

Session 6

THE CHURCH WILL NOT FAIL

Matthew 16:18; Acts 5:33-39; Romans 8:31-39

Memory Verse

What, then, are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

– ROMANS 8:31, CSB



The Church Will Not Fail

THEOLOGICAL THEME: It doesn't matter who opposes God's people because God is for us. His plans never fail, and neither will His church.

CALL TO ACTION: Don't give up on the church. As believers, we can lean into the discipline of the Five Gs with confidence.

In England in the 1500s, the world looked very different than it does today, and not just in the ways you might think. An English translation of the Bible didn't exist. That idea might seem wild for us, in a day and age when the Bible is more accessible than ever before; it's literally at our fingertips, in a myriad of translations, at nearly all times thanks apps and websites we can access on our phones. But in England in the 1500s, the church kept a tight leash on Scripture. They firmly held the belief that clergymen were the only ones qualified to read and interpret Scripture, and they radically opposed its translation into English.¹

The sad reality was shocking: There were huge gaps in knowledge among clergymen. Some didn't know where the Ten Commandments were located, and some couldn't tell you who spoke the Lord's Prayer.²

Enter William Tyndale. Tyndale believed that everyone should be able to read the Bible, not just clergymen, and to achieve that end, it had to be translated into English. He famously said, "If God spare my life, ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of Scripture than thou dost."³


Despite powerful and dangerous opposition, Tyndale got to work. He eventually had to flee to Germany, where he completed an English translation of the New Testament in 1525. Over the next five years, he would smuggle fifteen thousand copies of it into England. (Smuggling was necessary because Tyndale was condemned for his work and his translation was banned in England.)

Tyndale had mighty enemies opposing his work in England, but even they couldn't confiscate and burn every single copy. In 1536, Tyndale was executed for his translation work, and he isn't the only translator in church history to lose his life.⁴

Tyndale's story is a powerful representation of Paul's teaching in Romans: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31b). Tyndale tragically lost his life, but the work the Lord did through him was unstoppable.

Thankfully, our opposition in 2025 often looks different than the opposition Tyndale faced in the 1500s, but we experience many similarities. As our society becomes increasingly secular (embracing the ideals of the flesh we learned about in our study of Colossians), resentment and opposition toward the church grows. Unfortunately, apathy in the church grows too.

The future can look and feel bleak. However, we can take heart in what we learn from Tyndale's story and see reflected in Scripture: The church will not fail. "If God is for us, who is against us?"

 How would you describe our culture's relationship with the church?

 Are you worried about the future of the global church? Why or why not?

Session Summary

Today, we're talking about the fact that the church will not fail. In Romans, we will read Paul's famous line "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b, NIV). Scripture is clear on the fact that we will face hardships (John 15:20), but it doesn't matter who might stand against us, because God Himself is for us, and, as Gamaliel argued in our passage in Acts, God's plans never fail.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus also said the church wouldn't be overpowered. With the solid foundation of Jesus, the future of the faith is secure.

1. God Is for Us (Romans 8:31-39)



What do you think it means that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (v. 31b, NIV)?



What can we learn about the Lord from this passage?

In this passage, Paul presented an argument that God is for us. What a beautiful and humbling thought! When we are found in Jesus, God is for us. Paul backed this idea up with some pretty compelling evidence: God didn't even hold back His own Son for our sake. God sent Jesus so He could die on the cross for our sins. We are so familiar with this truth in the church that we sometimes fail to marvel at how truly wonderful it is. God loves us so much that He sent His only Son to die for undeserving sinners (Romans 5:8). This was all so our sins could be forgiven and we could live in relationship with Him forever. God is for us, indeed!

No one can rightly accuse or condemn us because God has called us forgiven and free. We are covered because Jesus died for us, was raised, and now sits at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us (v. 34). But just because our accusers don't have a leg to stand on doesn't mean they won't try. Satan will accuse us

and often uses the opposition of other people to do so. We see that in our culture every time someone misrepresents God's church with labels like "unloving." People will accuse us, but God has already ruled in our favor.

We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus and nothing can take that away from us. Our salvation is assured, and when we are working faithfully in the purposeful life God has designed for us, the future of the church is assured too. The church will not fail.

Many of us are familiar with Paul's famous question, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (v. 31b, NIV). As we think about the future of the faith and the future of the church, these words should give us hope and so should the circumstances in which they were written.

In Paul's day, the church was facing opposition through physical and theological persecution in ways we simply can't relate to in America in 2025, but Paul's writings consistently present a bold, hopeful outlook:

- "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).
- "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18).
- "Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up" (Galatians 6:9).

The cultural opposition we face as believers today can make the future of God's church feel uncertain, but we shouldn't despair. Just like God didn't let Paul fail in spreading His message for His glory or let William Tyndale fail to produce the first English translation of the Bible, no matter the difficult or discouraging our circumstance, the church won't fail when God is actively working through it.



Application: How does this passage give you hope as you think about the future of the church in our country and world?

2. The Church Won't Fail (Acts 5:33-39)



What argument did Gamaliel make in these verses? What was the response?



What can we learn about God's plans from this passage?

Our passage in Acts 5 looks in on a scene in the Sanhedrin, “the full council of the Israelites” (v. 21). At this point in Acts, the Christian body of believers was thriving. The Holy Spirit had arrived as promised, His presence fueled the apostles’ boldness in teaching, and multitudes of men and women were being saved (Acts 5:14).

For the apostles a growing church meant growing persecution from the religious leaders, as Jesus had predicted in John 15:20. They had been arrested more than once. Just before this, in Acts 5:17-21, they were arrested, but an angel broke them out of jail and sent them back out to preach!

When they were brought back in front of the Sanhedrin and questioned, Peter and the apostles spoke the truth of the gospel boldly. They held firm in the belief that they “must obey God rather than people” (v. 29). What a bold move! Once again, in front of the very body who condemned Jesus, they refused to conform to the expectations of their culture and forsake the call of God.

Our passage picks up after this moment. The apostles’ words enraged the Sanhedrin, but Gamaliel intervened. Gamaliel was a highly respected Rabbi under whom the apostle Paul studied (Acts 22:3). He was known to be temperate in his attitude and teaching, and we see that reflected in his response here.⁵ Gamaliel brought up a couple of case studies:


- Theudas (v. 36): He rose up and gathered a group but was later killed, and his cause disbanded.
- Judas (a different Judas than either disciple, v. 37): He rebelled against the census Quirinius took in AD 6⁶ and collected followers. After his death, his followers scattered.

Do you see where Gamaliel may have seen a resemblance between these men and Jesus? Jesus rose up, gathered a following, and died. We know the truth is that Jesus is the Son of God and was raised from the dead and has ascended into heaven. Though the Sanhedrin did not accept this fact, Gamaliel argued for a wait-and-see approach.


God used Gamaliel's argument to free the apostles, but it wasn't 100 percent sound. Unfortunately, not all plans or works of human (sinful) origin fail; we don't have to look very far in our society today to know this is true. However, he was right about one thing: The religious leaders were fighting against God, and God's plans simply cannot be overthrown.


Scripture is filled with evidence of this truth. Consider the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14. Moses stood against the world's most sophisticated army at the time with a multitude of untrained, freshly freed slaves that included women and children. But God parted the sea, saving His people and bringing resounding victory. Remember the story of Deborah in Judges 4? After twenty years of oppression at Canaanite hands, she and Barak led Israel's forces against King Jabin and his nine hundred iron chariots. God overcame even though Israel's forces were outmatched, and the entire Canaanite army died in battle (Judges 4:16). In Judges 7, God whittled Gideon's forces down to a mere three hundred against the Midianite army. They were grossly outmanned. God brought victory anyway. God sent Jesus who was "lowly and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29), not the military commander the Jews were expecting, "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus was arrested unjustly, beaten brutally, and died on a cross. He defeated death and the grave when He rose from the dead three days later. Scripture is filled with God's victories. **God's plans simply cannot be overthrown.**

So where does that leave us? We can be sure God's plans won't ever fail and that the global church is in the center of His plans. It's important to note and accept that our idea of success and God's idea of success don't always match up. Not everything He calls us to do will "succeed" by human standards, but we can rest assured that He is always seated on the throne, aware and in charge, His plan playing out in ways we won't fully understand this side of heaven. God's plans never fail, and He is for us.

 Application: Where do you turn for reminders and confidence in God's faithfulness to His promises and plans?


3. The Rock (Matthew 16:18)

 What did Jesus mean when He said “the gates of Hades will not overpower” the church?

 What does this verse teach us about God's plan for the church?

Jesus's proclamation here was in response to Peter declaring Jesus as “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Scholars don't all agree on what, exactly, Jesus meant by the word “rock”⁷ here— whether it referred to Peter's confession or Peter himself—but Scripture makes clear elsewhere that Jesus Himself is the “rock” on which the church is built. He is the foundational cornerstone the builders rejected (Matthew 21:42; Ephesians 2:20).

On this rock-solid foundation, the church is built. Note who the verse says is doing the building: Jesus. He claimed it for His own as “my church” (v. 18). The foundation is so strong that Jesus said, “the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Satan, his armies, and death itself can't defeat Jesus's church. We are still fighting the battle, but Jesus has already achieved final victory.

 Application: How does this verse give us hope for the future of the church?

Conclusion

- ❓ What are some moments from your life when you felt like circumstances were bleak, but God triumphed or provided for you in a way you couldn't for yourself?

- ❓ How does the idea of God being for the church enhance our perspective on why it is important for individual believers to be joined with the church?

- ❓ How does today's study encourage you to tell others the good news of Jesus?

Memorize

What, then, are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?
- Romans 8:31, CSB

References

- ¹Philip W. Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* (Carol Stream, IL: Living Books, 1996), 41-43; Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 60-61.
- ²McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet*, 60.
- ³Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions*, 42.
- ⁴Comfort, 43.
- ⁵Stanley E. Porter, "Acts," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1726.
- ⁶Porter, 1726.
- ⁷David Guzik, "Matthew 16 — Revealing Who Jesus Is and What He came to Do," Enduring Word, accessed April 14, 2025, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/matthew-16/>.