

**CASE AGAINST GOD
ROMANS 8:31-39**

Goodness, you hear it all the time. At the office, at parties, on the golf course, at school...you just don't hear too much about it in church: The Case Against God. Let's talk about it.

Abraham, now he had a case against God! Sacrifice his own son? There's your case.

And Jesus, he had a case against God. Suffer and die on a cross for sins he did not commit. There's your case.

How about you? Do you have a case against God?

A member of our congregation introduced me to her neighbor when we were over at their home recently. The neighbor said, "Preacher..." (Whenever a conversation with a stranger begins "Preacher," I know I'm fixing to hear it...)

"Preacher, I'm not a religious man. In fact, I've never received an answer from God though I have prayed sincerely and fervently and have needed much help throughout my life. I'm not close to God, but I got tired of praying and making appeals, so I gave up. I've been diagnosed with a heart disorder. My cardiologist said I will be dead within a year, maybe year and a half. All I would like is an acknowledgement of God. That God is real and listens. Throw out a prayer for me, Preacher, if you get the notion."

That gentleman has a case against God, don't you think?

She pulled her car into the parking lot one night as I was walking to my car. "Are you the pastor?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

We went back into the building, sat in the back pew, there, choir side. She told me her story. "All my life I have considered myself to be a Christian, but lately, about the past four or five years, many doubts have come to me. I married at age 16 and now I'm 60. I raised five children without teaching them about God. One of them knows Jesus. Five years ago my husband left me for a much younger woman. Left me to support myself. I am so confused about God in all this. Where was God when I needed Him?"

I'd say she has a case against God, wouldn't you?

You hear the case everywhere you go if you just listen. Oh, it's out there. The case against God is being made. Do you have a case against God?

A member of our congregation was vacationing in Europe and on this particular day she happened to be in Switzerland. She came upon a shepherd with sheep milling around him.

Over to the side was a clump of hay and lying on the haystack was a sheep, obviously in discomfort, in real pain.

So, she asked the shepherd, "What's wrong with the sheep?"

The shepherd replied, "His leg is broken."

"Oh, my," she said, "How did he break it?"

The shepherd told her, "I broke it."

She said, "You, why did you break it?"

The shepherd said, "He was the most wayward sheep I ever had. He had real leadership and the others were following him right up to the brink and would almost fall off a precipice. He never obeyed. So, I broke his leg. And I put him on the hay. The next day I came to feed him and he tried to bite me. I waited two days and then I returned with some food. He ate it all. And licked my hands for the first time since his birth," the shepherd explained to her.

She asked, "So why did you do that?"

He told her, "Because hereafter, he will be the most obedient sheep in all my flock. He will take my word seriously. He will love me, and he will remember that I healed him from his pain. And he will remember that he is to obey me."

We always forget God's ways are not our ways. We say it, but we don't understand it. The mind of God does not work like our minds. The ways of God are not our ways.

We see this when we pray. Almost invariably, in our prayers, we tell God how to answer the prayer. "This is what I want, God, and this is what you are to do when you give me what I'm asking for. I want you to be sure you understand this, God, I want it by 11 o'clock tomorrow morning. I don't need it at 10 but at 11, straight up, eleven."

And then when God does not deliver at 11, we have a case against God.

A case against God is an easy thing to have. God wanted Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac. And Abraham said, "I'm perplexed."

God sent Jesus to the cross of failure and death. And Jesus said, "I'm perplexed."

And we ask, "What does God want me to do with my life? I'm so perplexed."

"I've been praying constantly to God, but no answer. I'm perplexed."

Let me ask you this. Is there anything wrong with being perplexed? Not at all.

Do you remember how the Apostle Paul described his state of mind in the book of II Corinthians? (II Cor 4:8.) He said, "We are perplexed, but we are not in despair."

Paul did not understand God's ways so perfectly that he could explain them on all occasions, even explain things to himself.

I wonder if anyone, in looking back on the hurt in their own life, would want to relive the hurt. But have you ever learned anything in life except from hurt. I never have.

I've been to lots of parties. Never learned a thing from a party.

Oh, I've heard a thousand jokes, but never learned a thing from a joke.

I only learned from hurt. From sorrow. From heartbreak. From suffering.

And the Apostle Paul, who himself experienced pain, the threat of death, shipwreck, captivity, calamities even though he was a believer, perplexity though he was not in despair. The same Paul writing to the Roman Christians, summarizes it in this bold absolute way, saying: "If God be for us, who can be against us." (Romans 8:31)

You say, "Well, I can name them. You want them on one hand or two."

Paul means effectively against us. The God who did not spare his own Son, won't God freely give us all things?

"Look here," Paul says, "Let me summarize. What we suffer and how it comes out: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, we're like sheep being offered for slaughter on a daily basis."

That's how Paul looked at the world. Paul could say, "I am convinced that neither life nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor hardship, nor evil, nothing in the whole world can separate us from God's love." (Romans 8:31-39)

That is why God must remind us, "My ways are not your ways. My ways are past your understanding. You are not like me. I see the whole future as though it were the past. You see only the present, despite your apprehension about the future."

This morning, when you come to the nave for communion, you are asked to remember the blood of Jesus shed on the cross for every sin in your life. But you also have to remember that the integrity of God is at stake up here. Is God to be trusted not just with the past and present, but also with the future? Are you willing to trust God? What about God's integrity?

This is what God says: "I can never lie. I have the incapacity to lie. I will never contradict myself because my Word is unchangeable. My life is eternal."

Yes, and God says: "I ask you to believe I have sent my only Son from heaven to earth to die for your sin, so that you, by faith in Him, might turn from the way you've been living and follow Him. I give you eternal forgiveness, eternal life and eternal love."

Is that a God you can trust? Or do you have a case?

With your life, you make the case either for or against God.