

INTRODUCTION

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ:

Some people live their lives in constant worry or fear. Some who are wealthy worry that they may lose their possessions. We may have worries about the war in Iraq. We may worry about school, the future, our children, and any number of things. But what about our walk with God? Do we worry about that? Do we need to?

The book of Romans is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. It is written, in part, to put an end to any worry or fear. Our text comes to us today as part of a larger argument. Paul had just asked 3 questions and now we come to the fourth question. All of the questions have the same answer, "No," or "No one." Paul had been laying down the teaching of the doctrine of justification in Christ. He is explaining what it means for the church, for you. If God begins a good work in us, how do we know he will finish that work?

The questions before all of us today involves the love of God in Christ. How do you view this love? What is the nature of this love? Will Christ still love us if we fall into sin? What if many trials come upon us? These are questions we will look at and attempt to answer. We will see and conclude that *Our loving God secures our salvation victory by means of the unbreakable bond of Christ's love.*

I. The Questionable Possibilities (35-36)

II. The Encouraging Result (37)

III. The Comforting Conviction (38-39)

I. The Questionable Possibilities

Vs. 35 begins, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" We notice an interesting word beginning that sentence, it is "Who." If you look at the list that follows this question, you may think that "what" would be a better word to use. However, who is personal...Paul likely had people in mind when he wrote this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Trials are personal for Paul, but also for us, therefore he uses the word "Who."

This question is an interesting one. It builds upon the 3 previous questions he asked. This is the climax of this glorious passage of scripture.

This question refers to the love of Christ. There are 2 possible explanations for this. This could refer to *our* love for Christ and the surety and trust we receive from it, or it could refer to Christ's love *for us*. The latter of these options, Christ's love for us is clearly the intention, as it is even clarified in vs. 37 with the words, "...through Him who loved us." Besides, our love for Christ is not very comforting...it is weak and vulnerable.

So the question is before us, "Who shall or can separate us from the love of Christ for us?" Paul gives 7 possibilities that doubters may give. The world may say, as the Devil said to God concerning Job, 'If you bring trials to your people, they will forget you.' This is the hypothetical argument put forward. These are the hostile forces that could attack us. We will look at each possibility briefly so that we see the all-encompassing nature of these forces.

The first force is tribulation. This word is very vivid and it seems to get at the

original understanding of the term. The word tribulation comes from the word “tribulum.” In the ancient world during the time for harvesting wheat, the wheat would be taken to the threshing floor, it would be laid down on the floor, and a wood instrument with metal strips would be dragged across the wheat to separate the wheat from the chaff. This instrument used was a tribulum. This vivid picture fits in the lives of God’s people. You may have experienced times in your life where you felt great tribulation. Maybe you lost a loved one, a spouse, or sibling, parent or child. Maybe you have had times where you feel a great weight upon you. Maybe you have lost a job, maybe you were abused as a child, maybe you have been so hurt, even by Christians, that your life seemed unbearable. Beloved, even great tribulation cannot separate you from the love of God. Remember, our Lord Jesus Christ suffered a whole life of tribulation.

The second force is distress. This means to be confined to a narrow space. Not so much to be held down as with tribulation, but to be boxed in or boxed up. Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation where our hands are tied...we can’t move. We may look back on the past few years and think, ‘well, I’m stuck now.’ For us, in our country, it may seem more likely that you will have to battle this force. We become stuck in the same mundane ruts of daily routine. Whether it is the young mother or the middle-aged man stuck in the dead end job, or any other, ‘How do we work through these difficulties. Beloved, realize, as one commentator put it:

“...realize that Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, has fixed his love upon you and that nothing is going to separate you from his love. You may be in narrow straits now, but you are an heir of heaven, and one day your horizons will be as vast as the universe.” (J.M. Boice)

The third attacking force is persecution. Persecution refers to outward forces that abuse us. The next two in the list, famine and nakedness may be results of persecution. Persecution was very real for the early Christians, as it may be today. Even those in Rome who were Jews were kicked out of the city. Later, the emperor Nero blamed Christians, falsely, for burning down part of Rome. Early Christians were accused of cannibalism, because of the eating and drinking they body and blood of the Lord in communion. They were accused of incest because they referred to each other as brothers and sisters. They were accused of murder or drowning people in baptism. Needless to say, it wasn’t very popular or cool to be a Christian at the time of the writing of this letter. Many forces tried to persecute and break up the church. But, the love of Christ is greater than any Roman persecution.

Next we come to famine and nakedness. These two go together and both refer to a lack of something physical. Famine is a lack of food and nakedness is a lack of clothing. The understanding of nakedness was a bit different then, than it is now. Then it wasn’t so much concerned with indecency, as today, but rather poverty or being the subject or victim of theft.

Famine, on the other hand, is not something we deal with here as in some parts of the world. When we are hungry, it is because we haven’t eaten for a few hours, but for some in the world., they may be hungry because they haven’t eaten for a few days.

The next force that would threaten to separate us from God’s love is danger. Danger, along with the other 6 forces are a result here of being a Christian. We know very little of danger compared to Christians in China and other countries where

Christianity is illegal. But, as we look around our society, danger may not be too far off as our nation continues to become more secular, and radical Islam along with suicide bombers are on the move. Whatever the future may hold for us and our children and grandchildren, it cannot separate God's children from His love.

The final force is the sword. Many Christians have lost their lives by the sword. The Apostles Paul and Peter, and James and Stephen, lost their lives by the sword.

Paul is writing about possibilities that could attempt to separate us from God's love. However, he is also writing personally. Look at II Cor. 11:23-28. Paul experienced these things in his own flesh, and yet, none of these things prevailed. The love of Christ is greater.

After this long list, we see a quotation, an example from the OT taken from Psalm 44:22. (read) In essence, the significance is, expect persecution, this is the case for God's people. What a startling contrast this is from Psalm 23, where the Lord was our Shepherd/protector.

When we confront the world with the claims of Jesus Christ, there will be a response, either a hardening or a softening of the heart. However, we must continue...the emphasis is upon the phrase, "for your sake."

It is amazing to read some of the stories of those in concentration camps in WWII, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Corrie ten Boom. In the case of Corrie ten Boom, she continually put her life at risk for the sake of the gospel. She hid Jews in her home, then she snuck a Bible into prison and took it with her to the concentration camp. She and her sister Betsie held Bible studies with the women in the barracks and in the factories. Many women were receptive to it, and others had their hearts hardened. The simple message Corrie and Betsie spread was one of the love of Jesus Christ. Nothing could separate them from Christ's love, not even a Nazi concentration camp. The women who believed were forever changed, though they faced death "all the day long" yet they were comforted by Christ's love. Once they drank from that pure spring of living water, they were forever satisfied.

Brothers and Sisters, there are many dangers and possible forces that attempt to keep us from the love of God...but they fail. The love of God is too great, too deep, too wide, too firm, too amazing, too unchangeable for anything to tear us from the arms of our Savior. Those are the questionable possibilities, now we see the encouraging result.

II. The Encouraging Result (37)

The answer to the question in verse 35, is answered in verse 37 with a "No" or a "nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." Our text says, "No, in all these things..." In all the difficult situations, in the storms of life, we are more than conquerors. Paul includes himself in with the "we." Paul is going to die the death of a martyr soon, and yet he is more than a conqueror.

This phrase, "we are more than conquerors" comes from one Greek word which means to be a "super-victor" a "super-conqueror." It would have been too weak for Paul to just say conquerors or victors. No, we are those who annihilate, wipe out the opposition.

Now wait, before we get puffed up or proud about being super-conquerors, remember that the victory did not come from us. Our text says, "through him who loved us."

It is true that we are more than conquerors, but we are so because of Christ. The

love of Christ, is the love of God in our text...these two loves are the same, they cannot be separated. The word "loved" in our text is used in the past tense. It doesn't say that he "loves" us, but that he "loved" us. Why?

This is because this points us back to the cross. The ultimate picture of God's love is seen in Him sending His son to take on our flesh, to suffer and be humiliated throughout his life, to suffer the cross for our salvation, to be raised and seated at the right hand of God the Father as our Advocate.

Beloved we are more than conquerors because Christ was the ultimate conqueror. He imputes or gives that victory to us.

We are encouraged because we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. In vs. 36 we are referred to as sheep to be slaughtered, and now we are called more than conquerors. So what kind of conquering sheep are we? We are weak and feeble on our own, but in Christ, we are strong and mighty, in Christ, we are more than conquerors.

The reason that we are more than conquerors is due to the nature of the battle. Our enemy involves supernatural forces, as Paul says in Eph. 6:12 (look there), our battle is ongoing. Since our enemy is supernatural, the result is cosmic, it continues to everlasting. All that we accomplish on earth will pass away, but our victory in Jesus Christ is forever.

Congregation, this understanding must shape our existence, it must effect our world and life view. For the world, when pressures push them or something doesn't go their way, they complain or grumble. But for us, we are to give thanks in everything. We acknowledge that all that we have is from God our Father. If a difficulty comes upon us, we take it as coming from the Lord, maybe a teaching tool, maybe a correcting tool, but always as a blessing in disguise.

Through Christ's victory we become heir to an imperishable kingdom, an everlasting victory. We are more than conquerors because our victory cannot be shaken. (Heb. 12:28) Our victory is the result and now we look at our comforting conviction.

III. Comforting Conviction

Verse 38 begins, "For I am sure..." Paul is convinced, he is certain that nothing can separate him from the love of Christ. After all that Paul has said in our text, and in the whole book of Romans, it is all summarized and concluded here.

Romans 8 began in vs. 1 with "no condemnation." and now it ends with "no separation." What a glorious assurance we have.

The apostle goes through a list of 10 things, 4 pairs and 2 single items which he is convinced and sure cannot keep us from the love of Christ.

We will look briefly at this list. The list begins with death, right where the list in verse 35 left off. Death and life are opposites. Paul had been referring to death through Adam and death to sin, so this is the natural progression. For us, we know that we will all face death, shall the Lord delay His return. Death does not put an end to God's love for us, it rather ushers in new blessings and life. As Paul said, "To live is Christ, to die is gain."

Death can be a fearful thing. If you become ill and death is humanly inevitable, you may be at peace with this over time, or you may reserve anger to God. Beloved, what Paul is getting at is that Christ's love is greater than ours, it trumps ours, we love God, because he first loved us. This is what Paul is going to bring out even more clearly in the next 3 chapters. Death cannot separate us, but neither can life.

Life can be difficult...remember from last week, we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but beloved, difficulties are not our greatest danger. Rather ease and comfortability are a great danger it seems. Our own self-esteem, our apathy or not caring about spiritual things is a great enemy. Having wrong priorities in life will be a detriment to drawing near to God.

The struggles of life can be a bit different for young people. Next week some young people are going to stand before God and His congregation and publicly profess their faith. Praise God for these young people and the Spirit's work in their hearts. Profession of faith is a beginning and these young people and others as well will have to make some very important decisions about the role they want church and spiritual things to have in their lives. They may look for spouses in the future, and God may bring you any number of places. You will face difficulties, but even in the greatest difficulties in life, Christ's love is strong enough to hold us.

Beloved, it is as if we are mountain climbers and we are following behind our guide, supported only by a rope. We will slip and fall, we will loose our footing, but the rope is secure, it cannot break, for the rope of support is the love of Christ.

Nothing in space or time can separate us from His love. Neither angels nor demons, things that have happened or will happen, not powers, not anything in the whole entire universe can separate us from Christ's love. There is nothing in heaven or on earth, in the sky or down below, there are no events in our lives that can tear us away from Christ's love. Paul concludes the list by saying, "anything in all creation." In case he forgot anything, it is involved as well. None of these things are even *able* to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are many people in the world who believe in and talk about God's love, but unless that love is through Jesus Christ, it is false. Present day Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, secularist do not know this love. Christ is the necessary mediator for us of God's love. God showed the greatest example of love in Jesus Christ, now that love is reflected to us.

As we come to the end of our text, let us ask ourselves where we stand? Paul is convinced, he is sure that none of these things can separate us from God's love in Christ. Beloved, are you convinced of this as well? If not, then "turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, till the things of earth grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace." Stop looking to yourself, but look at that perfect redeemer. Congregation, this is our assurance, this is our comfort. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Paul began in our text by asking us a startling question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" After leading us through a number of possible candidates or forces, he concludes with none! In fact, we are more than conquerors. We are secured by the bond of Christ's work and love. Now we can confess in our hearts, "For I am sure...Lord. (read vs. 39)" Amen.