

The Assuring Comfort of God's Love

Romans 8:31-39

Series: Key Texts for Difficult Times

Introduction: Take your Bible and join me in Romans 8.

Charles Spurgeon once went to visit a friend who had built a new barn. On top of the barn Spurgeon noticed a weather vane with the words, "God is love." Spurgeon asked his friend, "What do you mean by that? Do you mean that God's love is as changeable as the wind?" His friend answered, "No, I believe that God is love whichever way the wind blows."¹

Indeed – that is the testimony of the Scriptures about God – that He is love whichever way the wind blows. And those who are reconciled to him through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ – can never be separated from that love. This is a truth that we must never let get too far from us. We must be preaching this to ourselves constantly because we are prone to be forgetting it constantly. And we especially need this comforting truth when the winds of change and uncertainty are beating against the walls of our life.

So, we turn this morning to the greatest expression in our Bibles of that truth – that God is love and that we cannot be separated from that love if we are in Christ. This text is, as one commentator put it, the top rung on the ladder of comfort. He has been making the case throughout chapter 8 that if we are in Christ then there is therefore no condemnation upon us. If we are in Christ, then we have His Spirit who gives us life and makes us heirs of God and bears witness with our spirits that we are truly children of God. In verse 18, we are told the truth about the present world – that it is full of present sufferings, but he comforts us by telling us that these present sufferings are not worth being compared to the glory that is to come. We are also comforted with the truth that this Spirit is the firstfruits of God's work in redeeming us. So, we groan inwardly because of all that is wrong with God's creation, and the Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God. We can therefore be assured that all things work together for good for those who love God and who are called according to his purpose. And his purpose is to conform us to the image of his Son through the process laid out in verses 29-30 – those whom he foreknew he also predestined. Those whom he predestined, he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. That golden chain of God's work to save His people is the foundation for our section. Those promises of his good work to foreknow, predestine, call, justify, and glorify His own are the steady truth upon which he builds the glorious tower of verses 31-39. So, he says this in verse 31 – *Read 8:31-39*.

These 9 verses lay before us the glorious truth that if God is for us then there is no one and no thing that can truly be against us. That is the truth stated by the way of a question in verse 31.

¹ Ron Prorise, *Preaching Illustrations from Church History*, pg. 95.

And the answer to the question is obvious. If God is for you then no one can be against you. That truth is then proven in verses 32-39 with a series of follow up questions and answers. And they move up the ladder of significance to the climax question of – who can separate us from the love of Christ?

This question and answer style reminds you of last week's text in Isaiah 40 doesn't it? And that text put before us the greatness of God in a way which exploded our current understanding of God and gave us a greater hunger to know Him. And now we have this knowledge of our great God applied to the reality of life in this world in Romans 8. If God – the Creator God of the universe – the eternally self-existent One – the one who can measure the unthinkably vast universe in the span of his hand – the One before whom all the nations of the earth are like dust on the scales, not even measuring a reading – the One who is inscrutable in his wisdom and unsurpassed in his knowledge – the One who sits above the circle of the Earth enthroned forever as the Lord and Sovereign Ruler of all – the One who never loses power or strength and never grows weary – the One before whom the nations are accounted as less than nothing – if this God is for us, who can be against us?

Well, the natural question flowing out of this then is, how would we know that God is for us? In what ways has he shown us that he is for us so that we can have the unbending assurance that no one else can truly be against us? And that is what we see answered in verses 32-39 through this series of questions and answers. Before we unpack those truths, you must be honestly confronted with reality here. The reality of your existence in this life is that there are lots of things which are against you. In fact, that is why this passage packs such a powerful punch – because we all know that there are great trials and troubles in this life. Who is against us? Well, from a merely human perspective it seems like the options are endless. It might be easier to answer if we just asked – who is actually for us? And because that is the reality the Lord knows it is so very easy for us to lose heart and to fear and worry and be paralyzed by circumstances and challenges beyond our control. But this is not the true reality for those who are in Christ. It is perceived reality, but it is not the whole truth about the matter. The whole truth is that since God is for us, then no one and no thing can truly be against us. So, how do we know that God is for us, and how does that build our assurance that no one and no thing can truly be against us?

1. He Gave Up His Son – vs. 32

- a. Well, we first see that God is for us in that he gave up his Son for us, in verse 32. 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? God is for us in that he did not spare his Son, but gave him up for us. Notice the negative and the positive. He did not spare him and he did give him up. He did not hold him back. He did not prevent the outpouring of condemnation upon him as he stood in our place at Calvary. Rather he gave him over to it. He offered him up for us all. Galatians 3 tells us that Christ was made a curse for us. 2 Corinthians 5 says that he who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. 1 Peter 3 tells us that Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God. This is the substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord for us – in our place. This is the means by which verses 29-30 are accomplished. We can be foreknown and predestined and

called and justified and glorified all because God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. You can't help but think of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah in Genesis 22. God intervened in that sacrifice and provided a ram in the thicket so that Isaac could be spared. But Jesus was given no such reprieve or release.

- b. And notice who the actor is in this scenario – it is God the Father giving up His Son. We too often think of God the Father as being reluctant to love and calcified with wrath toward us. But this verse blows that theory out of the water. God the Father did not spare His own Son. God has many adopted sons and daughters. But he only has one begotten Son – the Lord Jesus Christ. The other sons and daughters can only be adopted into this divine family through the adoption price of the sacrifice of the only begotten Son. This is how much God loves those who are his own. He did not withhold the greatest punishment so that he could pay the greatest price to make us His own. That price was the life of his very own Son! As Octavius Winslow has said, “Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy; - but the Father, for love!”²
- c. If this is true then, the question that follows is – how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? In other words, how could we possibly doubt his great love for us when he has shown such great sacrifice in giving his very own Son for us? If he was going to fail in his love for us, then he would have failed when it cost him the most – in the giving of his Son. What more could he give to convince us that he truly does love us? What else could he do that would be greater proof of his benevolence and care for you? The answer is – nothing! His greatest act of sacrificial love was seen in the giving of His own Son.
- d. *Therefore, there is no true lack*
 - i. Therefore, there is no true lack for those who are in Christ by grace through faith in Him. Remember – this is the problem of the experience of this life. We do experience hard things. We do lack physical things and emotional things and mental things and spiritual things. We do have great needs that are met in abundance by God every day, but we also have needs which presently go unmet. And these great needs might cause us to question the God who has promised to be our great supply. And if anyone knew this lack in the Christian journey, it was the one that the Spirit of God was using to write these very words – the apostle Paul. But he had learned the secret of contentment in the face of these great needs. He knew this great truth of which he now writes to us. That if God is for us, who can be against us? If God did not hold back his only begotten Son, will he not then give us everything we truly need in this life and in the life to come? So, don't let the lack of today cause you to doubt the great provision of God in Jesus Christ. If he gave him for you, he will give you all that is truly needful.

2. He Justifies the Elect – vs. 33-34

² As quoted in John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, pg. 324.

- a. That is enough to convince us that God is for us, but there is more. God is also for us in that he justifies the Elect. That is the clear truth statement of verses 33-34. There are two questions and answers here that we will combine for our purposes this morning. The first question is – who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? And the second questions is – who is to condemn? This is court room language. These accusations are official charges of wrongdoing and sin. And this condemnation is a proving of those accusations in a way that should bring the sure judgment of wrath upon the one being accused. And this has been a major theme in the book of Romans. This court room scene before the righteous Judge of Heaven is where the unrighteous and the ungodly are condemned. And, as chapter 3 has made so abundantly clear – that is all of mankind under the righteous law of God. So, 3:19-20 says – “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”
- b. So, no human being will be made right with God through the keeping of the law. They will only be condemned because the law exposes their sinful rebellion against God. So, how are we made right with God? What hope is there to not be condemned on that final day? The only hope is the perfectly righteous one – the Lord Jesus Christ. As Romans 3 goes on to say – we are justified by God’s grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This Jesus, the very Son of God, was put forward by God as a propitiation by his blood – in other words, Jesus satisfied the righteous demands of the Law and was condemned in the place of sinners. And all of this is to be received by faith. And what we have been taught in Romans 8 is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. And those who are in Christ are those who have been foreknown by God, and predestined by God and called by God and justified by God and glorified by God. In other words, this is God’s work and not ours. He justifies us by his grace. He gave his Son, and through His Son He makes us righteous before Him. And he does this for those whom he chooses unto himself – or what verse 33 calls the elect. God justifies them – and they are right with Him through Christ. In this way God is for his own!
- c. *Therefore, there is no true condemnation*
 - i. So, if that is true, then there is no true condemnation. And this is important because that is the experience of Christians in a sin-cursed devil dominated kind of world – to be accused and condemned by others. This is Satan’s main title as it relates to us – he is the accuser of the brethren. This is the world’s main tactic against the followers of Christ – to see them as the problem that is causing all the evils of society. But if God is the one who determines who is just and who is unjust based upon the sovereign expression of his grace, then there is no true condemnation for those who are in Christ. The world will hate you and they will condemn you, but that is not true condemnation. It is God who justifies

the elect. More than that – who can condemn you when it is Christ Jesus who died, was raised, and is now interceding for us at the right hand of God? No accusation from any other will ever overpower the presence of Christ at the right hand of the Father. He can rightly say to the Father on your behalf – no, I paid for that sin and I bought that sinner with my blood – he is one of ours. The Son was condemned and now speaks on our behalf so that we will never be condemned. This is how God is for you if you are in Christ! He justifies you and secures you in that justification so that no matter who accuses you and seeks to condemn you – Christ claims you as his own and you are righteous in Him.

3. He Loves Us in Christ – vs. 35-39

- a. So, God is for us in that He gave up his Son and He justifies the Elect. But wait, there's more. And this "more" is the climax of the text. We know it is the climax because the question and answer are not just one or two verses, but it explodes from verses 35-39. We know God is for us because he loves us in Christ! The question asked in verse 35 is – who can separate us from the love of Christ? And this is one of the most terrifying questions that can be asked. If this is possible, then there truly is no hope. If you could somehow be separated from the love of Christ, then certainly we would find a way to that reality – and we would be of all people the most miserable in this unsure and unsteady faith. It's truly impossible to overstate how assuring and comforting and confidence building the right answer to this question is.
- b. He follows that question up with another question – Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Can those things separate us from the love of Christ? This is quite the list isn't it? These are the worst of the worst for the Christian. If anything could separate us from the love of Christ it would be these things. Tribulation is the general word for trouble and trial. It is the squeezing in of life and life's circumstances which is commonplace for the Christian. Distress is describing a tight and narrow place that you have to squeeze through. It is the pressing in of opposition from others and of circumstances beyond your control that you can barely get through. Persecution is just what it sounds like. This is the opposition from the world and the enemy of your soul seeking to derail and destroy your faith. It literally means to chase – so the idea is someone chasing after you because you are so loved by Christ. Famine is the natural disasters which occur in this world and affect billions of people every year – Christians are not exempt from these struggles. Nakedness is an extreme expression for poverty and destitution. It is the loss of everything. Danger is the challenges to life which come for the one following Christ. And the sword is the obvious threat of martyrdom for the Christian. It's a terrifying list really. Can any of these things separate you from the love of Christ? If by God's sovereign plan you are asked to suffer great persecution for claiming the name of Christ – is God's love absent from you? If great disaster strikes your life – is that proof that God no longer loves you? What about the loss of all things to the point where you don't even have enough clothes to put on your body? Is that a big

enough problem to which we can finally point and say – it is there that the love of Christ has obviously departed?

- c. He follows this terrifying question up with a quote from Psalm 44:22 in verse 36. And the point of the quote is to say that Paul is thinking specifically of all of these challenges in direct connection to our being God's people. These sufferings are coming upon us specifically because we are His. That's the thought of the whole psalm in Psalm 44. The psalm expresses that God's people are in great distress, but this distress is not because they have done anything wrong. It is simply because they are God's people. And this argument culminates in verse 22, which Paul quotes here – For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. In other words, there is no reprieve and no relief in sight to the distress and the persecution and the physical defeat. They are being destroyed. And this is happening to them at the hands of the enemies of God because they are God's people. "For your sake" is not an errant statement – it is a Spirit inspired statement. They are suffering this great harm because they are God's people. And this is what Jesus told us would happen. That in the world we will have tribulation. Paul tells the Thessalonians that they must suffer affliction for being in Christ. He told Timothy that all who desire to be godly will suffer persecution in this life. So, can this separate you from the love of God in Christ?
- d. Well, the emphatic answer in verse 37 is – No – not a chance! In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. This is the triumphal note of victory for those who are loved by Christ. They are *hyper-nikao* – more than conquerors. They don't just win, they more than win in all these things. Conquerors are those who overcome their difficulty and leave that trouble laying beaten and broken in the ditches of life. But that is not what is being promised here. Remember, we just read Psalm 44:22 – we are being killed all the day long! The promise is that we will be more than conquerors in all these things. We don't overcome it by defeating it in the normal sense. We are more than conquerors in that we pass through the fire and we are never separated from the love of Christ. In other words, the love of God is not shown to us in removing us from the hard and challenging trials of life. Rather, the love of God is shown in making us more than conquerors in all these things. Every one of those things can come against us in this life, but none of them will succeed in removing God's love from us. And this does not just mean that he will still love us when we get through it all. This means that in those things, we are being loved by God. Even in the most terrible and awful of experiences for the Christian in this life – God is there, loving us every step of the way – working it for our good and for His glory.
- e. Paul is so convinced of this that he can say in a perfect tense in verse 38 that he is sure. This is an unwavering confidence that will never change. He goes on to list 10 things which he is sure will never be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The list communicates the extremes of everything we might face, or of everything that might come against us. Neither our death nor the death of someone we know and love can separate us from the love of Christ. Nor life or any part of living in this world – nothing associated with life can in any

way separate us. Neither angels nor rulers – those angelic beings which carry on the cosmic battle against God seeking to destroy his plan and thwart his church – not even they can separate us. Neither things present nor things to come – there is no present or future scenario that can be imagined that can work to truly separate us from God’s love in Christ. What a statement that one is! Nothing you are currently facing and nothing you will face in the future can separate you from the love of God in Christ. So, imagine the worst case scenario for your life – maybe it is paraplegia like Joni Erackson Tada – maybe it is the loss of your whole immediate family, or the loss of all of your possessions and wealth, or the loss of your job, or the downfall of our society, or the persecution of the church, or the destruction of some natural disaster which obliterates the life you have created, or some strange virus from some far away country which could make you very sick and ultimately kill you, or the response to that virus by your government which could fundamentally alter society forever – whatever it is – take the worst possible potential scenario – and Paul says – not even that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

- f. Nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation. No power in God’s world, no created thing from the greatest height to the greatest depth can separate you. And then that last phrase is a catch all of anything else. In case you can imagine something outside of this list, the point is clear – nothing in all of God’s creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ. But this is more than a catch-all phrase – this is also a statement of the nature and character of God. Since He is the Creator of all things He has the sovereign control over all things. And nothing in all of his creation can successfully come against His plan and thwart His great love for His people. It simply cannot happen. This is the bracket statement in our text corresponding to our original question in verse 31. If God is for us, who can be against us? If the Creator of the universe has chosen to set his love on you, then nothing in all of his creation can stop that or overcome that!
- g. *Therefore, there is no true separation*
 - i. Therefore, there is no true separation from God’s love, is there? If He gave his Son for you, if He justified you through the work of redemption in Christ, and if he has loved you in Christ – then nothing can change that or overcome that!
 - ii. And this is a necessary statement because these things make us doubt God’s love, don’t they? That’s the point. If ever we wonder if God loves us, it is not when the sun is shining and all is right with the world. It is rather in moments of great trouble and trial and opposition and persecution. And so, God in his infinite wisdom took the pen of one of the greatest sufferers of all time – the Apostle Paul himself – and used him to tell us that we cannot be separated from Christ’s love. I am so glad that the Lord didn’t give us this truth from someone who suffered little for Christ. Someone who would have to say – I’ve never faced great persecution, but I’m pretty sure when you do the love of Christ will not be absent! No, Paul

could say – I am persuaded – not just by bare faith in what God has said, but also because I have put this truth to the test and have never found it lacking. He has been in distress and imprisoned and has faced the natural disasters which caused his ship to wreck. He has faced the fiercest human opposition, and he knows that behind that human opposition is a panoply of demonic forces seeking to overthrow God's plan. He has rushed the gates of Hell as it were, and he has found that in it all, and through it all – God's love has never left.

Conclusion: And so for us today beloved – we too can be assured of God's great love. And if you are assured of that, you will need no other assurance. In Psalm 63, David is expressing his great angst in the midst of yet another difficulty. He is in the wilderness running for his life, all because God had anointed him to be the next king of Israel. What a place to wonder if God loves you – in the wilderness, suffering for being obedient to the Lord, separated from family and friends, and cut off from all that is good in this life. But he says this in verse 3 – Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. This is what Romans 8 is telling us. The love of God for us in Christ Jesus our Lord is better than life itself. If we were writing that verse without the Holy Spirit, we would say – the steadfast love of God makes life better, therefore my lips will praise you. But David says, because your steadfast love is better than life itself, I will praise you. May we prize God's love like this – knowing that we will never be separated from it!