

*What then shall we say . . . ? If God is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:31*

Dorothy Parker (1893- 1967) was a poet (lots of wit in what she wrote), also an essayist and *New Yorker* magazine book reviewer. One of her satirical pieces is titled *The Telephone*. A young woman is waiting for a phone call from her guy. He promised to call at five o'clock. It is five minutes after five. She thinks (in my edited quote):

*Please, God, let him telephone me now . . . I won't ask anything else of You, truly I won't. It isn't very much to ask. It would be so little to You, God, such a little thing . . . please, please, please . . . If I didn't think about it, maybe the telephone might ring . . . If I could think of something else . . . Maybe if I counted five hundred by fives . . . Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five . . . Oh, please ring. Please. This is the last time I'll look at the clock . . . He said . . . "I'll call you at five, darling." I think that's where he said "darling." I know I shouldn't keep telephoning . . . But I hadn't talked to him in three days - . . . He couldn't have thought I was bothering him . . . I don't think he would say he'd telephone me, and then just never do it. Please don't let him do that, God . . . Look. Suppose a young man says he'll call a girl up, and then something happens, and he doesn't. That isn't so terrible, is it? . . . Why can't that telephone ring? Why can't it? . . . Couldn't you ring? . . . You d--d, ugly, shiny thing. It would hurt you to ring, wouldn't it? . . . I'll pull your filthy roots out of the wall . . . No, no, no, I must stop . . . I'll put the clock in the other room . . . Are you punishing me, God? . . . All right, send me to hell . . . I mustn't do this . . . Maybe he is coming on here without calling me up. Something may have happened to him . . . Maybe I could read . . . God aren't you really going to let him call me? . . . Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five . . .*

Isn't this something each of us goes through? A neighbor, who kept a spotlight shining over his construction equipment at night, agreed to turn it off at 10 pm since I complained it flooded the room I sleep in. He held to that for months, years – and then recently on it went again, much to my chagrin. I spent that night doing what the young lady does in that story: I thought of all the reasons he turned it on again, all having to do with forgetting our agreement or giving priority to his needs or not caring about my losing sleep; then pondering how I would approach him again, his reaction, a future of hostility . . . wide awake all night. And then I found out: his yard had been robbed two nights earlier and he needed to light it up on subsequent nights to protect his property. When I heard that, I relaxed and even wonderfully gave up thinking about the issue entirely – and have slept well.

We do that so often as individuals and nations. We assume someone dislikes us and retreat into endless analysis of why? When with most it's not a matter of dislike; the other party isn't even thinking of us or may have positive thoughts we are not aware of. And so we sulk – we turn ourselves into “objects” of another's assumed attitude toward us – self-objectification. Once we crawl out of that “skin” and remember our Gospel – recover that we are worth the very incarnation of God - we cease to be objects, to make targets of ourselves. We become the persons, the unique beings we ARE – and no longer have to waste time counting: five, ten, fifteen, twenty . . . before we can relax in God's grace and be our *real* selves.