



Nothing Can Separate Us from God

Romans 8:31-39

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Our text this morning will be Romans 8:31-39. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Romans, chapter 8, beginning at verse 31:

"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."

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning, Lord, and we ask that you would bless us through the means of your Word. We pray, O Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit that our eyes would be enlightened, that our hearts would be softened to hear your Word, that we might know more of our Savior, your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, we ask this in great confidence, for we know that you have given to us your Word. You have given it to us that we might know who you are and what duty you require of us. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

We come now this morning to the very end of Romans, chapter 8. We've been saying that Romans 8 has often been called the greatest chapter in the Bible. This, perhaps, might be the greatest passage in the greatest chapter of the Bible. It is the capstone to chapter 8. Paul has been building up to this point. In the first 11 verses of this chapter he told us who we are in Christ, and then from verses 12-27 he told us what that means for how we should live our lives in Christ, and then in verses 28-30 we saw how he showed God's plan for all of us in the midst of this.

Now, we could say that not only is this a summary of this chapter, we could say this passage is a summary of the entirety of the book up until this point. This passage is actually the answer to the problem Paul told us about back in chapter 1, beginning at verse 18; that is, how an unrighteous man could stand before a righteous God. So, this morning, I would like us to see three things from this passage, three things about God. Not three things about *us* but three things about *God* that we need to know for ourselves.

First, *God is for us*. Paul tells us that God is for us. He is not against us. Rather, God is on our side. He is for us. Secondly, *God has justified us*. We are made right with God not because of something *we* have done but because God has done it *for* us. God has justified us. Then, finally, *God has established us*. In the work of Jesus Christ, we are not only redeemed but we are established by God himself. God is for us, God has justified us, and God has established us.

God is for Us

As we come to this passage, it begins with a question. Paul says in verse 31, "What then shall we say to these things?" We've seen this before. This is Paul's way of beginning to answer objections. He's going to tell us that God is for us, and the way he is going about doing this is to show us the fact of our redemption. Paul has done this twice earlier in the book of Romans, and he does it here. He asks a question because he knows somebody is getting ready to raise an objection and he wants to undercut the objections.

You may recall that after Paul talked about justification by faith in chapter 3 he anticipated that someone of the Jews would say, "Well, what about Abraham? Abraham was justified by his works, wasn't he? So why can't *we* be justified by our works?" So Paul begins chapter 4 by saying, "What then shall we say our father Abraham received?" and he begins to show that Abraham was also justified by faith.

In chapter 5, Paul emphasized that we're saved by the free grace of God in Christ, and he was anticipating someone objecting by saying, "Well, if grace is free and if grace is greater than sin, we should sin all the more so that we have all the more grace." So at the beginning of chapter 6 Paul says once again, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin? Certainly not!"

Now Paul has been giving comfort to us as we face trials and suffering, so he is about to answer the objection, "Paul, but what about *this*? Surely there's something you haven't thought of, Paul. What if I raise *this* objection? What about *this* trial? What about *this* tribulation? What do I do?" Paul's answer is plain and direct. "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

This answer Paul gives is sweeping and absolute in its scope. There is nothing, Paul says, that can be against us if God is for us. Paul is not denying that there is opposition. He's not saying, "If God is for us, there's nothing that exists that opposes us." After all, Paul has been describing suffering for the Christian. He will go on in verse 35 to talk about violent opposition, persecution, hunger, the sword. Then in verse 39 he's going to say there's even opposition that is supernatural, *beyond* this world.

What Paul is saying here is that the opposition is not even worth considering if God is for us. He's saying it's not worth considering because God is for us. The *if* here that Paul uses is not an expression of uncertainty. "Oh, I wonder if God will be for us." No. This is an *if* of presupposition. We might even translate it *since*. "Since God is for us, who could be against us?"

There is no doubt in Paul's mind here. It is actually the basis of Paul's confidence for the next phrase, "Who can be against us?" This falls exactly on with what Paul was saying in verse 28. He said that nothing is really against us to work ultimately for our evil because God is at work bringing all things together for our good.

This follows the same line of thinking. It is not that all things are good but that God works the good *and* the bad for our ultimate good.

So, it's not that there is *no* opposition, but what is that opposition compared to God? What effect can it have on us if God is using that opposition under his control and is working it together for our ultimate good? Someone might next ask at this point, "Well, how do I know that God is for *me*?" The Bible is full of accounts of believers putting aside all danger and all opposition because they trust God.

You remember the famous Twenty-third Psalm. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." The psalmist writes in Psalm 16, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken." So the question comes...*How can I have this confidence?* How can I know that God is for *me* in the same way David knew God was for *him*?

Well, Paul does something interesting here. He does not appeal to your emotions. He doesn't tell you about God's love and how that makes you feel. He *could* have done that, because God's love is real, but he doesn't do it. Often that is how we deal within our own families. If someone is not assured that we love them, we sit them down and tell them how much we love them and how deep our love for them is and how we shower our affection upon them, but that's not what Paul does here. Instead, he shows you God's love by giving you the fact of what God has done for you, that he has redeemed you.

Verse 32 is the proof of verse 31. "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?" You see, we know God is for us because he worked for our redemption. Our redemption begins with the Father's love. One problem we have with assurance is that we have a faulty view of redemption. Sometimes we look at it as if Jesus has to convince a grudging, harsh Father to justify sinners, only because Jesus has earned it.

It's as if the Father doesn't want to justify sinners, but he looks at Jesus and says, "Well, I guess I have to. You've done all the work, so I *have* to forgive these sinners." When we look at it *this* way, the Father is a stern and unforgiving figure. We cannot trust him. We don't see his love for us. We see it in Jesus, but it is hidden in the Father. The reality is that the Father is the one who loved first. Jesus came to redeem us because the Father sent him.

Think about John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son." We are redeemed because of what the Father put in motion. He did not spare his Son; he gave him up for us. The Father is so *for* you that he sent his only begotten Son, with whom he had unbroken communion from all eternity, to suffer and die for *you*. The Father did not have to be tricked. He did not have to be convinced. It was *his* plan. *He* put it in motion. He made sure at every point that it was fulfilled.

You know God loves you because of the fact of your redemption, but there is more than just the *fact* of redemption. Paul is now going to argue from the greater to the lesser. He's going to talk about the *cost* of our redemption. Remember, the whole context of this text is about how we can deal with trials and struggles. Paul

said God works all things together for our good. Now how do I know that? Because if God has done the *greatest* thing for me, how could he not do *lesser* things for me?

Redemption was not some easy, half-hearted matter. No. God gave up his Son. His Son! Think about what that means. When Paul uses this phrase "his own Son" he is being very specific. He is drawing a distinction between the eternal, divine, unique Son and all of God's adopted sons. That reminds us that the redemption required the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God himself. For God to redeem you, he had to send his Son, his perfect Son, God of very God, light of true light, to become man and suffer and die.

The sacrifice of Jesus was without limit. It was a total sacrifice, because that's what was necessary. God did not spare his own Son, Paul tells us. He did not limit the penalty in any way. Why? Because that's what redemption required. Sin carries with it infinite guilt and punishment, and Jesus paid that price for you. There was no one else who could pay that debt.

Think about the story of Abraham. Isaac was spared. Abraham did not plunge his knife into Isaac's chest. Why? Because the Lord provided a sacrifice. The Lord provided the ram to be the sacrifice. Abraham understood this. When Isaac asked him, "Where's the sacrifice?" Abraham said, "My son, the Lord will himself provide a sacrifice." But here, there is no one else who can be substituted. It is only the Lord. He provides and he does not spare his Son, because that was what was required to redeem sinners.

It's not just that he's not spared, however. It's also, Paul says, that he was delivered up. Where the previous statement was negative...God did not intervene, he did not spare his Son from the punishment...here there is even *more* emphasis. It is a positive statement. It's that he intentionally delivered the Son up so you would be redeemed. He made him who knew no sin to *be* sin so that you might be the righteousness of God in Christ.

If the Father has done all of that, how could he possibly not override the things of this earth and the events of life for your good? He has already shown you how much he loves you. He has shown how far he's willing to go. Imagine this. If someone came up to you and was willing and gave you a billion dollars, why would you possibly be concerned that he would withhold a dollar? It just makes no sense. God is *for* us.

God Has Justified Us

Then in verse 33 Paul brings another question. He says, "Who can bring a charge against God's elect? Who is it that can condemn you?" Paul is asking this question to tell us that God has justified us. He's not only *for* us but he has *justified* us. These are important questions for us as we struggle with assurance. We can believe God has saved us and still be afraid that something will come up that will tear us away from God.

You've heard stories like this, haven't you? Someone who's a criminal flees from the law and from justice and hides himself away somewhere. He gets married and has children, and he's a model citizen and does everything in accordance with the way people should with the law. He leaves behind that other life, but he lives in constant terror that someone will come and make the accusation of who he was and that once that accusation is made he will be dragged off to justice, ripped away from his family, ripped out of the life he knows.

We can think that way. We can think, "God has forgiven me, but what if they find out who I really am? What if people know how bad a sinner I am? What if my guard falls down? What if an old acquaintance comes to church? What if he tells stories of what I did 10 years ago, 20 years ago? What could I possibly do? Won't everyone reject me? Wouldn't perhaps even God himself reject me?"

This is also rooted in a misguided view of the atonement. Sometimes we think about the atonement in *this* fashion, as if it's a courtroom in which the Father sits in the seat of the judge and Satan comes and makes accusations against us and Jesus defends us against the accusations of Satan. God looks out and says, "My judgment is that Jesus wins the case. He has defended you. I declare you not guilty."

The problem with this view is what if more evidence is brought up? Wouldn't the case be opened up again? Wouldn't the judge have to do that for justice? Wouldn't he have to say, "Well, we need to dig more down into this"? Maybe *this* time what will happen is the Father *won't* acquit me. Maybe the accusations will be more than can be borne.

This comes to us because, if we're honest, our consciences accuse us all the time, because we *do* sin. The Enemy uses that to further accuse us. He is the great Accuser. He actually tries to use your spiritual awareness and understanding of God's character and God's law against you. The more aware you are of who God is and of how holy God is, the more Satan brings that to bear against you as an accusation.

Paul answers this question directly. He says, "It is God who justifies." Now what does that mean? It means God is more than a judge. He *is* the Judge, but it doesn't stop there. He is also the justifier. He is the one who acquits you. He speaks on your behalf, and he dismisses all of the charges. In the courtroom of God, the deck is stacked against Satan.

It's like *this*. Do you remember the scene from the movie *The Untouchables*, where Al Capone is on trial and the prosecutors are trying to convict him and they're getting absolutely no traction with the judge? Every motion they make is denied. The evidence they want to admit is excluded. They quickly determine that the deck is stacked against them, that the judge is for Al Capone, that they're not going to get a fair hearing.

There's a sense in which that's what the courtroom of God is like, not for the sake of *injustice* but for the sake of *justice*. The penalty has already been paid. The debt is no longer owed. The Father will not even listen to any more accusations against you. He is not just the Judge; he is the one who justifies you. That's an important distinction. It's also important because God is the one who is best suited to dismiss all of the charges against you. After all, he's the one against whom all offenses come. All sin is primarily rebellion against God.

David reminds us of this in Psalm 51. After he sinned against Bathsheba and sinned against Uriah, he cries out and says, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned, O Lord." God also knows the law more perfectly than any accuser possibly could. We might think Satan would come up with some event that has gotten missed or some section of God's law we didn't know was there. We might wake up in a cold sweat thinking we're going to be accused of violating "3 Chronicles 12:8." We don't even know where it is.

Think about this for a minute. Who knows God's law better than God does? How could anything escape the notice of God? He sees all things. How could Satan bring up something God does not already know? God knows the law and our actions more perfectly than any accuser could possibly bring to bear. God is also the one who has satisfied all of the claims of sin against us in the work of Jesus Christ. There's nothing left for us to do. Nothing depends on us. God has satisfied all of the claims of sin. No one can bring a charge against us.

Then we see that the work of Jesus itself is also the *guarantee* of our redemption. It is proof that God has justified us. So Paul then turns to describe *this* work. He asks, "Who is to condemn? [Now, before you answer that, let me remind you that] 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. [Before you can answer who can condemn, let me remind you of what Jesus has done.]"

There are four things Paul wants us to see in the work of Jesus, each assuring us that God has justified us and that we cannot be condemned. The first is that *Jesus has died for you, a sinner*. Remember, Paul is summarizing here. He doesn't go back in detail over the death of Jesus Christ. He has already done that throughout all of the book.

He *does* bring to your mind the great cost of redemption. It took the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the God-man, to redeem you. Christian, your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has secured satisfaction for your sins before God. The justice of God was satisfied in the penalty Christ paid. The wrath of God is satisfied. Nothing remains to be brought against you. You cannot be condemned.

The second thing Paul mentions is that *Jesus is raised for you, a sinner*. "There's more," Paul says. Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul *knows* there's more because he says exactly that. He says, "Even more," or "Especially," even beyond the death of Christ, Christ is raised. The resurrection is a fundamental part of the work of Christ.

Jesus did say, "It is finished" on the cross, but the resurrection is the vindication of that work upon the cross. It shows that Jesus was indeed God, that he did pay all the price, that death could not hold him, that all of our sins have been forgiven. Jesus is alive, and he secures his people. That means every single person who has believed on him.

But Paul is not finished yet. Now he turns to the present ascended Christ. He says *Jesus sits at the right hand of God*. Not only are we guaranteed our redemption by Christ's death, not only is it secured by his resurrection, but we also have the guarantee that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God. This shows the power and the sovereignty that has been given to Jesus Christ. He is sovereign over all things for you.

Lastly, Paul makes a final point. He says *Jesus now intercedes for you*. This goes beyond defending the believer before the Father. When we hear of Jesus' intercession here, we should not get the idea that every time we sin Jesus stands before the Father and says, "Okay, you need to forgive this sin. Remember." Next time: "You need to forgive this sin again." Like he has to argue for us and defend for us. After all, Jesus has already done that once and forever on the cross.

All of our sins are forgiven when we place our faith and trust in him. This is not about Jesus explaining away our sins before God. I think, instead, this speaks directly to God working all things together for our good. Jesus intercedes for his people in much the same way he intercedes in John, chapter 17. He prays for you that you would be blessed. He prays for you that you would know the true comfort of salvation, that you would be free from grief, that you would be filled with hope. That's the intercession of Jesus Christ for you, for your good.

God Has Established Us

God is for us, God has justified us, and Paul proceeds now to a final line of questioning: God has established us. Nothing stands in our way because of the work of Jesus. Paul had already asked us who could bring a charge against us if God is for us. He asked who could condemn us when God is the one who justifies. Now he asks, "What could separate us from the love of Christ?"

This last question deals with a different perspective on the same truth. The second set of questions dealt with the *judicial* aspect of our redemption: the courtroom, a judicial judgment that we are not guilty. That is, no one could bring a charge against you because you've become acquitted. You are declared not guilty. The penalty has been paid. Glory, hallelujah!

Now Paul brings up the *relational* aspect of our redemption. This is important. It's not just that we're declared not guilty. We are also brought into the family of God. God doesn't just free us from sin and guilt; he brings us into his family. He makes us his children. So Paul asks, "Are you worried that God would cease to love you? Specifically, do you think there's something that can separate you from Christ's love for you?" The question itself is actually one of comfort and assurance.

Notice what Paul asks. He doesn't ask about *your* love for *Christ*. He asks about *Christ's* love for *you*. That's what he focuses upon. It's not that *you* need to hold on to Jesus but that Jesus holds on to *you*. You know what this looks like. You've been out in public and seen a young child of 4 or 5 or 6 hold his father's hand. How does hand-holding work in that context? Does it depend upon the child to keep the grip upon the father; otherwise they'll be swept away? No, as a matter of fact, that kind of hand-holding doesn't even occur with the mere interlocking of fingers.

Usually, the father will swallow up the entirety of the child's hand and will have a grip not only on the hand but sometimes the wrist, sometimes the whole forearm of the child. There is no way the child is getting away from the father. As a matter of fact, the child can let go completely and they're still holding hands. That's a picture of *this*. Our security is in God's love, because there's nothing that could interrupt it. There's nothing that can defeat it. We need to hear this, because there are strong pressures in our lives and in our world today that can block our view of God and his love for us.

Today is a rather overcast day. Does that mean the sun ceases to exist or ceases to give light or heat? I don't know about you, but when I was out earlier it was not 200 degrees below zero. We did not become an ice cube. It's overcast, but it's not pitch dark. The sun is hidden from us by something intervening, but that doesn't mean the sun isn't there and isn't doing exactly what it was doing when we could see it. In the same way, there are things in our lives that can become between us and our seeing the love of God.

What Paul tells us is even though they may cloud our view, they don't change anything essentially. They cannot interrupt the love of God. They cannot stop the love of God. They cannot break the love of God. He is comprehensive in his terms. He starts with *external* pressures, ones that come from outside of us. He talks about *tribulation*. This word has at its core the idea of being pressed down, outside pressures that come upon us, when we feel like we're being squeezed. Paul says that can't separate you from the love of God.

Then he moves on to *internal* pressures: *distress*. This word has as its idea being in a tight and narrow place. The idea here, I think, is that sometimes we think we've lost God's love because this is the place where we are in life. "I'm not sure God loves me. My life is what it is. I go to the same job day after day, week after week. I'm not going to be a billionaire. I'm not going to own Amazon. I'm not going to be president of the United States." People tell you you can be whatever you want to be. That isn't true. I can't make myself be Bill Gates. It's not going to happen.

It can happen especially with young moms. They think, "Is this where I am now? Cleaning up spilled milk? Getting kids ready for bed? Doing laundry? I had such grand plans for me six or eight years ago. I'm in *this* place now. I didn't expect I'd be stuck *here*." We think we're stuck because God doesn't love us, but the truth of it is that even when we find ourselves in narrow places where we wish we could spread out, where we wish we had more, God still sheds his love upon us.

Paul then moves on to *circumstances*. He talks about *persecution*, which has as its root the idea of being relentlessly pursued. This is actually the case for most of the world today, and it may be coming here soon. In days of discouragement, I will look at my children and say, "There may come a day when your children or grandchildren may be lined up and shot for believing the Bible in America." But you know what? If that comes true, we still shouldn't worry, because that's the case for most of the world today. There is no evidence that Jesus stops loving his people because of persecution.

Paul then moves on and says he will not even allow *supernatural* things to separate us from the love of Christ. He gives four sets of pairs with two single items to make sure he encompasses everything that anyone could think of. He says there's absolutely nothing you could bring up and say, "Well, Paul, what about *this*?"

Paul says, "I am sure, I am persuaded, I am convinced...I can't say it any stronger than this...that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Not life and its struggles, not death and its seeming unknown, not even angels or devils if they tried, no dimension of time, neither the present nor the future, no dimension of space, neither depth nor height...absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of Christ."

The final thing we see is that it's not only that nothing stands in our way. The truth is that not only can we not be separated by any of these things but because of the love of Christ we are more than conquerors *in* these things. The word Paul uses here is interesting. "More than conquerors" is only one Greek word. It means super conquerors, and Paul made it up. He was trying to come up with a word, and "We are conquerors" wasn't enough for Paul. He says, "We are super conquerors."

Why would Paul make this word up? What's he trying to say? Again, we have to remember the context. So much of what we experience can make us feel defeated. Think about the church in America today. We're not even experiencing all of what Paul is describing, yet we feel defeated. We feel like we're losing. What we need to remember is that it's not something new, it's not something novel to experience these pressures, these tribulations, these persecutions. This is the lot of God's people throughout all of history.

Actually, Paul is quoting Psalm 44:22 in his statement in verse 36. "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." The persecution was as true in the days of Israel as it was in Paul's day as it is *today* in Pakistan, in India, in the Sudan. It's the lot of God's people. Paul is reminding us that even these bad, horrible things are a sign that we belong to Jesus. We are bearing his reproach.

We are more than conquerors *in* what we are suffering. Do you want an example? How about Stephen in the book of Acts? Do you remember what happened to Stephen? Stephen preached, and they didn't like what he was preaching. He preached faith in Jesus Christ, and they stoned him. The Bible specifically tells us Saul was consenting unto Stephen's death.

Then, you remember, Saul gets in a traveling party and goes up to Damascus, and the risen Jesus Christ comes to him and says, "Saul, Saul, why did you persecute Stephen?" No, that's not what *my* Bible says. What my Bible says is, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?" You see, when the people of God suffer, they suffer *with* their Lord. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. We might even put it *this* way: in our sufferings we are closer to our Lord than ever before.

Paul wants you to know that in every adversity, every difficulty, every pain, and every trial what you have is an unqualified victory in Christ. He is calling you to believe this by faith, to trust Jesus, to rest in his love. Will you do that today? Will you be secure in the love of Christ? Because that is where you will find peace and hope: in the love of Christ from which nothing can separate you.