or ever? Nothing!

Now, of course, it is true that God is on your side. But how about the opposite? Are you on God's side? Have you been faithful to Him in 2024? Have you loved Him with all your heart, mind and soul and your neighbor as yourself? For if you were on God's side, you never doubted Him, always put Him first in your life, never disobeyed Him and never did anything wrong against another person.

Unfortunately, we have to admit that we haven't always been on God's side. So, we enter 2025 asking God for His mercy and forgiveness. What's God's answer? Oh, it is so beautiful! Listen to what Paul says next:

"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

God gave up His Son for you to forgive you all your sins. If He has given you freely the greatest of all gifts – salvation- how will He not also give you all things for your prosperity in 2025?

Are all my sins really forgiven? Yes, God is on your side through Jesus. Listen to what Paul says.

"33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns?"

You, who believe are His elect, who have been justified. There is nothing to condemn you! For Jesus was condemned with your sins and buried them. Listen to how Paul begins this chapter 8.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."

One of Cicero's famous quotes was this: *"What then is freedom? The power to live as one wishes"*.

No that is not freedom. For such a person is still bound in sin and still must face the charges of sin. Living how you want is not true freedom. But living without condemnation in Christ is freedom. For a Christian is free to enjoy this life knowing that God is working all things for one's good. God has planned this in His great foreknowledge and predestined, called, justified and glorified His elect for eternity.

So, Paul concludes chapter 8 with these most comforting words to enter the New Year:

"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now that's happiness to the max...God on our side...forever! That's tranquility of mind in Jesus. Happy New Year! Amen

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)