

## Romans 8:31-39 - "The Conquering Love of God in Jesus Christ"

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 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 8:31-39*

This morning we are focused on the very last verses of the eighth chapter of Romans, which is the spiritual and theological hinge of the book of Romans, a chapter which is considered to be the spiritual and theological hinge of the entire Bible itself. The verses we are looking at today are some of the most comforting and assuring verses found in God's Word – which are words that we need to hear and embrace *because* life on earth, even for the most dedicated and devoted followers of Jesus, can be desperate and painful and numbingly sorrowful. In my research and study to write sermons every week, I always read a few sermons that have been written by those whom I know and trust and learn from – and one of the sermons I read this week based on our text for today was preached in a church where a family in the church had just celebrated the birth of a new baby girl on the very same day that they suffered the death of their young son. As saints who still struggle with remaining sin, who still live in a fallen, sinful world – life is strange intermixture of good and bad, pleasure and pain, joy and heartache. But the glory of our faith in Jesus Christ is that regardless of situation or circumstance, *everything* we go through in life has great purpose and meaning, as Romans 8:28 told us *"that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* The text we are looking at today will put a massive, joyful, glorious exclamation mark to that statement.

There are a number of ways this text can be broken down, outlined, taught or explained but this morning I will simply walk through these verses one by one, in order to honor the text and to let God Himself speak through what He inspired Paul to write down for us almost 2000 years ago.

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

What *"things"* is Paul referring to by *"these things"*? Well, since verses 31-39 serve as the conclusion to Romans chapter 8, as well as a conclusion to Romans chapters 1-8, we could rightly say *"these things"* are Paul's teaching on the sinful depravity of fallen humanity and the promise of salvation that we can now in God through Jesus Christ. In the immediate context of Romans 8, *"these things"* are the promise of no condemnation, the provision of the Holy Spirit, and the sovereignty of God in salvation. And in the even more immediate relational context of Romans 8:28-30 *"these things"* are God's *good purposes in foreknowing us and predestining us and calling us and justifying us so we might be glorified by being "conformed to the image of his Son"* through suffering because we are *"children of God, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ."*

*"What then shall we say to these things?"* It is significant that Paul's question begs for a response. He didn't ask the question: "Shall we say something?" No, instead he asks, *"What shall we say?"* And when he asked the question, *"What then shall we say to these things?"* Paul is also making a statement, and that statement is: "Divine revelation demands a human response." In light of everything Paul wrote about God and us in Romans 1-8, *"What then shall we say to these things?"*

*"God is for us."* Amen! God the Father is for us and He proved it by giving us His Son. We see that God is for us in that He makes *"all things work together for good"* according to His purpose for our good and for His glory. In His person and in His providence, God is for us. *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* Paul uses the word *"if"* here to challenge those who doubt God is for us, which often happens in times of trial and suffering. But the apostle's statement does not promise we will always be comfortable and safe. But what God does promise is that while sin and evil are still at large, they cannot ultimately prevail and triumph over those who follow Jesus. And if God did permit sin and evil to do their worst, all they could take is our physical life. *"God is for us!"*

*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* Romans 8:32

*"What then shall we say to these things?"* Christ died for us. Amen! And because Christ died for us when we were sinners, imagine what He will give us now that we are His children! Paul uses the word *"all"* in both cases, and so we need to remember the context of his words here to truly know what he meant. He first tells us that God gave up His *"Son . . . for us all."* Paul writes this in the context of Romans 8:28-30 where he spoke about the sovereign process of God by which God chooses those who will be saved: God calls and justifies and glorifies those who He predestines because He intimately knew them before the foundation of the world, in order that they might be conformed to the image of his Son. And so when Paul writes that God *"gave him up for us all"* he is not telling us that Jesus died to save *"all"* people because we know that not *"all"* people are saved - but rather that Jesus died to save *"all"* those whom God purposed to save. This is the same context of the other word *"all"* where Paul tells us God will *"graciously give us all things."* The *"all things"* he speaks of here is not *"everything"* (which is what the health, wealth and prosperity gospel teaches) - but rather *"all"* here is contextually limited to *"all things"* which are essential to bring about the *"good"* that God that has purposed for us that would glorify Him.

*Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* Romans 8:33

*"What then shall we say to these things?"* God has justified us. Amen! To be justified means to be declared righteous before God. Satan and the world and our flesh may accuse us, but in Jesus Christ we stand righteous before God. When God declares us righteous in Christ - that never changes. Our hearts and lives may wander back and froth from good and bad, pleasure and pain, joy and heartache - but our justification before God in Christ never wanders with us. We even may accuse ourselves and each other - but in Christ God will never again bring any charge against us because the penalty for our sin has been paid on the cross. God's decision in this stands forever; He is our Justifier who has ultimate authority as Supreme Judge over all!

*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* Romans 8:34

*"What then shall we say to these things?"* Christ intercedes for us. Amen! The first verse of Romans 8 already told us *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1) and now we read the four reasons that's true. 1) Jesus gave his life for us. No one can condemn us because Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross paid the penalty for our sin; 2) Jesus rose from the dead. No one can condemn us because Christ's resurrection from the dead is the evidence that his sacrifice was accepted; 3) Jesus is at the right hand of God. No one can condemn us because Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, sharing God's throne with God; and 4) Jesus is our intercessor between us and God. No one can condemn us because Jesus is presently interceding on our behalf. *"The Spirit himself intercedes for us"* (Romans 8:26).

*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.* Romans 8:35–37

*"What then shall we say to these things?"* Christ loves us. Amen! In Romans 8:31–34 Paul declared that God cannot fail us. But what happens when we fail Him? Are there things that can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ? This is what the apostle deals with in the last four verses of Roman 8. First of all, we know that if we are truly following Jesus, we will encounter trials, struggles, pain and suffering. This is the divine promise Paul wrote of earlier in Romans 5:3-5, when he told us that God does not shelter us from the difficulties of life because we need them for our spiritual growth: *"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."* Paul also spoke of that reality in Romans 8:16: *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."* We see this affirmed again in our context for today where in Romans 8:28 God assures us that the difficulties of life are not against us but are working for our good and for His glory. God, through Paul's words, speaks to us of possible circumstances that could separate us from the love of Christ: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"*

*"Tribulation."* Tribulation (thlipsis -"squeeze, put under pressure") is outward affliction – things like a physical health problem or a financial crisis. It is the typical kind of general adversity that we all face. Tribulation may irritate and fatigue, but it is not able to separate us from the love of God. The stress of tribulations should not separate us from the fact that God loves us.

*"Distress."* Distress (stenochoria) is about inward pressures or anxieties which comes from feeling unloved, unlovely, unintelligent, uncared for and unable to cope. God's love holds us up and gives us peace when our situations and circumstances tell us says that God's love is a lie.

*"Persecution."* Persecution (diōgmos) is evil inflicted because of our relationship with Jesus Christ. It attacks through derogatory comments, gossip, and false rumors and accusations.

*"Famine, or nakedness."* Famine (lee-mos) and nakedness (gumnotēs) are the physical evils of depriving shelter and nourishment. It suggests being vulnerable and unprotected.

*"Danger, or sword."* Danger [kíndunos) and sword (máchaira) are violent antagonists. *"Danger"* means approaching danger or to be in jeopardy. The word *"sword"* refers to a large dagger used by assassins because it was easy to conceal.

Now understand that Paul is writing about real situations and circumstances here. He and others before him had experienced these things for the sake of Christ. And while Paul had already made the point that sharing in the suffering of Christ is fundamental to sharing in the glory with Christ, he is also keenly aware that suffering is often interpreted as a sign of God's displeasure – and that even many Christians believe that if God truly loved us He wouldn't allow us to suffer. But Paul corrects that notion in verse 36 by quoting Psalm 44:22: *"Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* In this Psalm the psalmist lamented the defeats of Israel at the hands of pagans and pleaded for the Lord's intervention based on God's promised covenantal faithfulness towards His people. The Israelites had been crushed even though they had taken up the cause of God in a world that had rejected God.

But suffering for the cause of God came with the territory then - and it still comes with the territory today. Far from being a sign of God's displeasure, *suffering for Jesus is a sign that we belong to him*. If we are following Christ we will be considered to be *"sheep to be slaughtered,"* because Jesus was *"like a lamb that is led to slaughter"* (Isaiah 53:7). As followers of Christ and as the body of Christ, we personify Jesus' sufferings when we live for Jesus *"sake"* in a broken, fallen world that desperately needs to see the love of Christ in us and through us. What the world needs to see is that God loves us - and that we love Him and each other even when we suffer for His sake because *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."*

It is significant to note that God's Word tells us that the impossible separation is not because of our love for Christ, but Christ's love for us: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* All too often our love for Christ is separated from us because we really don't believe that God is working all things, both the bad and the good, for both our present and eternal good. And so we allow circumstances, situations, people and things to separate us from the joy we can know in God who loves us in Jesus Christ. When we take our eyes off of Jesus we forget that we are to give of ourselves for Jesus sake. Paul put it this way: *"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."*

This is a paradox, but it is also true. This is how God works. We save our lives by giving them up. We lead by serving others. We conquer by being conquered. Jesus' death at Calvary seemed to be a defeat, but in God's divine wisdom it was the perfect plan to defeat of Satan, sin, and death. The problem is, Christians too often think of victory in terms of winning. We like to think that Christ's power and purposes are most evident when we win, when we overcome our opponents. Paul simply underscores a principle that has always governed God's work: *God uses apparent defeat to produce ultimate victory.* God uses the suffering of His saints for His sake to make them not just conquerors—but *"more than conquerors."* We are *"more than conquerors"* when we are defeated for Jesus' sake; we are victorious when we suffer the calamities of life, in faith, trusting in God, knowing that He is accomplishing His purposes for our good and for His glory through our struggles, trials and affliction. If suffering was God's will for His sinless Son, is it not also His will for His sons and His daughters? And the very One who is giving us the victory is the one *"who loved us"* through the suffering and death of His Son. Our confidence must not end when we go through the tough seasons of life. The testing of our faith really begins in those seasons.

Brothers and sisters - It is not enough to muddle through life merely enduring our adversity. In Christ we are *more than conquerors!* God does not promise to take us out of our afflictions, but He does promise that we will emerge from them victorious in the sense that we will grow in our faith, love and hope; as we become more like Christ in our sufferings; as God's good purposes are achieved through us; and as those in the world see the grace of God at work in our lives.

*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

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* Nothing in creation can separate us from the love of Christ. Amen! In these final verses Paul give us a list of some of the dimensions of created things which will not separate us from the love of Jesus. The list is intended to be all-inclusive and it is.

Neither *"death nor life"* can separate us from the love of Christ. For some, death is the dreaded enemy. For others, life is the dreaded enemy, and death is a door of escape. Hebrews 2:15 tells us that Jesus came to deliver us from the *"fear of death"* which holds fallen humanity in bondage.

Neither *“angels nor rulers”* can separate us from the love of Christ. Paul is telling us the no one in the entire spectrum of celestial beings nor anyone who possesses power and authority on earth can separate us from the love of Christ. In speaking of *“angels”* he would be including the angelic beings who are fallen and who seek to destroy God’s people. Satan would be included in this.

Neither *“things present nor things to come”* can separate us from the love of Christ. This category would be speaking of events *“present”* and in the future. For us today we think of ISIS and the rapidly deteriorating moral fabric of North America. But we know God is sovereign, which means He has mapped out created history from eternity past to eternity forever – which means, in light of Romans 8:28, we know that all the events we presently face, along with those we shall face in the future, have been created by God for our good and for His glory. And that regardless of whatever happens, nothing cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Neither *“powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation”* can separate us from the love of Christ. The *height-depth* pairing in the context of *“power”* seem to speaking of some far distant menacing power that would surprise us and destroy our faith and separate us from the love of God. Paul says it won’t happen. No matter how high you go up or how deep you go down, you will never find a power that can nullify God’s omnipotent power. The apostle emphasizes this by then declaring *“nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* That covers everything in the universe that is not God. No thing or person or event or hidden power in all the universe can separate us from the love of God in Christ. And that includes ourselves. For those of us in Christ *“those whom he justified he glorified”* is the radical assurance that we cannot lose our salvation. But that assurance is not that we can forsake our faith and live in sin and go to heaven. The assurance is: *God keeps His own from ultimate apostasy and unbelief.* In Jeremiah 32:40-41 we read of God’s covenantal promise for His people: *“I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.”* While there may be many stumblings and wanderings, if you are truly God’s, you will be brought back.

This is the assurance and confidence that is grounded in the conquering love of God in Jesus Christ that every Christian should possess. This is the design of God we have seen all through every verse in Romans 8 that gives us a deep, firm, unshakable, God-wrought, blood-bought security in the face of wrestling with our remaining sin and our suffering for the cause of Christ, which God’s Word tells us is our witness to the world. The assurance we have in the conquering love of God in Jesus Christ is not an eternal security God has given us to add to a life devoted to earthly comfort - but rather a promise of eternal security that is designed to free us from a life of earthly comfort; which would give us the freedom and joy and courage to move forward in fulfilling the mission of God to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength; which would cause us to love one another; which would empower us go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded us, because Jesus is with us always, even to the end. Divine revelation demands a human response. God is for us. Jesus loves us. Jesus died for our sins and he rose from the dead. There is now no condemnation for those in Christ. Jesus is at the right hand of God interceding for us because when we follow Jesus for the cause of God we will encounter trials, struggles, pain and suffering. But God makes all things work together for good according to His purpose for our good and for His glory. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us because nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. May our response to all these things be a massive, joyful, glorious exclamation mark to the conquering love of God we have been gracefully given in Jesus Christ!