

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

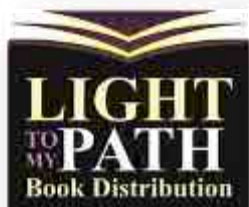
OUR SECURITY IN CHRIST:
A STUDY OF ROMANS 8:31-39



F. Wayne MacLeod

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INTRODUCTION

In an age of great education and human achievement, it is all too easy for us to assume that if anything is going to happen it will depend on our efforts. God *does* expect us to take an active role in the affairs of this life. Our human strength and ability can only go so far, however.

Some time ago, I was speaking at a conference in the Philippines. During the conference, I found myself crying out to God: "Lord, I have said all I have to say. I've given all I can and I have nothing more to give." As I prayed that evening, I remember the Lord speaking to my heart in response and saying, "Good, now maybe you can trust in Me and My strength."

The simple truth of those words still rings in my heart today. So often we feel like everything depends on us. We take on the cares of the world and burn ourselves out trying to fix every problem that comes our way. We do all this for God to the best of our human ability, but in the process God becomes distant.

The Christian life is not so much about what I have done as it is about what the Lord has done. It is not about law but grace. It is about a wonderful God who sent His Son to cover our sin. It is about a gracious Saviour who sent His

Spirit to dwell in us for the purpose of enabling us to do all He requires.

Romans 8:31-39 is a reminder of what the Lord Jesus has done. It is a picture of the grace of God providing all we need for salvation and a right relationship with Him. It is about a God who invests much in the lives of His children and who keeps them to the end. It portrays salvation from God's perspective. Paul's focus in these verses is not on our commitment to God but rather His commitment to us. This is the basis for the assurance of our salvation.

As you take the time to study this important passage, consider what Christ has done for you. Let the reality of what Paul says in Romans 8:31-39 bring you assurance and hope of eternal life in the presence of the God who has done all that is necessary. May this simple study point you to God and His purpose in Christ in whom alone we can have assurance and hope of eternal life.

F. Wayne MacLeod

1

WHAT SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS - PART 1

Read Romans 7:1-25

As we begin this study of Romans 8:31-39 it is important that we take a moment to examine the context. Notice that the apostle Paul begins in Romans 8:31 with a question: "What then shall we say to these things?" This question shows us that there is a context to what the apostle is going to say in Romans 8:31-39. This forms the basis for the conclusions he will make in this passage. Romans 8:31-39 can only be understood in the context of chapters 7-8. There are a number of important spiritual truths underlined in these two chapters.

Released from the Law

In Romans 7 the apostle Paul speaks about the Law of Moses and its relation to the believer. This Law had been the standard by which Old Testament believers had lived for many years. The Law of Moses revealed the purpose

of God for His people and the standard by which He intended them to live. Paul reminds us, however, that the Law was only binding on a person as long as they lived. Death released an individual from his or her obligations. He uses the illustration of marriage to clarify this point. The apostle tells us in Romans 7:2-3 that a woman was bound to her husband by law only as long as that husband was alive. If her husband died, she was freed from any obligation to him and could take another husband.

Paul goes on in Romans 7:4-6 to say that the believer has been set free from his or her obligation to the Law of Moses. That freedom came as a result of death. The believer died with Christ on the cross. Jesus took our penalty and died in our place so that all obligations to the Law would be met and we would be freed from its hold. We now belong to the Lord Jesus. He is our new Master and Husband. We are no longer under the Law. In fact, to continue to live under the Law is to be unfaithful to the One who has set us free from it. Our allegiance and devotion now belong to Christ alone.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who had been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. (Romans 7:4)

But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7:6)

The Curse of the Law

The Law of Moses was good in itself. It revealed the purpose and plan of God for humanity. The problem was that human nature was sinful and incapable of keeping that Law. It placed us before the standards of a holy and perfect God. It revealed to us how sinful we were but was incapable of changing our hearts and lives. No one could measure up to its standard. Every day many sacrifices were made for the forgiveness of those who had fallen short of God's purpose as commanded by the Law. Ultimately this law condemned us and sentenced us to death:

"The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment deceived me and through it killed me." (Romans 7:10-11)

These are strong words. The Law of Moses placed me before an impossible standard and held me accountable to that standard. Listen to how Paul describes the struggle he had under this law:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. (Romans 7:14-15)

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want, is what I keep on doing. (Romans 7:18-19)

Under the Law of Moses believers stood before an impossible standard, knowing that their lives depended on meeting that standard. Listen to the cry of the apostle as he reflects on this impossible situation in Romans 7:24:

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

The Law of God was perfect and holy. That was the problem. We were sinners who always fell short of the standard of God. The curse of the Law was in its perfection. No sinner could stand before such perfection and live. No sinner could meet the requirements of God. All were judged by the Law and found guilty.

The Purpose of the Law

There is one more detail we need to see from Romans 7. Why would God put us before an impossible standard when He knew that there was no chance of us ever being able to live up to that standard? Paul answers this question in Romans 7:13:

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, that through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

We could never truly understand God apart from the Law. The Law reveals God's character. It shows us His holiness, purity, justice, wrath, compassion and mercy. We also understand God's requirements for those who want to approach Him and live under His blessing.

Not only does the Law of Moses reveal God to us but it also shows us who we are in relation to that God. The apostle James compares the Word of God to a mirror in James 1:23-25. This is what the Law of Moses is for us. A mirror reveals things we cannot see ourselves. As we look into the mirror of the Law we see ourselves for who we really are, not for what we think we are. That mirror reveals our dirt and sinfulness. It shows us our failures and faults. Only by looking into this Law can we truly understand our need. The purpose of the Law of Moses was two-fold. First, it introduced us to a perfect Creator and showed us His purpose for our lives. Second, it revealed us for who we were before this Creator and exposed our need for a Saviour.

What do we see from the truths taught by Paul in Romans 7? We see that there is no security under the Law. No one could ever meet the standard of God. If keeping the Law of Moses was the only way I could get to God, then there would be no hope. I will always fall short of God's standard. Writing to the Galatians Paul said:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:10-11)

Neither the Law of Moses nor any variation of that Law can save us from our sin and bring us into a right relationship with God. The salvation offered in the Scriptures does not have to do with how well I behave or how much I do for God. It is a free gift given through Jesus Christ and offered without conditions to all who will receive it. It is given to

sinners who fall short of God's standard. It was when we were still sinners that the Lord Jesus died for us:

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (Romans 5:8-9)

The Lord Jesus came to set us free from the obligations of this impossible Law. He came to offer us salvation and a relationship with God apart from the Law:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it –the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:21-24)

This means that the endless and futile struggle to get right with God is over. We are accepted apart from the Law, apart from our personal efforts to measure up. We are accepted just as we are, cleansed and forgiven through the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross. We do not need to be pure and clean to come to God; we come as we are and He cleans and forgives us through His Son.

This is the foundation on which Paul bases his teaching in Romans 8:31-39. Our relationship with God is not about measuring up to God's standard. It is about Jesus reaching down and releasing us from the curse of the Law, the curse of never being able to attain God's standard.

For Consideration:

- What does Romans 7 teach us about the connection between the believer and the Law of Moses?
- How did the Law prove to be a curse for the believer?
- What does the Law teach us about God? What does it teach us about ourselves?
- Can we as believers be tempted to live under the Law today? In other words, is it possible for the believer to still try to merit favour with God? What is the difference between doing things to gain God's favour and doing things out of love for God?
- How does the Law show us our need of Christ and a salvation by grace apart from any work we do?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He chose to reveal Himself to us by means of the Law. Take a moment to consider what the Law teaches us about God. Thank Him for those qualities.
- Thank the Lord that the Law showed you who you were. Thank Him that He did not leave you condemned under the curse of the Law but died on the cross to set you free.
- Ask the Lord to help you to see ways in which you are still trying to live under the Law by trying to gain favour through the things you do. Thank Him that you already have His favour.
- Thank the Lord Jesus that when you could not reach the Father, He came and made it possible through His work on the cross.

2

WHAT SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS - PART 2

Read Romans 8:1-30

Romans 8:31 begins with the words: "What then shall we say to these things?" We began to look at the "things" Paul is referring to in the last chapter. There we saw that the believer was placed before the impossible standard of God's law. No one could meet this standard and, as a result, all were condemned under its curse. This is why the Lord Jesus came. He died in our place to pay the penalty for sin and set us free from the obligations of the Law.

As we begin chapter 8 of Romans, Paul tells us that there is now no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Those who are in Christ Jesus are free from the "law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). The key phrase here is "in Christ Jesus." What Paul is telling us is that the law, with all its condemnation, has no more hold on those who have trusted the Lord Jesus and His work. Jesus takes all who trust in Him under His wings. We are still imperfect and fall short of the standard of God but we are no longer

condemned. Jesus paid for our sins, past, present and future. Our salvation is not about trying to measure up to the standard God has set for us. It is about trusting in what Jesus has done.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4)

It is important that we understand from Romans 8 that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one when it comes to this matter of setting us free from the condemnation of the Law. In the last paragraph, we touched on the work of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit is also very much involved in this work of salvation. Romans 8:9 tells us that the Holy Spirit comes to live in those who have trusted the work of the Lord Jesus.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Notice what this verse tells us. It tells us that the sign of a true believer is the presence of the Holy Spirit. He comes to live in the lives of all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. The work of Christ is a wonderful work that sets us free from the condemnation of the Law. In itself this is sufficient to grant us favor with God and acceptance into His presence. God does not stop at this, however; He places His Holy Spirit in our lives. Romans 8:11 tells us that the Holy Spirit gives us life:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Something new happens in the lives of those who know the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. A new life is born in them. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.

Not only is God interested in setting us free from the condemnation of the Law, He is also keenly interested in enabling us to live to our fullest potential. God invests all He has into us. He sacrificed His son to set us free from the legal condemnation of the Law. He also pours His Holy Spirit into us to shape us into the image of His Son. The Holy Spirit does what we cannot do; He enables us to live the life God requires. He works in us, shaping us and guiding us each moment of the day.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:14)

This does not mean that everything will be easy for the believer. In fact, believers will have to suffer in this life. Some will have to lay down their lives for the Lord Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans 8:26, however, that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and prays for us in these times.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but

the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words.

Each step of the way, the Holy Spirit is with us. Not only does He help us in our weakness, but notice how He intercedes for us. He does so with “groaning too deep for words.” Does this not tell us something about the intensity of the Spirit’s longing for us? This groaning is filled with passion. The great desire of the Holy Spirit is to see us strengthened and equipped for every trial. He prays intensely to the Father for us and for our victory in the suffering we face. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal presence in the life of the believer; He is a loving and compassionate friend whose heart breaks with ours. He loves us deeply and desires our victory and blessing.

The Father, too, has an investment in our lives. Listen to Romans 8:15-17:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The Father adopts us as His children. He is the Creator of all things. He is holy and majestic. We are His creation, sinful and weak. What interest should He have in us? Yet He loves us enough to give His Son to die on our behalf. He loves us enough to invest His Holy Spirit into our lives. He loves us enough to adopt us as His very own children and make us heirs of all things. What kind of love is this? Never has there been so much invested in a single person.

The experience of this tremendous love and devotion of God is not only for our time on this earth but also in the life to come. Paul reminds us in Romans 8:18 of the glory that is yet to be revealed to us:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us for the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul would express it this way:

However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (2 Corinthians 2:9)

We have not yet experienced the kind of things God has prepared for those He has adopted as sons and daughters. Our minds cannot imagine the blessings and privileges God has been preparing for His children. Again, notice the intensity and depth of this love. Never was such an unworthy person loved so much. Never was such blessing given to one who was so unworthy of it.

Romans 8:29-30 tells me that the Father's eye was on me from the beginning. He knew me before I was born. From the beginning of time he determined to pursue me and win my heart. He forgave me for my sin and brought me into a right relationship with Him. His commitment is to bring me into His presence where I will walk with Him and enjoy Him forever, free from this world and its hindrances.

In Romans 8:1-30 the apostle Paul shows us the commitment of the Triune God to us as believers today. The Son

of God took on earthly flesh and died to set us free from the legal condemnation of the Law. The Spirit of God comes to live in our heart to strengthen, guide and shape us into the image of the Son and enable us to walk as children of the King. He also devotes Himself to interceding for us at a level of prayer that we have not yet understood. The Father pursues us, forgives us, and adopts us as sons and daughters, making us heirs of all His blessing.

The commitment of God to His children is absolute. We see from Romans 8 just how much God has invested in us. He could not love us with any deeper love. He could not give us any more than He has already given. All His wisdom, strength, blessing and mercy are ours in Christ. This is the context of Romans 8:31-39. "What then shall we say to these things?" What can Satan or anyone else say to these things? This is what God has determined. This is what God has done. Who can stand against it?

For Consideration:

- What investment has the Lord Jesus made into your life?
- What investment has the Holy Spirit made in our lives?
- What do we learn about the prayers of the Holy Spirit for us in Romans 8?
- What investment has the Father made in our lives?
- What does it mean to be an heir? What is our inheritance as sons and daughters of God?
- What evidence was there of the Father's hand on your life from birth? How did the Father pursue you and win your heart?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord God for what He has invested in your life. Ask Him to give you a deeper appreciation for this.
- Ask the Lord to give you more grace to understand His commitment to you.
- Ask the Spirit of God to have His way in your life. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have resisted the work He wanted to do in you.
- Make it your commitment to honour the Lord God with your life, not to merit favour from Him but out of love and devotion to Him for what He has done in you.

3

GOD IS FOR US

“If God is for us who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

In the two previous chapters, we examined Paul’s teaching about God’s work on our behalf. We were condemned under the Law of Moses without hope. God reached out to us in our need. The Lord Jesus laid down His life to set us free from the legal requirements of the Law. The Holy Spirit came to live in our lives and continually prays for us in the struggles and trials of life. The Father adopted us as His children and has made us heirs of His blessings.

What sacrifice He made for us! He could not have done more. Who can understand the commitment of God to us? Jesus told His listeners in John 15:13 that the greatest demonstration of love was when a man laid down his life for his friends. Paul would go on to say in Romans 5:7-8 that while this was a rare form of love, Christ went even further when He laid down His life for us even though we were His enemies:

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

There is no greater love than this. The Lord Jesus valued us to such an extent that He willingly sacrificed His own life to save us. What confidence this ought to give. The Lord Jesus threw Himself in front of our worst enemy. He placed His life between us and our greatest foe. His sacrifice for sin paid the penalty for all time. The Law has no hold on us. There is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Have you ever been loved to this extent? The Lord God is “for” us. He demonstrates this in the work of His Son.

God’s commitment to us is also seen in the person of His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit knows us intimately. He knows our thoughts and attitudes. He knows things about us that we do not know ourselves. There have been times when the Holy Spirit has revealed sins in my life that I thought had been dealt with long ago. I can hide nothing from the Holy Spirit. He works in the most private areas of my life. His purpose is to cleanse and make me more like the Lord Jesus. Sometimes I grieve Him by my stubbornness and pride, but He does not give up on me. Day by day He continues to work in my life. He comforts me when I struggle. He warns and convicts me when I stray. He is my strength to minister and my wisdom in life. God lives in me in the person of the Holy Spirit. I am not left alone. Before returning to the Father, the Lord Jesus assured His disciples that they would not have to face this world on their own:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because

it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:15-17)

While the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross was a once for all time work, the work of the Holy Spirit is an ongoing work. Each person who has been saved from condemnation through the work of His Son is important to God. He puts His Holy Spirit in each one to keep us and guide us in the path we should take. The Holy Spirit is God's own personal presence living in each person who comes to Christ.

Let's take a moment to consider this. The presence of God dwells in me as a believer. Considering this fact, the apostle John said this:

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Wherever I go, the presence of God is with me. Whatever trial I face, I will not have to face it alone. The Spirit of God delights to live in me. This is a commitment He has made to all who belong to Christ. God is "for" me. This is demonstrated in the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life.

God's commitment is seen further in the plan of the Father for us. He has adopted us as His children. It is one thing to show love to someone else's children but quite another to make those children your own. In adopting us as His own, God is making a deep and prolonged commitment to us. This adoption is not a temporary measure. Parents who adopt a child make a commitment to that child for life. They cannot give the child back if they grow tired of him. Their

commitment to that child is a lifelong commitment for better or for worse. An adopting parent also gives the child all the rights and benefits of an heir.

This is the commitment of the Father to His children. He accepts them as His own for as long as they live. They are inheritors of His blessings and the privileges of a son and daughter belong to them. He obligates Himself to them as their provider and caregiver. He holds Himself responsible for their wellbeing.

God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and God the Father have all declared their intentions. Of their own free will they have bound themselves to us. While we may find this hard to understand, the truth is before us in Romans 7-8—God is for us!

As we examine Romans 8:31, Paul asks the question: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” In the remaining verses, Paul will consider this question in greater detail. What is important for us at this point, however, is to grasp the incredible significance of the truth he is presenting to us now—God is for us.

We live in an age where grace and mercy are becoming rare. For many people, it is unthinkable that someone would love them without conditions. We have come to believe that everything comes at a cost. What we see in Romans 7 and 8 is that God, of His own free will, chose to commit Himself to you and me. He freely gave His Son. He freely gives His Spirit. He freely adopts me and makes me an heir of all His blessings. He commits Himself to me and my spiritual good. Why do I struggle still to trust Him? Why must I resist what He wants to do in me? Why can't I surrender to the love that sent Him to Calvary? He has my greatest interest at heart. He is committed to me and my

well-being. Let the truth of this statement sink deeply into your soul and may its impact cause you to surrender fully to Him in worship and awe. "God is for us!"

For Consideration:

- How does the Lord Jesus demonstrate His commitment to us?
- How does the Holy Spirit demonstrate His commitment to us?
- How does the Father demonstrate His commitment to us?
- What should be our response to this commitment of the Triune God to us?
- Why do you suppose many people believe that God is against us and that we have to earn His favour?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord God for His commitment to us as His children?
- Ask God to help you to grasp more of the significance of the phrase "God is for us."
- Ask the Lord God to help you to trust Him more in the trials and struggles of life.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for some particular ways He has demonstrated His commitment to you in this past few months.

4

HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS SON

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. (Romans 8:32)

We have seen from Romans 8:31 that God is for us. This is really quite an amazing reality. What is even more amazing is the extent to which the Lord God went to demonstrate His love for us. Here in verse 32 we see that God the Father did not hold back His own Son but gave Him up for us. Let's take a moment to consider what the apostle Paul is saying here.

In verse 32 the apostle is speaking about God. This is the God who created the universe as we know it. We know that the artist is greater than anything he creates, so when we consider the creation, we can catch a glimpse of the greatness of its Creator. After all these years, humankind has still not seen the limits of space. Our telescopes continue to probe the vastness of the universe discovering more and more marvels. Our microscopes peer into the

smallness of the atoms and cells that form this world. I remember speaking to a foot specialist about the complexity of the human foot and how it moves. How we see in full color, our sense of smell or our even how we communicate are things that baffle the greatest scientist in our day. These are gifts from our Creator, who many years ago, put everything together by the word of His mouth. How great is this Creator! How incredible is the intelligence and power that put this universe together! As marvelous as the creation is, the Creator is greater still. Who could ever measure up to His intelligence? Whose power is equal to His?

This is the God who put a child in the barren womb of Sarah when she was beyond her natural ability to bear a child (Genesis 17-18). This same God “laughs” at the power of the wicked for He knows their day of judgment is coming (Psalm 37:13). The power of the greatest nations is like a drop from a bucket to this all-powerful God:

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. (Isaiah 40:15)

All their armies and political influence is like dust on a scale to the Lord God—it amounts to nothing. How can we understand such power? This universe is held together from beginning to end by His will and purpose.

This God is the Holy God of Israel. It was He who descended on Mount Sinai in a great cloud. No one could approach that mountain (Exodus 19:12-13). When Isaiah the prophet saw something of the glory of God in his day he cried out:

“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!” (Isaiah 6:8)

The apostle John, seeing something of His glory “fell at his feet as though dead” (Revelation 1:17). Isaiah 40:21-25 describe the wonder of the God Paul spoke about:

Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretch out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

There is much to be said about the glory, majesty, holiness and power of our great God, but time and space do not permit us to go beyond this for the moment.

Paul tells us that it was *this* great God who did not spare His own Son. The Bible makes it very clear that the Son was one with the Father in purpose and character. All that the Father was, the Son was also. All power, all glory belongs to the Son as well as to the Father. John 3:35 tells that the Father had put all things into His Son’s hands:

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

When Jesus was baptized, the Father reaffirmed His love for the Lord Jesus when He said in the presence of those who attended the baptism:

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. (Matthew 3:17)

The love of the Father for the Son is beyond question. In giving up the Son, the Father was giving up what was very precious to Him. There was nothing more precious He could have given than His own Son.

Notice that Paul tells us that the Father gave up His son *for us*. That is to say he delivered Him over to serve the penalty of sin on our behalf. The Father turned His back on the Lord Jesus, His precious Son. The words the Lord Jesus cried out from the cross are painful words:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)

At that moment, when Jesus took our sins, the Father turned His back on Him and allowed Him to die. He went to the grave with the weight and shame of the world's sin on His shoulders. The decision of this all powerful and holy God was to allow His Son to die for us. This was His choice. Out of love for us, the Lord God laid down His own life. He did this to rescue us from the penalty of sin and to bring us into fellowship with Himself.

Paul goes on in verse 32 to show us the implication of this incredible truth. He tells us that if the Lord God was willing to go to this extent to save us from the penalty of sin, surely, He will now graciously give us “all things” with Christ. Again, let’s take a moment to consider what the apostle is telling us here.

Notice the phrase, “will he not also with him graciously give us all things.” The key to understanding what Paul is telling us here is in the phrase “with him.” It might be possible to look at this verse and assume that because God willingly gives even His own Son, He will also give us anything we want. It is important, however, that we interpret the verse in light of the phrase “with him.”

Paul tells us that God will give us “all things” *with Christ*. There is a connection between the things God gives and His Son. This implies that the things God promises to give are in tune with the purpose for which He gave His Son. Jesus laid down His life for the forgiveness of sin. He came so that our relationship with God could be restored. What Paul is telling us here in verse 32 is that God will give all that is necessary to live and walk in the relationship His Son came to give. He will give us all we need to accomplish the purposes He has for us in His Son.

This does not necessarily mean that we will get a new car or a bigger home. The purposes of God through Christ Jesus are much bigger than these earthly possessions. What it does mean is that He will give us everything we need in order to grow in our walk with God, conquer the enemy and serve as victorious servants. Do you need strength to face the enemy? Paul tells us in Philippians 4:13:

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Do you need wisdom to make the right decisions in life?
The apostle James tells us:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him (James 1:5).

Do you need provision for the work He has called you to do? Paul tells us:

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19).

The Father stands behind the work His Son came to do. In Christ, we are forgiven and restored to a relationship with the Father. The Father guards that relationship by putting His Holy Spirit in each believer and by supplying them with all they need for a life of holiness. His strength, wisdom and provision are available to each of us. The Father will not allow the work of His Son to be in vain. If He did not spare His only Son but gave Him up to die for us, will He not now jealously guard what cost Him so much to obtain?

Your salvation cost God the life of His Son. The Father treasures what His Son died to accomplish more than we know. How easy it is for us to treat our salvation lightly. God never treats what His Son died to accomplish lightly. He knows the cost of our salvation. Paul tells us in verse 32 that God gives us "graciously" ("freely", KJV) all we need to live and walk in that salvation. The idea here is that He pours out all that we need abundantly and without cost.

God gives us graciously all we need to walk in the salvation His Son came to accomplish. All of His resources are freely available to us. The treasury of heaven is at the disposal of all who accept the work of His Son. There will be no lack. There will be no shortage. The Father will guarantee, at His expense, that all who come to Him through His Son, will have all that is necessary to become all He intends. God so values the work of His Son that He stands behind it with all He has. What an incredible reality this is! The Father and the Son are one in regards to our salvation. Both the Father and the Son give all they have to guarantee that what began at Calvary will be accomplished in us. We lack no resource to live and walk in Christ's purpose for our life.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the God who gave His Son to die for us? Who is this God? How does the Bible describe Him?
- What do we learn about the relationship between the Father and the Son? How does the Father feel toward the Son He willingly gave to die for you?
- How does the Father show the value He places on the work of His Son? How does He stand behind the work Christ died to accomplish?
- What does God promise to all who come to Him through His Son Jesus Christ in this verse?

For Prayer:

- Have you ever treated your salvation lightly? Ask the Lord to show you more of what that salvation cost Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord God for the way He opened the resources of heaven for you as His child. Thank Him that you lack nothing for your growth in Christ or for your service for His kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to help you to draw more deeply from the resources He graciously offers you today. Ask Him to help you to become all He intends you to become.

5

WHO SHALL BRING A CHARGE?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. (Romans 8:33)

We saw in the last chapter that the Lord God gives to those who accept His Son all they need to walk in holiness and victory. We lack nothing to live and serve as God intends. Admittedly, we do not always take advantage of the resources provided for us. We often fall short of God's purpose.

As I look over my life, I realize that I have not always been the father I could have been to my children. There have been times I could have been more supportive of my wife. I have said things that might have been better left unsaid. There have been thoughts I should never have entertained. I have had times when I failed to listen to the leading of the Lord. I am sure that the remainder of my life will not be perfect either. As a human being, I will never be able to walk perfectly with my Lord. Until I shed this sinful body and mind, I will struggle with sin until my dying day.

In fact, sometimes the closer I grow to the Lord, the more I realize how much I need Him and His grace.

The story is told of a man traveling through the forest to his friend's house. It was a dark night when he set out. As he walked, his foot struck the root of an old tree and he fell. He got up and brushed the dirt off his clothes and continued on his way. In the distance, he finally saw the lights of his friend's house. As he approached the lights, he looked down and saw some dirt on his clothes that he had not seen in the darkness of the forest, so he brushed it off. The closer he came to the lights of his friend's house, the more dirt he noticed. What he did not notice in the darkness of the forest was made clear in the lights of his friend's house. This is how it is in our spiritual walk. The closer we get to the light of God's holiness, the more sin we see in ourselves. This was the struggle the apostle Paul faced in Romans 7:15:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very things I hate.

As close as the apostle Paul was to the Lord, he still wrestled with the sinfulness of his human nature.

As we move into verse 33 we discover another very important truth. Notice what the apostle Paul tells us here:

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Paul speaks in this verse about God's elect. The word literally means "chosen." This refers to God's choice of His people. While God calls us to make a decision for Him,

Scripture is very clear that God also chooses us. Listen to what He told Israel in Deuteronomy 7:7-8:

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your father that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

Notice in this passage that the Lord chose Israel for Himself. The basis for that choice was love and not anything Israel did. Jesus made a similar statement in John 15:16 when He said:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you (John 15:16)

The Lord Jesus chose us to be His instruments to bear fruit for His kingdom. The Lord God took the first step. The apostle John put it this way:

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

It was the choice of God to do something about our sin. God chose to reach out to us when we could not reach out to Him. He chose to love us when we did not love Him. He chose us of His own free will. God did not do this because

we were good or worthy of this salvation. It was a gracious decision on His part motivated by love and compassion.

There is something very wonderful about a God who chooses to pursue the sinner. He chose to love me when I was at my worst. He saw my sin but chose me anyway. It is in this context that Paul asks the question: "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?"

Consider this question for a moment. God chose us. He knew all about us when He chose us. He knew we were sinners in need of a Savior. He knew the things we were doing. He understood our sinful human nature. Despite all these things, He still chose us. Nothing about us will take God by surprise. He has seen the worst in us and knows every thought and attitude of our heart. Is there anything that Satan can say to God that will take Him by surprise and cause Him to turn His back on us?

God not only knew all about us when He chose us but He also did something about it. Notice that Paul tells us that it is the God who chose us that justifies. To justify is to declare something right or good. God declares us clean and right before Him. This was the result of the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. The penalty for our sin was paid in full by the Lord Jesus. Through His Son, the Father covered the penalty for every sin we had ever committed or ever will commit. We are right before God, not because we live perfectly but because His Son's sacrifice forgives all our imperfections and sins.

Notice the little word "any" in verse 33. "Who will bring *any* charge against God's elect?" That word is a very important word. What Paul is telling us is that there is no sin or shortcoming that is not covered by the work of Christ on the cross. The blood of Christ covers *any* charge that could

ever be brought against us. Those who accept what He has done are released from the penalty of *all* sin. God declares all who trust in His Son to be just and right before Him. He will not hold any sin against those who have accepted the work of His Son. There is no higher court of appeal. This is the decision of God Himself. He is the Law Giver and the definition of all that is good and holy. Who can declare guilty what He has declared holy and good?

What is Paul telling us in this verse? He is telling us that the Lord God chose us as sinners and through the work of His Son, paid the penalty for *every* sin we would ever commit. The work of His Son is sufficient to cover all sin, past, present and future. Not one of those sins will ever be able to keep us from the Father. We are declared by God to be holy and just. No accusation could ever be brought against us that Jesus' death did not cover.

We are imperfect. We fall short of God's standard. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, I have often failed to be all that God wanted me to be. What Paul tells me, however, is that Jesus covers those failures by His death on the cross. I can live in confidence in what Jesus has done. I can walk with the Father knowing that Jesus has made it possible for me to be His child, even when I fail to be what I need to be.

The Father has declared me to be justified. He adopts me as His child. He does so knowing all my past, present and future failures. Paul grieved over his past as a persecutor of the church. He wept over his shortcomings as a servant of God. At that same time, however, he proudly declared: "who can bring a charge against God's elect, it is God who justifies." What charge could ever be brought against me that Christ has not covered by His blood? What charge could ever be brought against me that God did not know

even before He accepted me as His child? God has declared me just. This is not because I do not sin but because His Son covered the penalty for my sin. There is incredible comfort and security in this truth. No charge can ever be brought against me that has not been already known by the Father and covered by His son.

For Consideration:

- Does being justified or declared righteous mean that we never sin again?
- What sins does the death of Christ cover?
- What comfort do you find in the fact that God chose to pursue you and win you for Himself? Would you ever have come to Him had He not first chosen to pursue you?
- While Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, how does our persistence in sin hinder our fellowship with God and our blessing?
- Is there any sin that the death of Christ does not cover in the life of the person who accepts Him?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the fact that His death covers all your sin. Thank Him that there is no condemnation now for all who are in Christ Jesus.
- Thank the Father that He chose you. Thank Him that He put it on your heart to choose Him in return.
- Thank the Lord Jesus for the assurance His death provides that all sin has been covered. Thank Him for releasing you from the penalty.

- Ask the Lord to help you to respond toward Him in a way that expresses your deep gratitude for the way He accepts you even when you fail Him.

6

WHO IS TO CONDEMN?

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)

In the previous chapter, we saw that the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross covered all our sin so that no one can bring “any charge” against those who belong to Him. Paul continues on this same theme in verse 34 but adds another dimension. Again, in this verse Paul asks a question and answers it. Notice the question. “Who is to condemn?” The word condemn has a legal sense to it. In verse 33 Paul spoke of a charge being brought against one of God’s children. Here in verse 34 he takes this a step further. The charge now appears before the judge. He alone has the right to sentence the individual being charged.

Notice Paul’s argument in verse 34. As the charge stands before the Judge, Paul reminds us of four very important truths:

1. Christ Jesus died

2. Christ Jesus was raised
3. Christ Jesus is at the right hand of the Father
4. Christ Jesus intercedes for us

Let's examine these truths in light of the accusations being brought against us.

Christ Jesus Died

The question is this: "Who is to condemn?" As Paul considers this question, he is reminded of the fact that the Lord Jesus died for sin. As the Son of God, the Lord Jesus saw our sinful condition and determined to reach out to us in our need. We could do nothing about our sin. It separated us from God and sentenced us to an eternity apart from Him.

What Jesus did on the cross paid the legal penalty of sin in full. Paul makes this quite clear when he says in Romans 8:1:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Jesus communicated this same truth in John 5:4:

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to live.

Notice that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. As a perfect sacrifice for sin, the Lord Jesus satisfied every demand of the Law of God. His death covered

the penalty for all our sin past, present and future so that we are no longer under their condemnation.

This does not mean that we no longer sin. Nor does it mean that we will not suffer the consequences for our sins on this earth. It is important that we make a distinction between the condemnation of sin and the consequences of sin. Christ came to set us free from the condemnation of sin. The word condemnation carries with it the sense of judgment and damnation. Those who are condemned by sin are judged guilty and separated eternally from God and His presence. Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What Jesus did on the cross was to set us free from this condemnation. Those who accept Him no longer have to be separated from God. Because of Christ's death, they now have access to the Father and are freed from sin's condemnation. There is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

While our condemnation is gone, we still suffer the effects of sin on this earth. We will also have to endure the consequences of our own sins. If I speak evil of a brother or sister, they will be hurt and my relationship with them will suffer. If I decide to be unfaithful to my wife this will have a very harsh effect on my marriage. My pride will hinder my relationship with God and keep me from experiencing the fullness of His blessing.

Churches are not immune to problems. This is because believers, though freed from the condemnation of sin, still

sin. The result of their sin is seen in the church. God's blessing is removed. There is friction between believers and the work of God is hindered. We will suffer the consequences of our sin on this earth. Though God allows us to suffer the consequences of our sin, the death of His Son covers its condemnation. The Son of God has removed the judgment of eternal separation from us—He has assured our standing with the Father.

Christ Jesus Was Raised

Paul goes on to tell us that the Lord Jesus was raised. What is the connection between condemnation and the resurrection of Jesus? The resurrection of Christ is a vital New Testament doctrine. The apostle Paul makes a very powerful statement about this in 1 Corinthians 15:16-17:

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

Notice the connection Paul makes between the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the forgiveness of our sin. He tells us plainly that if Christ had not risen from the dead, then we would still be in our sins. If Christ did not rise from the dead than death and sin would have overcome Him. What hope would we have if this were the case? Christ's death covered sin but His resurrection conquered it. Death could not hold Christ. Sin could not keep Him in the grave. He battled it, overcame and rose victorious.

What hope we have in the resurrection of Christ! His resurrection shows us that sin and death are truly conquered. They no longer have ultimate power over us.

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:56-57)

Yes, we will die, but we will rise again. We will sin and suffer the consequences, but those sins can no longer keep us from our Savior. Jesus did not remain in the grave, but rose victorious over it. Sin and death are conquered foes. Who can condemn us? Our greatest enemy has been conquered in the resurrection of Christ.

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace (Romans 6:14)

Christ Jesus is at the Right Hand of the Father

The third point that Paul makes in verse 34 is that Christ Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. In Bible times if a person wanted to honor someone, they would have them sit on their right side. Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. This is the Father's way of honoring His son. The Father stands behind the work of the Son and gives Him a position of privilege and authority. There is no greater authority. He who sits at the right hand of the Father, acting in complete unity with the Father and under His full authority, is Jesus who died for us. It is He who has removed all condemnation for those who trust in Him.

Who can stand against such authority? Is there anyone who can overrule what He has determined? If He has removed my condemnation, who can condemn me? There is no higher court. What He determines is final. The Father has given Him a place of honor –He stands behind His decisions and work.

Christ Jesus Intercedes for Us

The final point Paul makes in this verse is that Christ Jesus intercedes for us. Before examining this it is important that we see what Paul is saying in this verse. As human beings, we had broken the Law of God and were held accountable to God. The wages of our sin was death (physical and eternal spiritual death). Notice what Jesus does in verse 34.

First, Jesus died and rose from the dead—He personally paid our debt in full. Second, He rose to the right hand of the Father in Heaven where He reigns as Lord and judge—He is our Judge. Finally, He intercedes for us. As our intercessor, He is the lawyer defending our case. Jesus paid our debt in full, acts as our judge and personally defends us against any accusation.

As our intercessor, He stands fully behind His work. When we are condemned by human or spiritual forces, the Lord Jesus takes up our defense. As each accusation comes before Him, He declares them to be “paid in full” by His own blood.

We need to grasp the truth of what Paul is telling us here. This is not just an intellectual truth to be learned but a spiritual reality to be lived. We were condemned by sin. Jesus died, paying our penalty, and rose, conquering sin and its dominion. He stands now as a judge and lawyer on our behalf defending us and judging our innocence before any accusation that comes against us. He is committed to defending the work He has done on our behalf.

Who is to condemn us when our condemnation has been removed through the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf? Who is to condemn us when the Lord Jesus, sitting

at the right hand of the Father acts as Judge in our favor? Who is to condemn us when the Lord Jesus continually intercedes for us as lawyer? How can we ever understand this truth? We are so unworthy of such representation. We do not deserve that the Lord Jesus act on our behalf. This, however, is the clear teaching of Scripture. If there is any response on our part, it would be to love and devote ourselves to He who demonstrates such compassion to us. May this be our lifelong response to such love and mercy

For Consideration:

- How does the death of Christ pay our penalty for sin? If our penalty has been paid in full, can sin ultimately keep us from God?
- What is the difference between the condemnation of sin and the consequences of sin? Why is it important that we understand this difference?
- Why is the doctrine of the resurrection important? Could we have any victory over sin if Christ was not raised from the dead?
- What confidence should we have knowing that it is Jesus who is our judge?
- How does Jesus continue to defend His work in our lives as intercessor?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He willingly paid the penalty for your sin.
- Thank the Lord that He not only paid for your sin but destroyed the power of sin over us by raising from the dead.

- Ask the Lord to help you to deal with the consequences of sin in your life. Ask Him to give you ongoing victory over your failures and shortcomings. Thank Him that He has removed the condemnation of sin for you.
- Ask the Lord to make the truth of what He has done for you more real in your life. Ask Him to help you to respond in deeper love and devotion to Him for what He has done.

7

WHO SHALL SEPARATE 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." (Romans 8:35)

In the last chapter, we reflected on the commitment of the Lord Jesus to us. We saw how He not only laid down His life for us but also stands as both judge and lawyer defending our cause against every charge. It is in light of this truth that Paul now asks the question: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ."

Notice that the love spoken of is the love of Christ for His children. Our love for Christ can vary from day to day. There are many things in this life that distract us and keep us from loving Him as we ought. Paul's focus here is not our love for God but the love of the Lord Jesus for us.

When we consider the things Paul has been telling us about the Lord Jesus and His work on our behalf, we realize the incredible investment He has made in our lives. He gave His life for us. He stands behind His work and continually intercedes for us. This does not mean that we will never have problems in this life. In fact, the apostle Paul experienced more persecution than any other apostle. Listen to how he describes his suffering in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28:

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Speaking to Timothy, the apostle would remind him in 2 Timothy 3:12 that if he was going to live the life God required, he would have to suffer:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Here in Romans 8:35 Paul writes about the trials believers face in this life. He speaks about tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness danger and sword. Jesus taught His disciples to expect persecution and tribulation as they lived out their faith in Him:

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. (Matthew 24:9)

Hebrews 11 describes the great men and women of faith who have gone before us. Listen to the description of their suffering:

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:36-38)

The lives of these men and women of faith were not easy. They suffered all the things Paul speaks of here in verse 35. Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 in verse 36:

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

For some people, the problems and tribulations of life cause them to wonder if God really loves them. They feel that if God really loved them, He would never allow them to face rejection. They believe that the evidence of God's love is freedom from pain and suffering in life. It is not my

purpose to deal with the problem of pain in this study. There are a few points we need to make in this regard, however, as it relates to verses 35-36.

First, the pain we face on this earth is often the consequence of sin in the human heart. We suffer because of the sinful attitudes and actions of other human beings. People say things that damage our reputation or hurt us deeply. If someone speaks evil of me, does this mean that God doesn't love me? Surely not? In fact, Jesus tells us that the day is coming when we will all give an account of those words to God.

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak. (Matthew 12:36)

Jesus would go on in Matthew 25:40 to show us the deep connection He has with His children and the pain caused them by other human beings:

And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

The Lord God feels the pain we feel. The hurt we cause others, He treats as His own personal hurt. We will answer to Him for what we have done to His children. What others do to us is not an indication of any lack of love on God's part. Scripture teaches us that Christ treats the things done to us very personally and will hold each person accountable for what they have done to His loved ones.

Scripture also teaches that Satan is seeking to hinder the work God is doing on this earth. Paul challenges the believer to put on the armor of God to protect themselves from His wicked schemes (see Ephesians 6:11-12). Peter tells us that the devil “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Revelation 20:10 tells us that the day is coming when God will throw him into the lake of fire where he will be “tormented day and night forever and ever.” It is true that the enemy is ravaging the nations, but God is also working to bring men and women to Himself in these days. We are in the midst of a battle. Satan rages as God advances His kingdom. The focus of God in these days is that the gospel be preached to all nations and that His people come to know Him.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

All nations will be given a chance to hear the message of Christ and His salvation. God delays His final judgment until all who will come to Him have safely entered the fold. This is an act of compassion and love on His part. God is not blind to what the enemy is doing. He has equipped us with spiritual armor. He will defeat this terrible enemy when all His children have safely come home. He sent His Son to die so that we could be freed from his domination in our lives.

It is also important that we understand that God promises to use all we go through for our good.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Speaking to his brothers in the book of Genesis, Joseph explains that while they had intended to do him harm, God changed their evil into good in his life.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20)

Whatever happens to us, God promises to use to accomplish good in our lives and in the lives of those around us. The crucifixion, as violent and cruel as it was, accomplished our salvation. Joseph being sold into slavery saved the nation of Israel in a time of famine. Daniel, being thrown into the den of lions, brought the king to faith in the God of Israel.

The pains and trials of this life often purge away those things that keep us from a deeper intimacy with the Lord God. Notice what God says through the prophet Hosea about the nation of Israel:

For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.'

Imagine Israel in those days. She had been going after other gods. This resulted in God “hedging up her way with thorns.” Everywhere she went she was getting pricked by those thorns. God built up walls, blocking her path. She was not getting anywhere. It seemed that God was against her. The reality of the matter, however, was that God loved her so much that He would not let her go. The obstacles on her path were not evidence that God did not love her, but that He loved her so much that He would not give her up. He was protecting her from harm.

Psalm 23 shows us something else about the trials we face on this earth. Notice what the Psalmist had learned in verse 4 of this 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.
(Psalm 23:4)

The Psalmist knew that even when he walked through the valley of the shadow of death the Lord was with him. God does not abandon us in the valleys. He goes with us through those valleys. Remember the story of Daniel’s friends in Daniel 3? When they refused to bow down to the king’s idol they were thrown into the furnace to be burned. When the king looked in the furnace, he saw the presence of another person. The presence of God was with Daniel’s friends in that furnace. When God asks us to go through any trial, He does not ask us to do it alone. He promises to go with us through it.

God is not blind to the suffering we face in this life. He will hold all who have hurt us accountable for their words and actions. He feels the pain of those words and actions and treats them as if they were done to Him personally. He died

to destroy the power of Satan over us and will one day throw him into the Lake of Fire. He promises to use every trial to accomplish good in our lives. He will not let us go through the valley of the shadow of death alone. He will walk with us through that valley, protecting and keeping us until we reach the other side. Yes, there will be trials and persecution in this life because of sin. The only way to remove that suffering is to destroy this earth and all who sin. The day is coming when the Lord will do just that. In the meantime, He commits all He has to our well-being.

Why would the Lord God treat our hurts as his own? Why would he demand an accounting from anyone who speaks evil against us? Why does He go with us through the difficulties and persecution we face? The only answer to this is love. He will not let us go. He will do all He can to keep us in the trials this life brings. No trial or distress can separate us from His love. He is right there with us through all the valleys of life. This is His firm commitment.

For Consideration:

- Is suffering part of the Christian life? What causes that suffering?
- What is God's response to the words spoken against us and the actions done against us?
- What does Scripture teach us will happen to our great enemy Satan? How does this demonstrate God's commitment to us?
- How does God promise to use the trials of this life for our good? How has God used a particular trial in your life for good?

- Has God ever kept you from going in the wrong direction? How did this feel at the time? As you look back on this time, how do you see the hand of God in this?
- Do we have to go through our trials alone? What is the promise of God to us when we have to go through the valley of the shadow of death?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He personally feels all that is said and done against us.
- Thank the Lord that He promises to overcome every enemy that stands against us.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the times when He has used what has happened to you for good.
- Ask the Lord to continue to block your path whenever you are going in the wrong direction.
- Ask God to give you a deeper awareness of His presence as you go through the valley of the shadow of death.

8

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

In the last meditation, we saw that the believer is not free from problems in this life. From the beginning of time, believers have faced persecution and distress. As we continue into verse 37, Paul answers a question he asked in verse 35 – “What shall separate us from the love of Christ?” After giving some theological background on the person and work of the Lord Jesus, the apostle now proceeds to answer this question in a very practical way.

“In all these things”

Notice first, how Paul makes it clear that in “*all these things*” we are more than conquerors. The phrase “all these things” refers to whoever or whatever would oppose us as mentioned in verses 35-36. Paul is confident there was nothing that could ever separate us from the love of Christ. Even though there are trials and tribulations on this earth, the love of God for us will never change.

Revelation 12:10-11 speaks of the defeat of Satan:

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Notice how Satan is described as the accuser of the brothers. He accuses believers day and night before God. Notice also that these brothers conquered Satan by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. These saints did not conquer Satan by the word of their testimony only. They also had to conquer him by the blood of the Lamb. The accusations of Satan were not necessarily false accusations. None of these believers were perfect. The Bible does not hesitate to show the failures of God's people. The blood of the Lamb, however, forgave their sin and covered their guilt. None of Satan's accusations could stop God from loving the people for whom His Son had died.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that we do not always go through trials well. Sometimes we respond in anger or impatience. We say things we wish we did not say. At times our faith is tested and we wonder if God is really there. Sometimes, we fall into sin and rebellion. Consider three examples of this in the Scripture.

Job was severely tested. Satan killed his children. He left Job in pain on an ash heap. Job said things during that time he later regretted. He accused God of injustice (see Job 31). He cursed the day he was born and wished he

could die, thus questioning the purpose of God (see Job 3). Did Job pass this trial? When God spoke to him in chapter 42, Job was forced to confess his sin of not trusting God and speaking wrongly of Him. I'm sure Job wished he could take back many of the things he had said. While God challenged Job on these matters, His love for him would not change. In fact, God's anger burned against Job's friends and their accusations against His servant Job. God would restore to Job all his fortunes and bless him more than He had blessed him before his trial. Have you ever spoken evil about God in your trial? Have you ever questioned His purpose for your life as Job did? God is not threatened by our words, nor will those words keep Him from His commitment to love us and restore us to fellowship.

David also knew this wonderful unfailing love of God. He fell deeply into sin when he committed adultery with his neighbor's wife and murdered her husband to cover it up. His family was a mess. One son raped his sister. Another killed his brother. Still another tried to overthrow him as king and publicly disgraced his father by sleeping with his concubines. I wonder how David felt as a father. Despite these obvious human failures, God's love and commitment to David remained. For years after the death of David, God resisted judging his descendants as they deserved because of His love for David. The phrase, "yet for the sake of David," or its equivalent is often repeated in Scripture in conjunction with sparing kings from the judgment they deserved (see 1 Kings 11:12; 2 Kings 8:19). Our failures in life will not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Finally, remember Peter who on the day of Jesus' trial openly denied knowing His Lord. Cursing at those who accused him of being a follower of Christ, Peter refused to

associate himself with his Master and Lord. Despite Peter's denial of Christ, God's commitment to Peter never faltered. He would be restored and used in a powerful way for the sake of the kingdom. On the day of Pentecost, Peter would preach a message that brought 3,000 people to faith in the Lord Jesus. God had not abandoned him.

Will your response to trials and tribulations separate you from His love for you? Have you spoken evil about God and questioned His purpose like Job? Have you fallen into adultery or committed murder or failed as a father like David? Have you denied Jesus like Peter? Men and women before us have failed in like manner. In their failures and sins, however, they have also testified to the unfailing love of God and His commitment to them even in their failure. "In all these things" we are more than conquerors through Christ who loves us.

"We are more than Conquerors through Him"

Paul goes on to tell us that in all the trials and struggles of life we are "more than conquerors." Job, David and Peter were conquerors. This did not mean that they did not fall. They were struck by the enemy's arrows as they battled. They stumbled on the battle field. Sometimes they even felt despair. They had to pick themselves up off the ground but they kept going and in the strength of their Lord, won the battle. 1 Samuel 30:6 speaks of David in one of those times of distress.

And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

Notice how Paul tells us that we are “more” than conquerors. What does it mean to be “more” than a conqueror? This implies that the strength and authority at our disposal far outweighs any trial the enemy could ever throw at us. The Lord God provides us with more than we need to conquer. Have you fallen? There is forgiveness in Christ (1 John 1:9). Do you need wisdom? God gives it generously (James 1:5). He strengthens us to do all He calls us to do (Philippians 4:13). He provides all you need for a life of victory (Philippians 4:19). His supply far outweighs your need.

There is one more detail we need to consider. Notice how Paul moves from the question of what can separate us from the love of God to a discussion on being more than conquerors. There is a connection in the mind of the apostle between these two ideas. To be loved of God in such a way is to be more than a conqueror.

Listen to how Jude begins his epistle in Jude 1:1

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.

Notice the phrase, “beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ.” Those God loves He keeps. This does not mean they do not struggle and fall along the way. Despite our failures, however, God's love for us remains and we are kept for Christ. His Son's work in our life will not be in vain. God keeps all His Son saves.

Peter, who knew what it was like to deny the Lord Jesus, says something similar:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

See once again the connection between God's great mercy and love and His commitment to guard our inheritance in heaven for us. Because He loves us, God's power guards us.

The love of God for us is such that He commits Himself to us. Consider what Paul wrote to the Philippians:

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6).

By choosing to love us, God obligates Himself to care for us. In love He provides all that is necessary for us to be victorious. Our victory in this life is not so much a result of our efforts to please God but about His commitment to us. We owe our victory to Him who loves and cares for us. He promises that He will not leave us:

It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." (Deuteronomy 31:8)

From before we were born to the time we die, He will carry us:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made and I will bear; I will carry and will save. (Isaiah 46:3-4)

What confidence the love of God ought to give us! We will fall. We will sin. We will at times be unfaithful to Him but His love for us will never change.

What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! (Romans 3:3-4)

What is our response to such undeserved love? There may be those who seek to take advantage of it but the normal response of the heart to such love is to love in return? The love of God is demonstrated in what He does for us. He gave His Son; He gives us His Holy Spirit. He opens the store house of heaven and makes all its resources available to us. The enemy cannot stand against such power and wisdom. We are more than conquerors, not because we are strong in ourselves, but because of Him who surrounds us with such love.

For Consideration:

- Does being more than a conqueror mean that we will never fall into sin?
- Job, David and Peter were conquerors. Were they sinless? How did they fall into sin? Did this change God's commitment to them?

- What is the Father's commitment to us?
- What is the connection between the love of God for us and the fact that we are more than conquerors? Do we conquer because of our own strength or because of God's love?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the forgiveness He offers through His Son Jesus.
- Thank the Lord that you can be a conqueror because of His love and commitment to you. Thank Him for the strength He provides.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to respond to the love of God by loving and surrendering to Him.

9

I AM SURE

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. (Romans 8:38-39)

Paul concludes his reflections in verses 38-39. In these two final verses, he makes a list of ten specific things he is sure cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. We will examine these briefly in this final chapter.

Paul begins in verse 38 with the words, “I am sure.” The word translated “sure” in the English Standard Version of the Bible has the sense of being convinced, having confidence or being persuaded. It is a strong word that conveys absolute assurance. There is no room for doubt on this matter in the mind of Paul. He would be willing to stake his life on the truth he is conveying in these verses. This assurance comes as a result of Paul’s understanding of the person of Christ and His commitment to the believer. Let’s take a moment to examine the ten things that cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Death

Paul begins by telling us that death cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The context of Romans 8 tells us that believers will have to face struggles and trials in life. Some will even lay their lives down for the sake of the Lord Jesus. This was what happened to Stephen. In Acts 7 the Jews of Stephen's day picked up stones to stone him to death. The Lord revealed His presence to Stephen at that time and in Acts 7:56:

And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

When they stoned him, as he was about to die, Stephen cried out to this Lord Jesus he saw in heaven: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Stephen's violent death was not a separation from God's love. While sinners lashed out at him, the Lord Jesus received him into His presence where he would be protected and secure in His love forever. Death has no ultimate power over the believer. The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians said:

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55-56)

The sting of death has been removed from those who love the Lord Jesus. Death is but a stepping stone into His arms of love.

Life

Paul goes on to tell us that life cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. There are times when death is easier than life. Consider for a moment what sin has done to this earth on which we live. Pain and illness have ravaged our bodies. Natural catastrophes strip us of our possessions, comfort and security. Loved ones pass away, leaving us lonely and grieving. Our children, enticed by the lure of this world, fall into immorality, drugs and addictions of all kinds. Life at times can be overwhelming.

The apostle Paul knew what it was like to live for Christ in this world. He speaks of the problems he encountered in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. In those verses, he reminded the Corinthian believers that he had been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and often in dangers. He had been robbed and in danger from false brothers who sought his life. He also knew what it was like to be without food and water.

Consider David in the Old Testament, who, for years ran from King Saul who sought to kill him. He lived in caves and his life was constantly in danger. Of all the characters in the Old Testament, David was a man of praise and worship. His love for God and God's love for him was obvious.

Hebrews 11:36-38 describes men and women of faith who, out of love and devotion, refused to deny their Lord:

Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated—of whom the world

was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Jesus tells us that as the days of His return draw near there will be an increase of persecution on the earth.

Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:21-22)

The apostle Paul tells us that even when life strikes us with its worst blow, the love of God remains strong. We can be sure that no matter what happens to us, God still loves us. Paul was absolutely convinced of this. As an apostle who suffered tremendously for the cause of Christ, he knew this to be true in his own experience.

Sin has devastated this earth. The effect of sin on this earth and in the lives of its inhabitants causes us pain and suffering. In the midst of this evil, the love of God reaches out to us. It is our comfort and strength and motivation.

Angels

Paul tells us thirdly that angels cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Angels were created by God as heavenly beings. Scripture teaches us that there are angels who live in heaven, worshipping and serving the Lord. Other angels seem to work on this earth. There are also fallen angels who rebelled against God and now serve Satan in his evil purposes on this earth. Peter tells

us that angels are stronger and more powerful than human beings:

Yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord. (2 Peter 2:11, NIV)

Kings 19:35 shows us the power of these angels:

And that night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, there were all dead bodies.

A single angel, in one night, slaughtered 185,000 soldiers! When Peter was in prison in Acts 12, an angel appeared to him, told him to get up and leave his cell. As Peter responded to the angel's command, the chains that bound him fell off his hand and he walked out of the locked prison without being noticed by the guards (see Acts 12:7-11). This shows us that these angels are capable of doing what is not natural for us to do in the flesh.

Fallen angels use their power to undermine the work of God's kingdom. They are often the source of problems and conflicts in this world. They influence and deceive leaders and governments for the sake of evil. Revelation 12:9 tells us that they seek to deceive the whole world:

The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:9)

As powerful as these angels are, Paul tells us that not one of them can separate us from the love of God. They may seek to hinder us in our walk with God. They may throw obstacles on our path but they cannot change or take away God's loving commitment to us.

Rulers

In the course of history, political and religious leaders have done much in an attempt to destroy the work of Christ. When Jesus was born, King Herod sought to kill Him. To do this, he decided to kill all male children in Bethlehem two years of age and under. The religious leader of Jesus' day put Jesus on a cross. Across this world there are countries where rulers have made it difficult for believers to worship or serve the Lord Jesus. This is not only the case in countries where religious freedom is restricted but also in countries where there is freedom to practice one's faith. There seems to be less tolerance of Christian principles and morals even in countries that pride themselves in religious freedom.

Rulers and governments are not always governed by Christian principles. The Bible is no longer the authority by which decisions are made in our nations. We can expect to see opposition to the principles of God's Word. Believers who stand by those principles will struggle with rulers and the laws of their land.

Paul reminds us, however, that no ruler or authority on this earth can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. They may make being a follower of Jesus difficult. They may persecute us for our faith but they cannot take God's love from us. Even in the midst of the most difficult oppression by rulers, the believer can know and experience God's love and tender care. In fact, some of the strongest

believers I know live in countries where faith is restricted by rulers. These believers have much to teach me about their experience of God's love in these difficult situations.

Things present

Paul speaks next about "things present." This is a very general expression. "Things present" includes anything we can see around us today. As you take a look around you, what do you see? This will be different for each of us, depending on where we live. As I look around me I see materialism. I also see greed and lust for power and wealth. I see the watering down of faith and the turning away from God's Word as the standard for life and faith.

Paul is telling us here that none of these things can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. It is important that we understand here that our experience of that love may vary, depending on where we are in our relationship with God. The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 tells of a young man who left his father and went to live an immoral life on his own. He separated himself from the father because of the pull of his flesh. He wasted his inheritance and ended up with nothing. When he returned home, however, he was overwhelmed by the love of his father who greeted him with open arms.

Yes, "things present" may tempt you and pull you away from God for a time but that will not change the love of God for you. He continues to love you. He continues to reach out to you. In love, He will not leave you. He will pursue you like He did the lost sheep of Luke 15. You may resist Him because of the attraction of "things present" but you can never keep Him from loving you.

Things to Come

Not only will things present not separate us from the love of God but Paul tells us that neither will “things to come.” None of us knows what tomorrow holds. Great temptations or great evil may be unleashed into our lives. We may face struggles we never thought we would ever have to face. Paul was so confident in the love of God, that he was willing to make this very bold statement. Nothing that could ever happen to us will be able to separate us from the love of God. Satan can unleash tremendous evil onto this earth, but he will not be able to change how God feels toward us. We may fall into sin and fail miserably, but God will still love us. My experience of that love and the intimacy I enjoy with God can certainly vary, but God’s love is constant and strong. He died for us when we were His enemies, will He not love us now that we are His children?

None of us knows what will happen to us in the years to come. I have seen believers who seemed to be so close to the Lord one day and so far away the next. I have met believers who stood firmly for the truth of the Word of God who have now wandered into error. I have known believers whose pride has been their downfall. I have had friends who have fallen into sexual immorality and wandered from the path God had for them. How easy it is for us to think that we would never fall into any such sin. The reality of the matter is that we can all fall. How thankful we need to be that our failures will not change God’s love for us. His heart is broken for those who fall. He grieves for them. He will not abandon them in their sin. He will pursue them like a lost child. His love will reach out to them in their need.

Powers

The seventh thing that will not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus is described as “powers.” The word used in this verse is the Greek word “*dynamis*”. The word refers to miraculous powers or mighty works. These powers may take on many different forms. In some cases, the power can come from false teachers. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 24:24 when He said:

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

These signs and wonders are attributed to false prophets. They lead people astray and sometimes keep them from becoming all God intended them to become. What is the response of God to those who have been led astray by these powers? Listen to what God says through Ezekiel about those who were led astray by false shepherds in his day:

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. “For

thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:7-16)

God's people had been led astray by false shepherds who were taking advantage of them. God's anger was aroused because of these shepherds and in love He reached out to His sheep and cared for them Himself. The fact that they had wandered from the fold, did not change the love of God for His sheep.

The powers referred to here by Paul may also come from demonic sources. Revelation 13:11-14 describe this power of the beast that came out of the earth:

Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a

dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

Notice the power given to this beast. It performed great signs, bringing down fire from heaven. It was sent to deceive the inhabitants of the earth and to slay those who would not worship the beast who came out of the sea. Who would not fear such power? This power is not from God but from Satan. Around us in this world there is evidence of such power. It is exercised through witchcraft and other such occult practices. While it is a power to be feared, it cannot separate us from God's love and tender care. Our God is stronger than these powers. No power of hell can keep God from loving us and caring for us. We can rest in this assurance when evil powers are unleashed around us.

Height

Notice in verse 39 that Paul tells us that no "height" can keep us from the love of God. He does not tell us particularly what he means by this. What is important for us to understand is that there is no place God's love cannot reach us. There are many ways we can understand this term "height." Consider the fact that God is far above us.

Scripture speaks of God being in heaven and us being on the earth. Listen to what the Psalmist tells us in Psalm 102:18-19

Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD: that he looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die.

From the heights of heaven, the Lord looked down to the earth to set the prisoners free. He is far above us but He will reach down in love.

Sometimes it is us as human beings who lift ourselves up. This was the case of the people the prophet Obadiah spoke to in his book. Listen to what he told them in Obadiah 3-4:

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down declares the Lord.

How often has pride lifted us up and kept us from fellowship with God. In our pride, we have believed that we did not need God and we separated ourselves from Him. Speaking to the people of Obadiah's day, the Lord reminded them that He would bring them down. Paul tells us that he had a "thorn in his flesh" to keep him humble:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. (2 Corinthians 12:7)

God would not let Paul get so high that he no longer experienced the love of God and his need for Him every day. It was God's desire to keep Paul in fellowship with Him. God sees us from heaven and reaches down to us. He sees us in our pride and brings us down to where we can again know and experience His love. Though we lift ourselves up and turn from God in our pride, He will not forget us. He will reach out to us in love.

Depth

If heights cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, neither can depths. In our human experiences, we can descend emotionally to great depths. There have been times in my life when I have asked the Lord that if He was finished with me to take me home to be with Him because I did not feel I wanted to go on any longer. Sometimes we can descend to great depths of sin and rebellion against God. In our pride, we can turn our back on God and His purpose for our lives. We can wander and fall into great sin, hurting many people in the process. Jesus descends into this depth to find us. He pursues us in our sin and rebellion. He was known as the friend of sinners and touched people the religious leaders of the day refused to touch. Maybe you have descended so low you wonder if anyone could ever love you. Paul tells us that he was absolutely confident that there was no depth that could ever separate us from the love of God in His Son Christ Jesus. No matter how far we wander, no matter how deep the pit, His arm of love reaches out to us.

Anything in all Creation

Paul concludes with this final thought. He was convinced that there was nothing in all of creation that could ever separate us from the love of God. What is there on this universe that was not created? Everything that exists was created by God. The world as we know it and even Satan and all his angels are created beings. Nothing in all of this creation can separate us from God's love.

Recognize also that you and I are created beings. This means that I cannot even separate myself from the love of God. I cannot make Him stop loving me. I am not saying that we should therefore do as we please. This would be foolish. I have the ability to stand in front of a speeding car but it would be foolish to do so. Who in their right mind would want to separate themselves from the experience of God's love?

While God's love for us remains strong in every circumstance of life, my experience of that love can vary. I can enter into the experience of that love and enjoy it or I can turn my back on God and know very little of this love. The question is not whether God loves us as His children, it is whether we are willing to open our heart to the fullness of that love and respond in loving surrender to Him in return.

If there is one thing I would like this study to accomplish in the life of the reader it would be to see the incredible commitment of the Lord God to those who belong to Him. He has done everything to rescue us from sin and now commits Himself to all who accept the work of His Son Jesus Christ. He will never stop loving His children. He will never stop pursuing them.

As a child of God you are loved and cared for with an eternal and unconditional love. Will you open your heart to this love? Will you surrender to it and experience its fullness? As unworthy as we may feel, God's great delight is to love us and pour Himself into us. May we surrender to this love. May we make it our lifelong commitment to know and walk in this love.

For Consideration:

- Is there anything Paul does not cover in verses 38-39? Is there anything that can separate us from the love of God in Christ?
- What is the difference between being loved and experiencing love? Can we be loved and not really experience that love? What hinders our experience of love?
- Does opposition or pain mean that God does not love me? Explain.
- Does God still love me when I fall into sin?
- What should be our response to the unfailing and unconditional love of God?
- Does knowing that God loves me no matter what happens mean that I should feel free to live however I want?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the assurance of His love in all situations.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have wandered from Him and turned your back on His love. Thank Him that he did not give up on you.

- Ask the Lord to teach you to live in the fullness of His love. Ask Him to give you such a gratitude for this love that your heart wells up in praise and devotion to Him in return.

A FINAL WORD

In the course of this study we have seen salvation from God's perspective. Paul reminds us of how God set us free from the requirements of the Old Testament law and he shows us the investment of God in our lives. Paul was confident that God would preserve and mature what He invested in us.

We do not deserve such grace and favor. The Father, however, adopts us as His children and showers us with every blessing. He covers our condemnation and defends us against the accusations of the enemy. His commitment to love us is unconditional and eternal. Nothing can separate us from His love. He forgives us, He loves us, and He keeps us. This is His commitment to us. If salvation depended on me, I could have no ultimate assurance. The reality of the matter, however, is that my salvation depends not on me but on what God alone has done.

Can you trust Him today? Can you cast yourself fully on Him for His protection and keeping? Your assurance of salvation will never come from human efforts to please God. It must always come from God and His grace in your life. I owe my salvation completely to God. He is the one who forgave my sin. He is the one who empowers me to

live for Him. He is the one who will keep me. From beginning to end I owe everything to Him.

What is my role in all this? It is to cling to Him and to what He has done for me. It is to surrender to Him and to His work in my life. It is to allow Him to complete in me what He has begun through Jesus Christ. Will you open your heart to Him anew today? Will you say, "Lord, I am yours do with me what you will."?

If you have never come to the Lord for the forgiveness of your sin, take a moment right now to confess your sin. Ask Jesus to forgive you and accept you as His child. Open your heart to Him and to what He wants to do in you. Cling to Him alone and to His promises for your salvation.

Romans 8:31-39 offers us an assurance based on a God who cannot fail. It places our salvation on a solid rock that cannot be moved though the forces of hell and this life rage against it. There on that foundation that cannot be moved, we can have absolute assurance and confidence that we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

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