

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Romans 8:31-39 “The Unending Love of God”

Intro. My text today is one of the greatest passages of Scripture about the love of God. I trust that you will be encouraged by the message of my text. It is also one of the great Scripture texts relating to the eternal security of the believer. You see, true love is unconditional, and it gives security. This text of Scripture confirms the truth that once a person is *truly* saved, their eternal salvation is indeed secure.

Now vv.18-26 speak about our various sufferings that we endure. There are times when it seems that everything is against us. Trouble can overwhelm us. At such times we may wonder if God really loves us. We may wonder why a loving God would allow such things to happen. Others have trouble believing that God would love them when they recall how many times they have sinned against God. We tend to project on others our own feelings & character. We know how difficult it is to love & forgive someone who has sinned against us several times. We assume that God is the same way. We may wonder if God would ever stop loving us.

So in this text of Scripture Paul reviews for us some possible fears that we might have; things that might work against us in our relationship with Christ. Can any of these things cause us to lose our salvation? Can they separate us from the love of Christ? Let's answer those questions as we consider this text of Scripture together.

Notice with me first of all:

I. OUR SINS CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Even though we are Christians, we will fail & sin against the Lord. At times we will mess up big time. Does that mean that God no longer loves us? Could we even lose our salvation? Well the Bible calls Satan “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). When you sin, he will try to accuse you before God, and attack your conscience. He will remind you of past sins. He wants to beat you down, and make you doubt your salvation & give up on the Christian life.

But notice how Paul responds in vv.33-34. He says, “Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns?” Since God Himself had justified us & declared us “not guilty,” how can anyone now bring charges against us to condemn us? No one can!

Our sins and mistakes cannot separate us from the love of God for the following reasons:

A. Because of the Work of Christ - Paul says in v.34, “Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” Because of the past & present work of Christ on our behalf, we cannot move from being justified to condemned. Notice in particular what Christ has done & is doing to ensure that we will never be condemned.

1. He Died for our Sins on the Cross – Paul says in v.34, “Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died....” Jesus loves you so much that He went to the cross to die for your sins, past, present, & future. We can also see this truth in the last of v.31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” “For” (*huper*) is a word of substitution. The Son of God substituted

Himself for the believer & died for our sins in our place. God knows that His righteousness was satisfied in the death of the Savior so that He, Himself, will never think of bringing a charge against you or me.

2. He Rose from the Dead – Not only has Christ died, but Paul goes on to say in v.34, “furthermore is also risen.” The “furthermore” (*mallon de*) is significant. It indicates an important amendment to what Paul has said. It is to stress the fact that Jesus’ death would have been of no avail apart from the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ proves that He was not a sinner. He did not die for His sins. It proves the validity of all His claims (Rom. 1:4). It proves that God the Father accepted the sacrifice of His Son. The fact that He lives gives great assurance of the security of our salvation, for He lives to bring our salvation to completion.

3. He Sits on the Right Hand – V.34 also says that Christ “is even at the right hand of God.” Paul does not specifically mention it here, but we know from other scriptures that He *sits* at the right hand of God (Mt. 22:44; 26:64; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12). He never would sit if the work were not fully done. In the tabernacle there were no seats for the priests. That’s because their work was never finished. But Jesus is seating because His work of atonement for our sins was accomplished once and for all. He knew this blessed truth, for just before He died, He cried out, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30).

Still another blessed truth is that Christ is thus exalted as the supreme authority (1 Peter 3:22). Our Savior is seated upon the throne of the universe, & has the power and authority to bring about our final salvation.

4. He Makes Intercession for Us – That’s what Paul says in the last of v.34. He acts as our advocate and pleads our cause before God. Likewise, the apostle John said in 1 Jn. 2:1, “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” He knows we have sinned, but He intercedes for us, not pleading our innocence, but pleading His own blood that was shed to atone for our sins. “Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25, NIV).

There are times when we do not *feel* like God loves us. At such times we need to get our attention off our feelings, and begin to focus on what Christ has done, & is doing to secure our final salvation. We should not live by feelings, but by faith.

There’s another reason why we believe that our sins will never separate us from the love of God:

B. Because of God’s Gracious Disposition Toward Us – We have seen what Christ did to demonstrate His love for us. Now in v.32 we see the heart of God the Father. Paul says, “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all...” We read here that God did not “spare” His Son, even when Jesus pleaded in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup pass from Him. And as Jesus endured the suffering of the cross, God the Father did not withhold one drop of the cup of judgment from His only begotten Son. This is an echo of Genesis 22:12, where God says to Abraham: “you have not withheld (LXX “spared”, Gk. *pheidomai*, as here) your son, your only son, from Me.”

How difficult it must have been for God the Father not to spare His Son! In 1937, John Griffith had a job in Mississippi, tending a drawbridge for a railroad. One day his 8 year-old son, Greg, spent the day with his dad at work. He played in the office that morning and asked a thousand questions. Then a ship came through and John opened the drawbridge. Suddenly, he realized his son was not in the office. Frantically he looked around, and to his horror saw him climbing on the gears of the draw bridge. He hurried outside to rescue his son but just then heard

what he knew was a fast-approaching passenger train, the Memphis Express, filled with people. He yelled to his son, but the noise of the ship and the oncoming train made it impossible for the boy to hear him. John Griffith realized his horrible dilemma. If he took the time to rescue his son the train would crash and probably kill all aboard. If he closed the bridge, he would sacrifice his son. He made the decision he would relive ten thousand times and pulled the lever to close the bridge. As the train went by he could see some passengers' faces. Some were reading, some waved, and all were oblivious to the sacrifice that had just been made on their behalf.¹

Even so, God the Father made the difficult decision not to spare His Son, for only through His sacrifice could millions, or even billions, be saved. What great love God had for sinners, many of whom are oblivious to the love of the Father, & the great sacrifice of the Son! Are you among them?

Now in the last part of v.32 the argument is from the greater to the lesser. Paul says, "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?" Since God has done so much to purchase our salvation; shall He not also secure our final salvation? Since He has given such a great gift, the gift of His Son, shall He not also freely give us eternal life by His grace? God gave Christ for you; how is it possible that he could withhold any lesser blessing? If when we were sinners, God gave us His best, now that we are God's children, will He not give us all that we need? Our sinful works will not condemn us, for this salvation is of grace.

So we should agree with what Paul says in v.33, "It is God that justifies." Jesus has already paid the penalty of our sin. And when God pronounces us just, how can anyone argue with God to condemn us? Since God is the being against whom we have sinned, if He does not accuse, there can be no accuser. This ought to bring peace to our hearts. This ought to bring assurance to our hearts that no sin or failure will ever cause God to withdraw His love or saving grace.

So we have seen that our sins cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Now let's consider another truth from this text of Scripture:

II. OUR ENEMIES CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

In v.31 Paul asks "Who can be against us?" Ungodly people will be against you as you follow Christ. Satan will certainly oppose you. Then v.35 asks another question. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Can any of these enemies separate us from God's love?

Then he moves to consider the ways our enemies attack us. Can any of their attacks upon us separate us from the love of Christ? Well in v.35 Paul asks, "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "Tribulation" originally meant "pressure." Have you ever felt like you were under great pressure, such as peer pressures, work pressures, & financial pressures?

Then he mentions "distress," which is a similar word. The Gk. word is a combination of 2 words, the one meaning "narrow" and the other meaning "space." It conveys the thought of being hemmed in. Some people feel they are hemmed in with no place to go; no escape. But even in such a situation we are assured that Christ's love is still with us.

At times we may face "persecution," which literally refers to chasing after someone to harm them. Many persons have suffered persecution at the hands of the enemies of Christ. In North Korea, China, Vietnam, India, Islamic countries, and parts of Latin America, people have given up

¹ Allen Webster, *Glad Tidings of Good Things*, Via Pecan Grove Church in Pulpit Helps, August 2006, page 28.

their lives for their faith in Christ. In 2007 there were about 250 million believers who were persecuted for their faith worldwide, up from 200 million in 2002.

Then Paul gives some of the common results of persecution, especially in view of the fact that v.36 specifically mentions persecution. Some have faced famine. In fact, Christians in Judea suffered famine about 10 years before Paul wrote this. The Bible predicts that wide-spread famine will take place in the last days. "Nakedness" is mentioned next. In 2 Cor. 11:27 Paul recounts what he suffered for the cause of Christ, including "hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Thus, Paul is especially referring to not having enough clothes to keep warm. Next Paul mentioned the threat of "peril." This refers to the times when we may face danger, risking our lives. Paul faced peril from ambush on several occasions. Finally, Paul mentioned the possibility of facing the "sword." Indeed, Paul later died as a martyr from the sword.

If we experience such things, does that mean that God no longer loves us? There are times when it may *seem* that your enemies or your trials have separated you from God. Yet Paul affirms that such things will never separate us from the love of God for at least 2 reasons:

A. We Understand that We Suffer for Jesus' Sake – Suffering is not inconsistent with the Christian life, nor does it contradict the truth of God's love for us, for Paul says in v.36, "As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'" The adversity of which the apostle had given examples was the lot of the people of God in all generations.

There are those who teach that God wants you to be happy, prosperous, & comfortable. Yet that kind of theology would lead one to believe that if you are not happy, prosperous, & comfortable, God must not love you. But the Bible does not teach that. Though God *may* bless us with good health, prosperity, & comfort, He does not promise such things. As we have seen, you may be called upon to suffer as a Christian. You may suffer in body because your full redemption has not yet been accomplished. God's love is not revealed in material blessings or comfort, nor does affliction denote the absence of His love; but the cross is the real proof of His love for us. Beside, these trials not only do not cut us off from Christ's love, they actually give us more intimate and thrilling experience of it.

B. We Conquer Through Jesus - Our text contains what seems at first to be an absurd contradiction. We are first told that we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Then Paul says in v.37, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." How can sheep counted for slaughter become conquerors? To answer that question we must understand the purposes of God and the ways of God. Remember that with God, the way up is down. Because Jesus was willing to suffer, He was highly exalted (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Pet. 5:6). In the epistle to the Hebrews there is a summary of the struggles of God's people in old times (chap. 11). The list is carefully balanced with one section given to those who battled and won and others who battled and were destroyed from this earth. But all, whether victors or vanquished on this earth, were victors in Christ. Nothing could separate them from His love (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-11).

Now let's examine more closely the truth of this victory over suffering that we can have. Notice:

1. The Assurance of this Victory – Paul says in v.31, "What then shall we say to these things?" Shall we question God's love for us when we go through times of suffering? No! Instead, we should say with Paul, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Suppose we wanted to play a football game, and on one team was a group of guys about my size. And on the other side was a group of guys who were much larger, faster, & more athletic. Who would win? But suppose a car load of Washington Redskin players drove up, and looked the teams over, and decided to play on my team to help out the underdogs. I would say if the Redskins be for us, who can be against us! And the word translated “for” is a word that carries the meaning of “on behalf of” or “in place of.” In my illustration, the Redskins would not be on the sideline cheering for us to win; I would put them in the game to play for us.

Even so, in life and as we face trials and opposition, God is not just cheering us on in heaven; He is working in us and through us and working providentially for us! And if God be for us, who can be against us? The “if” is *ei*, the conditional particle of a fulfilled condition. His thought is, “Since God is for us, who is or could be against us, so as to do us any lasting harm?”

Furthermore, notice:

2. The Greatness of this Victory – Paul says in v.37 that “we are more than conquerors.” In the original Greek “more than conquerors” is actually a verb. We conquer super abundantly. How can that be true when at times it appears that we are defeated? First of all, we are more than conquerors because the result of the battle is eternal, and therefore our victory is eternal. Secondly, we are more than conquerors because we receive rewards that far surpass anything given to earthly conquerors. The latter fight for earthly possessions, power, & glory, but we for a crown that is incorruptible and an inheritance that fades not away. Our troubles do not ultimately harm us, but they minister to our good, and swell the glory of our victory. Finally, our victory will be fully manifest some day. Some day Jesus is going to come again, & we will return with Him in great victory & glory. Just as Roman generals would often ride in victory parades upon white horses, even so Revelation 19:14 says that when Christ returns, we will ride upon white horses in great victory.

How is such a victory possible? How can persecuted believers possibly be described as “more than conquerors?” Here is the explanation. It is only “through Him who loved us.” Our victory is tied to His victory. Death cannot defeat us for Christ has conquered death & gives us eternal life. Persecution cannot defeat us, for in times of persecution, we experience His presence & power even more. The world’s hatred cannot defeat us, for the love of Christ is all we need. Yes, we are super conquerors “through Him who loved us” enough to die for us upon the cross. If you ever question the love of God, then turn your attention once again to the cross.

So if you face enemies in life, who persecute you, and try to harm you, don’t feel that God has forsaken you. Instead, just remember that Christ suffered for you, and Christians should not expect to be exempt from suffering. Furthermore, remember that no enemy shall prevail against the children of God. Many times in this life God will intervene on your behalf. But if not, He will give you the grace you need to bear it. And in the end, death will be turned into total victory!

We have seen that our sins cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Our enemies cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Finally, we see that:

III. NOTHING ELSE CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Paul says in vv.38-39, “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 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.” Paul has come to an absolute conviction that nothing else will separate us from the love of Christ. “I am persuaded” (*peitho*) is a perfect tense in Greek, which refers to a settled conclusion.

Notice with me the particulars that Paul mentions:

A. Death - We should not fear death, for death cannot separate us from the love of God. Death cannot separate us from Christ. Some believe your soul sleeps at death, but Paul says that death cannot separate you from Christ. He said in 2 Cor. 5:8 that “to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord.” However, this is only true of the Christian. If you are separated from Christ in this life, then after you die you will hear Christ say, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Mt 7:23; cf. 25:41).

B. Life - Here we see that no aspect of life will separate us from the love of Christ. You can't get too busy. You can't get lost in the crowd. You can't get so isolated and lonely that no one cares, for Jesus cares! No troubles in life can separate you from Christ's love.

Life is like living in a darkened room. You get glimpses of a sunlit garden outside, but you are living in the shadow. Death is the door that takes you out of the shadowy room of life into the sunlit presence of the Lord Jesus.

C. Any Order of Angelic Beings – In v.38 Paul says, “nor angels nor principalities nor powers.” “Angels” can only mean fallen angels in this context, of whom Satan is leading one. Principalities [lit. that which takes first place, i.e. rulers] refers to the fact that there is a chain of command among the hosts of darkness. Although most people do not realize it, Satan has a most elaborate organization. Demons also influence many of the human rulers of this world. The fact that Paul calls them “powers” indicates that they are indeed powerful. But why should we care if Satan's organization is wide-spread & powerful? As the apostle John says in 1 John 4:4, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” The Holy Spirit is greater & more powerful than Satan, & all his demons. Satan, his demons, & those working for him cannot prevail against us!

D. Anything Else – With broad sweeps Paul is including anything we could possibly worry about. In v.38 Paul also mentions “things present nor things to come.” Do you fear what the future may bring? A nuclear holocaust is possible. An worldwide economic depression is possible. Many thought that advances in science & education would bring in a much better future, yet we are confronted with the fact that science & education cannot save us from our sin, greed, and self-centeredness. Yet, we need to worry about the future. As long as God is in our future, nothing that is yet to come will separate us from His love.

Then he says in v.39, “nor height nor depth.” This is probably a reference to the heavens above and the earth below, including the depths of the seas. Finally, lest you think he left something out, he closes any loophole that may exist in our minds. He says in the last of v.39, “nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” No being or thing in the whole realm of created reality is excluded. Jesus said in John 10:28, “And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” A true Christian would never want to be separated from the love of Christ, but even you cannot separate yourself from the love of God.

Conclusion: Paul has made it clear in this text of Scripture that nothing can separate you from the love of God! You may lose the love of a spouse, a parent, or a friend, but you will never be separated from the love of God. Believe it. Be persuaded of this truth just like Paul. Then rejoice in it!

What security we have! What would you pay for such security? Do you seek for security in insurance? Do you seek for security in the government? Do you seek for security in your savings? Real eternal security can only be found in Christ. Believe it, and you can experience peace in the midst of troubles!

The Bible teaches that we should imitate God, as dear children (Eph. 5:1). We ought to have the kind of love that God has for us. I want Cheryl to know that she is secure in my love. Nothing will separate her from my love, such as sickness or any other trial. I want my sons to know that nothing will separate them from my love. And I challenge you to imitate God in the kind of God you have for others, especially your family.

When death comes, you will be separated from your loved ones. Will you also be separated from Christ? You will if you have never trusted in Him as Savior. It doesn't have to be that way. Christ died for your sins. You can be forgiven. Today, why not repent of your sins, and trust in Him as your Savior. Then, nothing will ever be able to separate you from His love!

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, "God's Heirs" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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