

Reading: Romans 8v28-39

Theme: Who shall separate us from the love of God?

The last 5 verses of this extraordinary chapter Romans 8 bring us face-to-face with incredible and marvellous truths. Some have said this is possibly the greatest passage in the whole of the Bible. Throughout this chapter Paul has been bringing great arguments, reasonings and encouragements concerning the eternal safety and security of believers. Here he brings all those to a crescendo of a conclusion and begins his conclusion by asking another question to go with the other 5 he asked in v31ff. Those questions cause us to consider huge answers that are well worth looking at - but not this morning!

Now here in v35 he asks another question and answers it by describing the stuff of people's nightmares! Paul paints a dark picture in v35ff and yet does so to underline, highlight, draw attention to the security and safety we have in Christ - which Paul has been stressing, proving and driving home to all who read this glorious chapter. I want to note 3 things from v35-39:

1. The daring challenge.

I borrow this heading from Matthew Henry who says Paul gives "*A daring challenge to all the enemies of the saints to separate them, if they could, from the love of Christ.*" Paul is basically challenging all the enemies of God "*Come on, do your worst!*" He challenges whosoever and although they could bring trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, dangers, the sword i.e. put them to death (*quoting Psalm 44:22 where God's people were in danger and being killed by their enemies for being part of God's people - though they had been faithful to God.*)

How would we feel if we were to go through any of that list to any degree and intensity? I would not like it. I know my own heart, disposition that I would question why, grumble and to be honest, even though I would not openly ask the question or verbalise my thoughts, I could question if God loved or cared for me. How much could I take before my love gave up and gave in? When I've read of persecuted Christians or martyrs, I fear I would have cracked long before and been a pathetic figure of a supposed believer.

Paul says "*Not so!*" and goes on and adds other daring challenges to in v38-39 "*For I am convinced, persuaded, sure that...*" in which he gives another list of 10 awesome and staggering things - 4 pairs and 2 singles in the list of 10 to add to the 7 in v35. Do we have his conviction and persuasion? Surely, it would be beyond us even on our best days, let alone in such hardships and suffering!

Here is Paul and he daringly challenges our enemies and all things to come and separate us from the love of Christ - it includes all our fears and anxieties as we face Covid and all it could bring upon us, our families, ruin our country, its life, the NHS etc. as we look at these things, we may feel our faith, strength, love would crumble and fail; we would be pathetic representatives and we would be laughed at by non-Christians and pitied by Christians.

How then are these things meant to encourage us and deepen our sense of security? We may see these disastrous things and tremble; fear we would not keep on, that our love and faith would be shattered and lie in pieces around us. We may have

little confidence in ourselves and abilities. Even if we had, then we would have every reason to fear, to prepare to crumble as we consider the daring challenges to our enemies, to the convictions, persuasions of our own hearts. We may feel our love would not hold up and our faith would not remain. It is a real and daring challenge to OUR love and faith.

Thankfully, the focus is not on OUR love and faith if these things occurred to us. The enemies of Christ have thrown all those things and worse at His people and they stood firm. Not because they were supermen and women. The challenge, the daring challenge of all these things is not to separate **us** from **our** love to Christ, but to separate **us** from **His** love, from the love of God to **us** in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing can separate us from Christ's ongoing moment-by-moment love. Christ's love is not merely a memory, but the continual moment-by-moment love of the living Son of God.

Realise the focus is not on our love or grip on Christ, but His eternal, undeserved love to us. We have been savingly drawn to Him by His love, grace and mercy. Because of that there is nothing that can separate us from Him and His love. Can the love of Christ, the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord withstand all these tests and keep us? Yes, of course it can! Now the situation is changed - not us trying to weather a storm alone, but we are safe and secure because He has secured us to and in His heart for time and eternity.

The daring challenge is not to us, but is thrown out against all the enemies of God, the enemies of His people. It lays down and draws a line in the sand that says in effect *"You cannot*

and will never, ever be able to separate any child of Mine from My love!” Our Saviour loves us with an everlasting love.

The challenge to us individually is to realise and recognise it and to own with Paul *“I am persuaded, convinced, sure that nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord!”* Yes, it is a very daring challenge Paul gives in v35-38, but it is also a glorious statement of being in Christ and having His love for us and upon us forever. Moving on and we see:

2. The direct statement.

Paul has said of the things that cannot separate us from Christ, then he makes a direct and enormous statement in v37 *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”* Picture all these things coming upon us as a Christian, all aiming at and trying to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. It would be an awful situation to go through. Paul says here that even if all those things came upon you and me, we would still be more than conquerors through Him who loved us!

As a Christian, our guaranteed entrance into heaven is not tied into **our** surviving in the Christian life, or our love, faith or feelings. Not at all, it is through Christ who loved and loves us! That is why we are safe and secure for time and eternity. Paul’s statement here that we are more than conquerors is an amazing one! How is it that we are more than conquerors? It is because of and through the love of God in Christ. We have read and know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. So here, when Paul is speaking of us as being

more than conquerors, he is stating the same truth in a different way - that our God loves us, is going to take us to heaven and we will be glorified.

We are to realise that when any of the 17 things listed come upon us, they really and truly will hurt, confuse and upset us. Although God is still working all things together for good, it does not isolate or insulate us from pain, hurt or suffering. As they come upon us, they are to cause us to realise that this world - with all its joys and pleasures, all that attracts and entices us, that it is not our final destiny. We are passing through it to the glory of heaven and we will be there for ever. There in heaven none of these things will ever come upon us or threaten us or terrify us or disturb our bliss and enjoyment again.

At our more sensible moments, we groan along with the whole of Creation for such a time and our focus will be off this life and all it has ahead for us. Yet even in such painful and confusing circumstances, we are to look for, expect and enjoy the help and care of our God and Saviour. He does truly give us more grace as the burdens grow greater, He does provide His help, comfort, strength and if our lives are threatened or taken because of our following the Lord Jesus, even then we are to realise we are not going to be the losers and we will be able to join with Paul in saying “*for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*” (Philippians 1:21)

This is why Paul, having listed these atrocities and horrors for us, is able to say that we are more than conquerors and that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If our God and Saviour who loves us,

sees fit to allow us to pass through such things, then we can be sure of His grace and presence, for He will be with us to keep us, bring us through the darkest valley - even if it is the valley of the shadow of death, it will only bring us to be with Him, to see Him, to be where He is and gaze on Him forever and we will be captivated and filled with His glory and beauty.

The love, grace and mercy of Christ will never let us go, but will bring us safely home - even if it is through many trials and tribulations. His love will never let us go, fail us or let us be lost. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. What security, safety and a sense of assurance this should give us.

3. The dynamic conclusion.

Paul was persuaded, convinced, was sure that nothing at all could separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus. He considered who God is, what He had done, was doing and would do, also the love of God in Christ Jesus towards ones like himself and all Christians. As he weighed or rather surveyed the evidence, he could only conclude that nothing at all could separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Does that thrill you? It should do! Why? Because Paul includes you and me in this dynamic conclusion - “*separate us from...*” We who have known God’s grace as He called us to Himself, who know they have new life; are justified and therefore assured the other 3 links of salvation’s golden chain are in place - foreknown, predestined and glorified (8:29-30). We are to remember all is well with our soul between us and God in terms of our eternal security and nothing can rob us or

deprive us of the love of Christ. Many things may intercept, interrupt or confuse the love tokens Christ sends to us. Our pig-headedness, sin, stupidity and insensitivity could rob us of the comforts of these love tokens and this should grieve us, but it does not break or rob us of His love and care for us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus and this conclusion answers the question raised in v35.

The love of God in Christ Jesus is not a weak insipid thing, it is a love that is mighty and powerful. It is a love that has 4 dimensions - as we learn in Ephesians 3:18 *“pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how **wide and long and high and deep** is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.”* We are kept by the power, wisdom and love of God and He will not spare anything for our good (v32).

This God has promised never to leave us or forsake us – even in the trials and joys of our lives. He Himself has promised and He will keep His word! He has loved us and loves us still with an everlasting love. Just because we do not recognise or feel it, or it is obscured by the clouds of our sin, troubles, pressures, tribulations, a Covid pandemic, it does not invalidate His promise. He still loves us and He will love us with such love in our lives as we go into death; then after death, we will realise the fullness of His love in all its wonder and glory, and will rejoice in Him and His love in a sweeter nobler tongue. He still loves us when angels are for us or demons are against us; He loves us in the present and in the future; when any earthly or spiritual power is for or against

us; in the heights of life or the depths of life - He loves us. Paul then adds '*nor anything else in all creation*' - a wonderful phrase that covers everything we will question "*What about, or what if?*" Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

All of Romans 8, especially this last section, should cause us to step back, survey all God has done and is doing for us in Christ Jesus. As we do so, it is to cause us to marvel, praise and love Him the better. It should cause us to join with Paul in the dynamic conclusion personally for our own lives in the light of the question, the statement in v35, so that we would say v38 & 39.

As we go in to 2021, I pray we will all know the blessed assurance of being a child of God, of knowing we have no condemnation and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and we would be aware of that love being with us and our loved ones more and more as we go through 2021.