

## The Inseparable Love of God Romans 8:35-39

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There are many ways that a pastor can know if a teaching series is connecting with people. One mile from our church I saw this:



Apparently, it has connected. It has connected with me too. From the celestial words of 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" to our adoption into God's family to "If God is for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31 ESV) to "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Romans 8:35) I will never preach through a greater chapter in the Bible and it has been my privilege to do so with you. Let's end with a bang and indeed we do as Romans 8:35ff is the grand finale of the grand Romans 8.

It begins in verse 31 with yet another rhetorical question. This section has many of these:

<i>If God is for us, who can be against us? (v. 31)</i>	<i>No one</i>
<i>Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? (v. 32)</i>	<i>No one</i>
<i>Who is to condemn? (v. 34)</i>	<i>No one</i>
<i>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (v. 35)</i>	<i>No one</i>

If God declares us justified then who can be against us, who can bring a charge, who can condemn? He is drawing us in. Drawing us higher. As one person wrote, we are ascending the grand staircase. Then this majestic final step:

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)*

And all God's people said? *Amen!*

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (Romans 8:35)

We must first understand that when it says "the love of God" or "the love of Christ" it is not describing OUR love for God but God's love for us. Who can separate us from Christ's love for us? We should be glad. Part of my problem is that I am all too easily separated from *my* love for God. Even in its purest form, human love is flawed because we are flawed. My love for God often rises and falls depending on circumstances that I deem good or bad – whether I am involved in spiritual disciplines or not, my health, my job, my relationships. The soaring majesty of the love described here cannot be human love for God. It must be his love for me.

The finish line here is the inseparability of Christ's love from his people. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Unlike our loves, his love never ends.

To be separated from love is one of our greatest terrors. Is there a more painful sentence to be heard than, *I don't love you anymore? I used to love you, but now I don't.* Withdrawn love is the worst of all human experiences. Those of you who are single and in the dating world know the pain of serial *I love you* relationships that end with, *I don't think I love you enough* or *I think I love someone else more.* Love separation comes in many versions of passive-aggressive love, where love is weaponized in order to control and manipulate. Of course, death represents the ultimate separation from love and from loved ones. Perhaps you are grieving today separation from love. We all fear love separation.

Into that void steps divine love. The love of God. The love of Christ. Perfect love. Sacrificial love. Crucifixion love. Bloodshed love. The gospel is that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Great. Wonderful. But earthly human love is capricious and easily withdrawn. So, what if God loved us at one time or for a season?

This is the stunning truth of God's love. It NEVER ends. NEVER. Why? God is unchangeable. If God loves you, his love cannot change because he doesn't change. That alone isn't fully assuring. Your mom or dad will always love you, but you may not always experience their love. Geography or circumstances can separate us from them. Ultimately, death will separate. Unchanging love is great but there are many things that can separate me from unchanging love. I need unchanging love; but what I really need is an *inseparable* love.

This is the grand finale of Romans 8. To emphasize the inseparability of God's love, Paul lists 17 categories where we may fear the loss of God's love. The first list is seven circumstances in which we could possibly question whether God loves us. The second are 10 apparent threats to God's ability to love us. These are answering two questions, Is there *anywhere* that can separate us from Christ's love? Is there *anything* that can separate us from Christ's love? Anywhere? Anything?

**When I am in \_\_\_\_\_, Does Christ Still Love Me?**

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." (Romans 8:35-36)*

Each of these is part of a sequence of rhetorical questions, all assuming the answer, "No."

*Tribulation.* That is a fancy word for *trouble*. I am in trouble when my life's circumstances sour or when life is hard. When life seems out of control. The reason tribulation is first is because the pain it creates can cause us to ask, *Jesus, do you still love me?* When circumstances are pleasant for us and life is trouble free, Christ's love seems very real. When circumstances are not pleasant, but painful, we think, *I thought you loved me!*

*Distress* – Tribulation is outward trouble, distress is inward struggle. They tend to go together, but not always. Distress describes inward human pain. Emotional pain. Anxiety. Fear. Anger. Worry. Bitterness. Hate. Distress keeps us awake through the night. Let's face it, life has a lot of distress. Will my emotional distress cause Jesus to love me less?

*Persecution.* This was a very common reality in the first century. He adds *danger* and *sword* in the list as well. Are moments of physical danger or even martyrdom moments that Jesus will withdraw his love?

*Famine and nakedness* refer to those moments of great need. Famine is the absence of food. *Nakedness* is the absence of clothing and shelter. Is it easier to be confident of God's love when you have a job or when you don't? When you're making your mortgage payment or facing foreclosure? When you can buy clothes for your family or not? We all know the answer. In times of plenty, God's love feels very real and secure. Times of want make us wonder, *Does God still love me?*

What is the theme of this list? They all are bad. Trouble. Famine. Inward distress. He even quotes Psalm 44 as a description of genocide against Christians. That may not connect with us today in America, but that's a precious truth in North Korea, China, and Pakistan where Christians even today are regularly killed for their faith.

All of these ask, *Is Christ's love circumstantial?* When things are good, when I look good, when I'm performing well, then he loves me. When things are bad, and my life is messy, he doesn't?

Is Jesus like my experience years ago in my bachelor pastor days when I had a small apartment in a larger house? For a little extra the cleaning lady of the big house would clean my little apartment too. I discovered a strange tendency in myself on the days she was coming over. I'd think, *the cleaning lady is coming; I'd better clean this place up.* We often think of God's love that way. I'd better clean up my life so God's more likely to love me. I can't do ministry; my life is a mess. I can't join the church; look at me! We project our wrong view of love onto God and think, *Christ's love must be conditional like mine is.*

Please note what is absent from this list is the cause of these circumstances. What if I am in trouble because of my own foolishness? What if I am in want because of decisions I made? What if my inward anguish is of my own doing? Well, for Christ to love me, I need to straighten up the apartment, clean up my actions, wash my feelings, and arrange the spiritual furniture. Here's God's love,

*"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:6-8)

Christ's love for us in the past was not based on our performance so why should we think his love today or forever is? If it was, he never would have died for us in the first place. **No circumstance made Him love us and no circumstance will make him stop loving us.**

He loved us when our spiritual apartment was filthy. If he loved us even then, how can he not love us now?

Paul answers his own question, "*No, in all these things [circumstances] we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*" (Romans 8:37)

All seven of these circumstances appear to mean we are losing at life. Do you feel that way today? What do we say if someone is in distress? I'm so sorry. If someone is in tribulation? I'm so sorry. The list looks like loss and losers and sometimes Christians' lives appear that way too. But that would be wrong. No, in all these apparent losses we are more than conquerors.

Sports fans, there is a Greek word here that will resonate with you. It is the word translated *conquerors*. Here it is literally, *Hyper-nike*. Nike sound familiar? Yes. The shoe company selected as its name Nike. They took it from this Greek word. It means "victor" or "victory." It's a much better shoe company name than Loser or Third Place or Bronze Medal. No. Wear these shoes and you will run faster, jump higher, be like Mike, and win. Winner. Victor. But the word here is not just *nike*. Victory. It's hyper-nike.



What does *hyper* mean? It means "extra, super, mega." In all these apparently losing circumstances we are mega-victorious. This is domination. Crushing victory. In all these things we win going away. This is not a one-point victory; this is a blowout.

Years ago, I shared this illustration and I can't improve on it. I didn't grow up in this area. Have the Bears ever won a Super Bowl? What year was that? 1986. Who did they play? *The Patriots*. Was it a close game? *No*. What was the score? 46-10.



Here's what this means:



It could have just said, *we win*. But the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to say, *in all these things, even the hardest, the most painful, the most seemingly hopeless, we hyper-nike*. We are more than conquerors.

Before we beat our chest and spray the champagne, notice how we overcome. "*Through him who loved us.*" (verse 37) Our victory over the array of discouraging and overwhelming circumstances has nothing really to do with us. Our victory comes from someone else. We conquer because Jesus conquered.

His victory over sin, death, Satan, and all the destruction means that Christ's love never fails. It never gets tired. It is never overwhelmed by external forces. We are conquerors even when we don't feel victorious. Since we cannot be separated from his love, we will always have him, and since we always have him, we will always be *hyper-nike*. "*We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*" (verse 37)

That's great. Unconditional love is great, but is it enough? Is there anything out there that is stronger than Christ's love?

### Can \_\_\_\_\_ Keep Christ From Loving Me?

*"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

Ten powers threaten our confidence in the inseparability of God's love. He starts with the big one – **Death**. Death is our ultimate separation. Does Christ's love extend past the grave? **Life** – life is filled with uncertainties and dangers. Can anything in life separate Christ's love from me? **Angels and rulers** – The spiritual world has rulers and principalities. Is there anyone there who can impede his love? How about Satan? He's strong, isn't he? **Things present or future?** Is there anything in time or in the future that can pull his love from me? **Powers** – is there any authority on earth that can keep him from me? **Height and depth** speak to spatial realities – could the highest star be too high for his love? Could the deepest ocean be too far from his love?

In one long sentence, Paul goes to every extreme possible. Life and death. The spiritual world of angels and demons. The unknowns of time. The far reaches of space. Political power. Judicial authority. King or queen. Ruler or president. Is there anything that is too much for his love to overcome?

Here is the summary, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let that soak in your heart. NOTHING can keep him from loving us. Nothing outside of me. Nothing inside of me. Nothing anywhere. God's love is inseparable, and he will forever love me.

The love of God is more than a feeling, more than an idea. It's more than a ritual or religion. The love of God is embodied in a person and his name is Jesus. He displayed that love by dying for us and there is nothing, nowhere, and nobody that can pluck us out of his hand. He's God. We win! *"We are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* (v. 37)

### **How Confident are You in Christ's Love for You?**

Paul says that he is totally persuaded, and that confidence sustained him through all his apostolic tribulations. The question today is, are we convinced? Do you know this love of Christ? Have you received it by faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord? Oh, what a difference this makes.

Centuries ago, when early church hero Chrysostom was brought before the Roman empress, Eudoxia, she threatened to banish him if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied, *"You cannot banish me for this world is my Father's house."*

*"But I will kill you," said the empress.*

*"No, you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God," said John.*

*"I will take away your treasures."*

*"No, you cannot for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there."*

*"But I will drive you away from your friends and you will have no one left."*

*"No, you cannot, for I have a friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you; for there is nothing you can do to harm me."<sup>1</sup>*

I wish I had a little more Chrysostom in me, how about you? When we realize that the Son of God loves us and promises that he always will, what more do we need? *If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against us? Who can condemn us? Who can separate us from the love of God?* The answer to each is the same. No one. Nothing.

How dear this chapter would be for these Roman Christians in the years to follow. Shortly after receiving this letter from Paul, Nero began persecuting Christians. Those who read these words would be shoved into the Roman coliseum as spectacle for the crowds who cheered as they were devoured by lions. These Romans Christians would be impaled on poles and lit on fire to light the city. Even Paul who wrote these very words in a few years would be in Rome and be beheaded. What did they think and whisper to themselves as the lions approached, the fire was lit, the sword was about to fall?

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<sup>1</sup> Story as told by Justin Taylor via Ray Ortlund, "Chrysostom: Nothing You Can Do to Harm Me." [www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org). August 10, 2009.

The same thing we must whisper to our souls in the terrors and afflictions of our lives or in the final moments on our deathbed. Nothing *"in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:39) Praise God for Romans 8.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016)*.  
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