

THE LOVE THAT NEVER LETS GO – Part 2

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Last week we began looking at Paul's four great questions in Romans 8:31-39, a passage that brings the gospel to a magnificent climax. Let's take a moment and read that passage.

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? [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? [33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. [34] 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. [35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, [39] 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)

Paul reminds us that because we have been adopted into God's family through Christ, have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and have the certainty of God's promises, we can face life's trials with confidence.

The first question we looked at last week was **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** The point is not that Christians will never face opposition, but that no enemy can ultimately defeat God's purpose for our lives. The greatest proof that God is for us is the cross. If He did not spare His own Son but willingly gave Him up for us, we can trust Him to supply everything necessary to accomplish His will in our lives.

We also considered Paul's second question: **“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?”** Because God Himself has justified us through Jesus Christ, no accusation can ultimately stand against us. Satan may accuse us, others may criticize us, and even our own hearts may condemn us at times, but the highest Judge has already declared us righteous through the finished work of Christ. Jesus not only died and rose again for us, but even now He intercedes for us before the Father. Therefore, we live not under condemnation but in the assurance that our standing with God rests entirely on the completed work of Jesus Christ.

This morning, we're going to continue Paul's incredible chain of questions by looking at Questions 3 and 4, where we'll discover even more reasons why the love of God gives us unshakable confidence in every circumstance of life and never lets go.

So that brings us to the third question. It seems like the same as question #2, “**Who can accuse us?**” But this means something a little bit different. It's not repetition. There's another idea here.

1) **QUESTION #3: WHO CAN CONDEMN US?**

Paul asked in verse 33, he says, “Who can accuse us?” Then he asks in verse 34, “Who is to condemn?” or “Who is he who condemns us?” They seem like the same thing. Who can accuse us? Who can condemn us? But they're actually two different ideas.

No accusation can be brought against us. That relates to a specific legal charge before God. Satan cannot bring us up on charges before God the judge. So he resorts to condemnation. That vague challenge that he brings to the believer to discourage us and to unnerve us. He lies. The Bible says that Satan is the father of lies. Is there a lie in this world? There's billions, right? He's the father of it all. He's the father of lies. It says when he lies, he's actually speaking his native language.

Some people here, your first language is English. Some people, your first language is Spanish. Some of you, Filipino, Farsi, Arabic, Ukrainian, Russian. Satan's first language is lie. That's what he does. He's a liar and the father of all lies.

He can't lie to God about us, he doesn't have the right to accuse. And God knows the truth anyway of what his Son has done on our behalf. He can't lie to God about us. So what does he do? He lies to us instead. And so many Christians buy into the lies of the enemy and give in to false condemnation.

The very first verse in this wonderful eighth chapter, Romans chapter eight, verse one says, **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)**

There is no condemnation. Now, mark this, there is a big difference between the condemnation of Satan and the wonderful conviction of the Holy Spirit. I want to block my ears to the condemnation of the enemy. I'm not listening. But I want the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes the conviction of the Holy Spirit can come and it smarts and it hurts as God puts his finger on something in our life.

But listen, they are a world apart. They are very different. If the Holy Spirit convicts you as a believer, because there is some matter of sin in your life, number one, he will be very specific. He's not generally saying what a miserable worm you are. He'll come and say, this is wrong. And it needs to be dealt with. He will be specific.

And secondly, his entire goal is to lead you to repentance. It is to restore you. The word of God is clear in first John one, verse nine. **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to**

forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) That's where the Holy Spirit will lead you.

The condemnation of the enemy is not usually specific. It's vague. It's general. “You're no use to God. Think of all the terrible things that you've done.” And rather than lead you to repentance, what the enemy wants to do is bring you down to despair and hopelessness. “How could God ever forgive you?”

Now, Paul interjects something here in this verse, in verse 34. **“Who is going to be able to condemn us?”** There is only one who could justly condemn us. Only one who could dredge back the past against us out of the sea of God's forgetfulness. God doesn't forget a thing, but he drowns our sins in the ocean of his forgetfulness. He does not look on our sins any longer the Bible says. So only one person could dredge something back and really bring a charge against us.

Do you remember the time that the Pharisees dragged before Jesus a woman caught in the very act of adultery? And they said to Jesus, “Now listen, the law is clear that we should stone this woman. What do you say?” They were trying to trap Jesus. They were trying to show the people that he was really just another religious leader like all the others with the same kind of thinking. But Jesus answered them with that glorious answer.

He said, **“Let you who is without sin cast the first stone.”** And then he stooped down to the ground and he was just drawing something in the dirt. We don't know what it was. Maybe it was a list of the ten commandments that each of them had broken. Maybe it was something they were doing in secret that they thought no one knew about. We don't know, but he got down on his knees and he stooped down and he started to doodle something in the ground.

And in the time while he was doing that on the dirt, one by one, they dropped their stones and they walked away as they came under the conviction of God about their own sin. Now, the woman is still left standing there waiting because there is still one person present who has every right to stone her.

The perfect Jesus who has no sin. **“Let you who is without sin cast the first stone.”** He could pick up the stone and start the process. But he doesn't. He says, **“Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”**

Jesus could condemn us, but instead he is praying for us. That's what it says here. He says, **“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.” (Romans 8:33)**

Jesus is praying for us. Jesus said in John 3 verse 17, **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:17)**

Look at our verse again. **“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)**

2) QUESTION #4: WHO CAN SEPARATE US?

And that leaves us with the fourth and the final question in this wonderful passage of scripture, and it's this. Who can separate us? Who can separate us from the love of God? The word separation here is a Greek word which means to cut off or to amputate.

Who can amputate us from God's love? Of course, it's rhetorical again. The answer is nothing can separate us from God. Nobody could ever separate us from God.

But then the apostle Paul gives us several categories of very specific things that are unable to separate us from the love of God, because these are things that when we experience them, they really do cause us to wonder where God is. And so Paul goes through them one after another. So let's run through these other four categories very quickly.

A) WE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM THE LOVE OF GOD BY EMOTIONAL PRESSURES

Number one, we cannot be separated from the love of God by emotional pressures. Look at verse 35.

He mentions two things. He says, **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress,” (Romans 8:35A)** The word tribulation means inner pressure, depression, discouragement. Sometimes inner feelings of calamity and pain make us wonder, “does God really love me?” Well, the Bible says that even those inner feelings that we have of pressure cannot cut us off from God's love.

Then he uses a second word, it's that word distress, and that's a word that means outer pressure. It's a word used to describe being caught between two rocks. That's what the literal Greek word distress means, being caught between two rocks, like we say between a rock and a hard place.

Do you feel like you're not only getting pressure from within, you're getting pressure from outside, financial pressure, pressure on your job, pressure from family members, from loved ones. The Bible says even the worst pressure that comes at you from outside and causes you that emotional pain, it cannot cut you off from God's love.

B) WE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM THE LOVE OF GOD BY PHYSICAL ADVERSITY

Then he introduces another category. He says we cannot be separated from the love of God by physical adversity. It's not just what's going on inside of us, those feelings, actual physical pain cannot separate us from the love of God. Look at the next few words that he uses here. He says persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword.

He says even such physical onslaughts could never separate you from the love of God. And Paul drops in a quotation here. You might in your Bible see that it's italicized or spaced out or something or capitalized. There's a little quotation here. Paul actually takes a verse out of Psalm 44 and he drops it in right here. In Psalm 44, it says this, **"As it is written, "Yet for your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." (Psalm 44:22)**

Paul is writing to the first century church and they were under the reality of Psalm 44. They felt like they were being slaughtered all day long. The church in Rome was entering into the darkest of times. Christians were being put to death for their faith. In fact, that one little word right at the end of the list there, that word "sword," it must have sent a chill through the Roman spines when they heard Paul write to them that. Not even sword can separate you from the love of God.

Imagine how they felt when they read that. The Romans were brutally ingenious in their methods of execution. Sometimes young teenage Christians were put into a leather bag and it would be tied up around their neck and inside the bag was poisonous snakes and scorpions.

Paul was saying "To all of you when you go in the bag with the snakes. Even that could never separate you from the love of God. He's with you. God loves you still."

Sometimes Christians were tied to the horns of a bull and then the bull was sent into the arena to fight against the lion. And as the lion and the bull fought each other, the Christian would be torn to pieces. Paul was saying, "Listen, even when they tie you to the horns of a bull and take you into the arena, God still loves you. Don't think he's turned his back on you. There's no shadow from his face. His presence is there. God loves you."

In some of the early writings of the first century, they spoke about virgin martyrs. Why were they called virgin martyrs? Well, Tiberius, the Roman Caesar, had decreed years before that a virgin could not be put to death because even in their pagan godless culture, they still revered the virtue of virginity. And so he said, you can't put a virgin to execution. So some of these young Christian sisters who belonged to Jesus were taken and because it was unlawful to crucify or execute them because they were virgins, they were violated.

And then taken into the arena and put to death. The apostle Paul is writing to these believers in Rome and he says, "Listen, when they take you and do the worst things you can imagine, God's love can never be questioned. He's with you. He loves you."

The apostle Paul eventually was an old man shut up in the Mamertine prison there in Rome. And he heard the footsteps one day of a Roman soldier coming down the hall. Tradition tells us it was at sunrise. And he pulled Paul out of his dungeon, took him to a place where he laid him down on a block. No wonder as the apostle Paul looked up and saw the sword there ready. If he took strength from his own words, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, not even sword, could ever separate him from the love that is in Christ Jesus.

Swish, clunk, and split second, the apostle Paul was looking into the face of Jesus because nothing can separate us from the love of God. Have any of us got it that bad?

Let me tell you, I don't want to minimize your pain this morning because God loves you the same. He cares about you, whether or not you're going to the lions in the arena. Some days you feel like people are tearing you apart with their words or their actions. You may never face a literal sword, but you do face terrible moments when it feels like a knife has been thrust right through your heart because of something somebody did.

Take courage this morning. The very worst that the world or life can throw at us cannot separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Listen to what Paul says. He says: **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."** (Romans 8:37)

That phrase, "more than conquerors" is one word in the Greek. It's the Greek word "hypernikai". It's actually a word that's made up of two words super glued together. The first word is "hyper." Of course in Greek it means super. We talk about someone being hyperactive. It means that they are super active. They're over the top, right?

"Nikai". You've probably heard on TV or you're wearing them. Nike. Nike is a Greek word for victory. And it's right out of the Bible. This is a word that means super victors, super conquerors. We are more than conquerors over all these things because of Him who loved us. Not because of me. Because of Him. My strength, puny as it is, doesn't even come into the equation. It's because of Him, I am more than a conqueror.

C) WE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM THE LOVE OF GOD BY EARTHLY TRIALS

We cannot be separated from the love of God by earthly trials. Earthly trials. Sometimes it's not the sword. It's not some persecution. It's just the grind of life and all the things that we endure. Look at verses 38 and 39. He says:

“For I am sure that neither death nor life... [39] 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 8:38a – 39)

He is saying that even death doesn't separate you from the love of God. Even the dreaded process of dying. You know, a lot of people who are Christians are not afraid of eternity because they're believers, but they do worry about dying. They worry about the process of getting there.

But even walking through that process, the valley of death as David called it, nothing can separate you. Nothing at all in the trials of life can ever separate you from the love of God.

He also uses a couple of words here. He says height nor depth. The word height means the highest pinnacle on earth. The word depth is the Greek word “bathos,” which the Greeks used to describe the deepest part of the ocean.

The deepest part of the ocean cannot separate you from the love of God. Jonah found that out, didn't he? He's in the belly of a whale down in the lowest part of the Mediterranean sea. He's right down at the bottom of the sea. Thought he could run from God. Yet God's right there with him. Right in the belly of a fish at the bottom of the ocean.

Nothing you experience in your time on earth can separate you or cut you off from the love of God. And then finally he gives one other category.

D) WE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM THE LOVE OF GOD BY SPIRITUAL ATTACKS

We cannot be separated from the love of God by spiritual attacks. I've endured some things in my life. Natalie and I have gone through things as we've pastored. I can honestly say there was no other explanation for it than a spiritual attack. It's not normal what's happening, the way Satan's opposing the church, the way he's opposing the events. You say, no, it's a spiritual attack.

Well, Paul says here, not just earthly things, but heavenly factors. He talks about angels and demons in verse 38. Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers. The very words that he uses in Ephesians 6 about our spiritual warfare. He says, these things cannot separate us from the love of God. And then in verse 39, he says, **“nor anything else in all creation.”**

I love that. It's very interesting. Paul makes the point that all these things, everything that he's listed, this whole list of things that people fear, they are all what? Created things. They're in the realm of creation.

God, therefore, is greater than them all for he is the creator. Nothing in creation can rival the sovereignty of the one who made all things. I'm not saying that God made sin or evil. That's not

what we're saying. God created the world perfectly. Sin entered in and destroyed. But nothing in all of the created order can rival the sovereignty of him who did make all things.

If God is for us, who, what, could ever be against us? Effectively.