

The Adequacy of God

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[0:00] Please turn to Romans 3. We've been spending the last several weeks in the final section of J.I. Packer's book that we've been reviewing entitled, *If God Before Us*. Today we close our study by considering the adequacy of God, in which Packer unpacks the four questions that are raised in Romans 8, 31-39, which paraphrased are, If God is for us, who can be against us? If he gave us his Son, will he not also give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against God's elect? Who will separate us from the love of Christ? I'm going to say up front we will probably only get to the first question, maybe the first two, because one thing Packer does is he spends some extensive time setting up the context for these questions. And because of the amount of material involved, I felt that that context was very vital for us. And I would challenge you to go back and reread this section of scripture multiple times as you get the context from this morning's lesson. So what is the context? Well, we need to go back to chapters 1-7. The first three chapters are all about coming to know ourselves as we really are, and it's summarized well in Romans 3, verses 10-12. Look there with me, Romans 3, 10-12.

As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. We all have a very big problem, and that problem is sin.

As our creator, God has the right to command us and expect complete obedience, but the problem is, is we don't obey. We're all lawbreakers rather than law keepers. And Jesus summarized the problem in Matthew 10-28 when he said, do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but not kill the soul.

Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. So that's our problem. But then we turn to chapters 4 and 5, and we see that our hope isn't found in trusting in the divine promise and provision for that problem by accepting and submitting to Jesus as my head in the substitutionary sacrifice for my sins. And we see in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5, that thought summarized. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this glorious grace in which we now stand. God did the unthinkable.

[3:17] We were rebels against him, him as our creator, but we rebelled. We deserved just eternal damnation for that sin. But God sent Jesus as a substitutionary payment for our sins. He redeemed us, in order that we might now be able to have a relationship with him. But then moving on to chapters 6 and 7, I find that although I've sought to commit myself to total holiness, my obedience is marred by my flesh, and my life is a contradiction of the good I've purposed and the evil I've renounced.

So again, in Romans 7, starting with verse 22, For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

As Paul moves into Romans 8, he confronts the predicaments of life, which every believer now struggles with. The guilt and power of sin, the fact of death, the terror of confronting God's holiness, weakness and despair in the face of suffering, paralysis and prayer, the feeling that life is meaningless and hopeless.

This whole book has really been about one thing, and that is our relationship with God. That relationship's been broken by our sin, resulting into eternal damnation.

And it's been restored by God to his elect through the redeeming sacrifice of his son. Well, as we move into verses 31 to 39, which is Packer's focus for his chapter, the focus shifts from our problem to God.

[5:17] What's the answer to these predicaments in life? God. And not simply, and I put that in quadruple quotation marks, but not simply as a solution to our problem of sin and guilt, but as the lover of our souls.

And this is the aspect, this is the setting up of this chapter that we cannot miss this morning. We will not appreciate these promises to us until we take this beyond his redeeming, incredible, amazing work to the reality that he is the lover of our souls.

Look at some verses in chapter 8. Begin with verse 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Verse 37.

Know in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Verses 38 and 39. None of these things that he speaks of will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is all about God's love for us. So, in summary, our sin resulted in our relationship with God being broken.

[6:34] God's solution restores that relationship, not merely judicially, but also relationally. Very simply, we are to be consumed with the love of God.

He is to be our motivation for living. He is to be our comfort during difficulty. He is to be our hope for the future. Sin causes me to go after other lovers.

It seeks to find fulfillment, purpose, meaning, and enjoyment in anything and everything other than God. Redemption restores the person of God to the center of my universe.

When God's work of sanctification in me is complete on that day, when I see him face to face, I will be fully consumed with him.

I will find him fully adequate. Thus the title of Packer's chapter name. The Adequacy of God. God is fully adequate to be my complete source of pleasure and purpose.

[7:36] But where the rubber meets the road is how adequate is he really for me. I will not fully appreciate the reality of the adequacy of God, as unpacked in Romans 8, 31 to 39, until I see how many God substitutes I've filled my life with.

Just how consumed am I with the love of God? How do I measure the degree to which the love of God has permeated my soul? And I open this up as a question for you.

What is a good gauge for identifying how much I am motivated by the love of God? Anyone. How I live. In what way.

Okay. Living to glorify him. To live for his law. How we respond to tragedy. Okay. I'm going down the path my mind started going.

So, what kind of responses could we have to tragedy that could help reveal or gauge whether or not I'm living for the love of God?

[8:44] How we respond to rebukes. Okay. In the sense that somebody wants to do something on the Lord's Day or something else to make it stand on and we're rebuked because of our beliefs.

Okay. How we take rebukes. Others. Very good. How we act or think. When no one can see us but God.

Okay. So, how do we cope with the little things of life? I'm going to take off a little on that. I mean, everything said is very good and I wanted to do this exercise so you can see that what I'm going to focus in on today is not the only answer.

There's many paths we could go down here. But I'd like us to focus our attention on the question of our zeal. I found that determining the sources for my zeal is a strong indicator for the motivations of my heart.

Well, it also immediately identifies the God's substitutes that I must purge from my affections. So, with this context in mind, I'll be presenting this morning lesson under two heads.

[9:55] Yes, this was all introduction. One, the believer's source of zeal. And two, God's promises that are to motivate our zeal. So, firstly, what is the believer's source of zeal?

And let me just begin by saying that there's not necessarily anything idolatrous or wrong about earthly desires. It is when those desires become inordinate, they become a source of sin.

It's when they become our motive for living that they become idolatrous. So, how do we know when we've crossed that line? We're commanded to never be lacking in zeal, but to keep our spiritual fervor.

Romans 12, 11. But what's to be the source of our zeal? What is to feed our fervor? Well, the well-taught Christian will immediately respond, Jesus Christ.

But let's be honest. We often live large chunks of our lives with no passion or zeal for life. Or when the fires of our passion are lit, it often has nothing to do with a love relationship with Jesus.

[11:05] Why is that? I want to pose another question to you. Why are good things, what are good things for which we may feel passionate or zealous?

What are some good areas, what are some good things that we can feel passion for? And I say things, meaning, by definition, I'm not focusing on Jesus at this point.

Okay, care for our families and loved ones. We can see how passionate we can become if somebody crosses a parent who loves their children.

Others. Patriotism and politics. Okay, good. How do you mean by that? How is that a good thing we can be zealous for? Oh, in terms of being angry, zealous, when people do misuse it.

Okay? There. So, righteously being angered for others. God has given us a deep sense of justice, hasn't he? Kind of as a side tangent, going back to where we started the lesson.

[12:15] We are sinners. We are sinners. And everybody wonders, well, why can't God just forgive us? Why did he have to send Jesus? Because he's just.

The very sense of justice that we feel within our bosom is the nature of God. He can't just let that which justly is deserved to go unpunished.

So, there's many good things that we can be zealous for. But here's our problem. A good goal, sometimes even a spiritual goal, for which we are working or praying, can easily become the fountain of our fervor.

What if that desire has never been realized? How do I know if that desire has been inordinate? If I've made it into a God substitute?

Proverbs 13.12 gives us a clue. It says, Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. The real question is, does it dampen my zeal?

[13:20] We are commanded to never be lacking in zeal, but keep our spiritual fervor. Does my zeal fade? Then, what should happen in my mind and heart is, what caused it to fade?

What happened that wiped out my zeal? And if I can trace back to that thing that happened, I can be pretty sure I've just found a God substitute.

I've taken maybe a very good thing and made it my motive for living. What do I do to rekindle the flame? Maybe I focus on the promise that God will someday give me the desires of my heart.

But how do I know if my desires are truly God's desires? King David desired more than anything to build the temple for the Lord, but he never got that opportunity, did he?

His desire was never fulfilled. what is wrong with using this promise that God will give me the desires of my heart within this context, meaning, I've just lost my zeal.

[14:29] I'm wiped out. I have no motive for living. And I trace it back that, well, it's because this desire, this hope that I had has been dashed. So now I go to this verse and say, well, God's going to give me the desire of my heart.

What's wrong with using that verse in that context? Very good. It's using a promise to further idolatry. We're not really addressing the root issue.

The root issue is Jesus is not our fervor. This desire that I had had become my source of fervor and motivation. It was the source of my zeal. And so when that source is dashed, do I take and try to find in Scripture something that will buoy up my hope that someday it will be fulfilled?

To do so is to simply delay the reckoning of my idolatry and my sin. That I've put my zeal, my hope, my purpose for living on something other than Christ.

Maybe I rekindle the flames of my passion through the hope that after all my trials I will finally reach the state of human prosperity. That these deferred hopes are simply that.

[15:47] Deferred. That these trials will finally come to an end and my human goals will finally be realized. How many times have we heard Jeremiah 29, 11 quoted within the context of this idea?

For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.

Plans to give you hope in a future. But we saw from our very memory verse this morning that God's ideas of blessing and prosperity sometimes are very different than ours.

The fact is that God does bring many good earthly gifts and pleasures to his children. He knows how we are formed. He remembers that we are dust. He doesn't give us more than we can bear.

And he often does follow periods of darkness with times of temporal encouragement. He does give those blessings. And if we're honest, every one of us goes through cycles of discouragement followed by zeal.

Discouragement followed by zeal. If you've never thought about it before, my question for you this morning is, what ultimately lifts you out of your discouragement and returns pleasure and meaning to life?

[17:07] Is it from a renewed perception of God's love for you? A refocusing on Jesus and living for his pleasure? Or do your mood swing on the status of your earthly hopes and desires?

When your hopes are dashed, discouragement and frustration reign? When they're renewed, joy, happiness and zeal return? The answer to that question will reveal what or who it is for which you are living.

It's really as simple as that. Please turn to Hebrews 11.32. Hebrews 11.32. This is the elephant in the room that we want to pretend isn't there.

We often live a nominally Christianity in which our desires are being fulfilled through so many other things beyond Jesus. But to properly set up the glory of the truths God has for us in Romans 8.31-39, we must consider this subject personally.

we must slay these misplaced passions with the light of reality, what we are really living for. I want to especially speak to the younger crowd this morning.

[18:29] I would venture to guess that those of us over 40, maybe over 50, have already gone through at least one midlife crisis, which is the world's term for having all those dreams and desires that you had as a young person, reaching a place in life where you finally realize, you know what, I'm 50, I'm not going to become a millionaire by the time I'm 30.

So you reach this crisis of unfulfilled desires and passions. Looking at Hebrews 11, we like to use the first part of the scriptures hall of faith as an encouragement for reaching ours for the goals.

Begin in verse 32. And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength, and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

women received back their dead, raised to life again. If I just had enough faith, I too would shut the mouths of lions.

I too would do mighty things for God. But the hall of faith goes on, doesn't it? Continuing in verse 35. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.

[20:10] Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they were put to death by the sword, they went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated.

The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes on the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised.

Let me ask you, for every Samson that comes along, how many of this latter group do you think has been in God's kingdom? For every George Mueller or C.H. Spurgeon, how many thousands, millions, of people are like the widow who gave the mite, people like you and me?

Simple, with no grand accomplishments, and very limited impact from the world's perspective.

God's conclusion for having taken us through the hall of faith?

Chapter 12, verse 1, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

[21:27] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. What do you suppose kept these people going, the people in the latter group?

The command to never be lacking in zeal came to them as well. Their zeal certainly wasn't coming from something that we can surround our lives with, being sought in two, living in caves, being chased to their deaths.

They had to have something more. must God put us into this category of saints before we will finally turn holy to Christ? Simply because there will be nothing left in this life on which to put our hopes and pleasures?

Is that truly what it will take? Are we going to be satisfied with a nominal Christianity in which I allow all these other things to crowd in? Or am I going to set my affections fully on Christ and him alone without him having to continually take me through trials to do what is truly good for me?

We find two actions in Hebrews 12, 1 and 2. Throw off and fix our eyes. Throw off everything that hinders. Hinders us from what? Well, hinders us from fixing our eyes on Jesus.

[22:53] And may I suggest that very often our own desires can become a major hindrance and keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. Our desires, our goals for the kingdom of God are often nothing more than a form of idolatry.

The idol of the fulfillment of our own desires and passions. The idol of wanting our own way to be fulfilled. The idol of self-glory, wanting to be considered great in God's kingdom.

So in what is my passion, my zeal, to be rooted in the many great desires of my heart to help further God's kingdom?

No, no, no. The source of our zeal, the foundational element of our insatiable drive to keep on daily serving in the most menial tasks of life, is to be centered in a person.

It is to be stoked by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. Its source, in fact, should be the same as what drove Jesus, his pleasure of his heavenly father.

[24:02] Jesus declared that his food, his life-giving sustenance, was to do the will of the one who sent him. My food, Jesus said in John 4, 3, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

God made us with a quality that will drive and feed our zeal like nothing else can. Husbands, how much increased motivation do you get out of knowing the pleasure that may come to your wife by doing something for her, by seeing her bubble over with delight and increased pleasure because of something you do?

Wives, does it add any motivation for preparing the next meal when your husband or children express delight in the meal you just prepared? When I receive a sincere or thoughtful compliment for something I have done, my reaction of increased desire to please that person still amazes me. God build us with that capacity. We are relationally driven. The problem is that we have substituted so many things and often time good things for what is to be the only true source of Christian zeal. We can often live our lives or even a lifetime without ever being zealous for the one thing that really matters, knowing Christ and feeling his pleasure. Our passions and dreams and goals for the kingdom of God can easily drown out the centrality of true Christianity, a relationship with Jesus Christ.

[25:32] God made us relational creatures. Even the most non-emotional project-driven ones among us receive our highest motivations from wanting to please other persons.

Romans 12.11 ends by telling us how we are to keep our spiritual fervor. Never be lacking in zeal. Keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.

How will serving the Lord keep your spiritual fervor? Well, first, the passage assumes that my service to the Lord is being motivated out of an Abba-Father relationship, not from duty to earn his favor, as Jesus illustrated through the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son.

And as I serve my God out of love, I am elevated above earthly circumstances and motivations. I'm freed from my own deceitful desires and goals.

I begin living for the pleasure of one person, Jesus Christ. Given this backdrop, what is foundational to driving this motivation?

[26:44] question, what must I believe unwaveringly if my spiritual fervor is to remain constant? Again, I ask the question to you. What must I believe unwaveringly if my spiritual fervor is to remain constant?

If Jesus Christ is to be the source of that fervor? the gospel. What do we mean when we say the gospel? That all I have is because of Christ.

He who knew no sin became sin in my stead. And why did he do that? Because of the love of God. If my zeal is relationally founded, and I am to never be lacking in it, no matter what trial, no matter what comes into life, no matter how menial my task, whether it's changing diapers or doing dishes, or doing some great thing in a mission field, and life's circumstances are shifting constantly under my feet, then it is only knowing that as I do all that I do for him, for his pleasure, that he will be pleased, that I can bring him pleasure, that he does delight in me.

And that is what the promises in the section of Romans 8, 31 to 39 is all about. So God's promises that motivate our zeal.

question 1, we're in verse 31 of chapter 8, question 1, if God is for us, who is against us?

[28 : 46] If God is for us, who is God? He's the absolute sovereign one, he's the creator, creator. He is the one who made everything we see, who made us, who as we study more and more into creation and the complexity of it, boggles our minds with amazing immenseness and wisdom and power of the one who made it all.

He's omnipotent, able to do anything. More specifically, he's able to raise spiritually dead sinners to spiritual life, Ephesians 2, 4, and 5. But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions, it is by grace you have been saved.

If God is for us, the words for us declare God's covenant commitment. The goal of grace, as we have seen, is to create a love relationship between God and us.

notice that the goal, I'm sorry, notice that his goal for us is not that we start a mission, although he may choose to use us to do so.

It's not that I should earn a million dollars by the time I'm 30, although he may purpose this for one of his children. It isn't to become the world's greatest theologian. It isn't even to raise a wonderful family, nor to have a glorious marriage, or any number of other goals we often set for ourselves and feel cheated when they don't materialize.

[30 : 26] No, while God perfectly measures out his good gifts to us, and the works to which he has called each of us to perform, none of these gifts or duties are to be the source of our zeal.

If they are the reason we wake up in the morning and have passion to face another day, then we have substituted an idol for God. God is committed to accomplishing something far more glorious for us, the developing of a love relationship between himself and his children.

God is for us. But what he is for is not the fulfilling of our earthly goals and the removal of trials.

Rather, he is determined to develop within us something far greater than our wildest human dreams, a covenant relationship with himself.

Packer comments, this covenant relationship is the basis of all biblical religion. When worshipers say, my God, and God says, my people, covenant language is being taught.

The simple statement, God is for us, is in truth one of the richest and weightiest utterances that the Bible contains. Who is against us?

[31 : 46] us. The literal translation of verse 31 is not who can be against us, but rather who is against us, or better yet, if God for us, who against us?

So it is a fact that there will always be many against us, not the least of which is myself, my own fleshly desires. We have hope that my father-in-law threw himself on Christ, on his deathbed, as he turned to him, at least in word at that time.

But I had dozens of conversations with him leading up to that day, which centered on his belief that although he could trust God to handle all of his outward circumstances and all of his outward enemies, it was up to himself to maintain his faith, to keep pursuing Christ.

If he left God, God would leave him. Let me ask you something. Who is your greatest enemy? I think any believer who has lived very long will quickly answer my greatest enemy is self.

My biggest problem is my own rebellious, wandering heart. If God's covenant promise for me does not include the conquering of my own wayward heart, that I am left in Romans 7.

[33 : 12] And my lot is truly hopeless because left to myself I am hopeless. Listen to Romans 7 beginning in verse 21. So I find this law at work.

When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

What a wretched man I am. Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. How does Jesus rescue me from this body of death?

Well, by promising that the work he began in me, he will carry on until completion, until the day of Jesus Christ. By promising to work in me, to will, and to act according to his good pleasure.

By marking us with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the day of Jesus Christ. By continuing to deliver the gospel to us, not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction.

[34 : 27] I find Ezekiel 36, 25-27, especially helpful in describing this work that God is performing in every one of his covenant children.

I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Who is against us? Satan, the world, my own flesh. But no matter.

God is for us. Question number two, very briefly. If he gave his own son, will he not also give us all things?

[35 : 28] How is love measured? If I were to tell you that a thousand dollars was given by a parent, two different parents, to a child, would it necessarily demonstrate the same level of love and commitment from both parents?

What if I were then to tell you that one person was a multi-billionaire and the other was a pauper? Would that make any difference in the measurement of the cost? You see, the amount that one gives compared to what one has determines the demonstration of the love that is within the heart. How does the cost of God's gift of his son measure on this scale? He gave it all, didn't he? He gave his very self.

And how personal is God's gift? I do not believe we can underestimate, now that you have this context in which we're speaking, I think you will see this, but I do not believe we can underestimate the damage that the notion of general atonement has had on the church.

What's the difference between general atonement and particular atonement? Well, general atonement simply says that God sent Jesus to pay for the sins of everyone, every human being in the world.

[36 : 58] Particular atonement says, no, God looked down the corridors of history and he chose who he would save and then he sent his son to redeem those through the death of his son that he sent on the cross.

Beyond its theological compromise and the toll it's had on the gospel, the crippling effects that it has on the true children of God can be ruinous. Within the context of all that we've been saying this morning, how is the notion of general atonement crippling to the believer?

Well, those of you who have been without work could probably relate to this question. When you received your unemployment check in the mail, how much gratitude did you feel toward the government?

were you warmed by the notion that Uncle Sam and President Obama were sending you money in the mail? If not, why not?

Well, because you're just a number. It's general. It's to everyone. But if you received a gift from the church or a fellow believer, if someone showed up on your doorstep with a bag of groceries with all your favorite foods in it, how much gratitude and love did you feel emanating from that person?

[38 : 18] I would dare to say it would be far, far different than in the former case. Beyond its scriptural error, to say that Jesus died for every person in the world has the effect of changing our very attitude toward God.

We are to battle wrong emotions with truth, and all of us are in desperate need to feel more emotional gratitude and love toward emotions can only flow when my thinking is correct regarding what God has done for me.

And if you believe that Jesus' death on the cross has no particular purpose, only a general sacrifice that may be appropriated by me if I so choose, like a barrel of money sitting out downtown in Bremen, in the center of town, it was donated, and anybody can just come along and scoop some up.

If on the other hand, I allow the personal nature of God's love for me to sink in, that he chose me personally before the foundation of the world and to be a recipient of his grace, that he's written my name on the palms of his hands, that he has given up his son for me to redeem me from my sins, if this be true, and it is, then how will he not also along with him graciously give me all things?

Calling, justification, glorification, eternal life, our material and physical needs while on the earth, in summary, everything in both this life and the next that is worth having.

[39 : 59] what do you wish that you have that you do not? What do you see others enjoying that you long to experience? If you're a Jesus redeemed child of God, then there is nothing that has been withheld from you that has resulted in you missing out on anything that is good.

God is continually giving to his children everything that is to their benefit and for their good. Let us remind ourselves of this reality the next time envy and discontentment floods our souls. If God did not spare his own son but gave him up for me, he will graciously give me all things. All things are working together for good to those who love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.

Thank you and you're dismissed.