

Sermons through

# Romans

## More Than Conquerors

*Romans 8:33-39*

*Part 5*

*The Love of God in Christ Jesus*

*Romans 8:37-39*

*With Study Questions*

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**Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> *Who is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. <sup>35</sup> *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."* <sup>37</sup> Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:33-39).**

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### **What God Has Joined Together**

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians the Apostle Paul compares the Christian faith to a marriage. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and wives are to put themselves under the care of their husbands the way the church is called to trust Christ. Jesus taught elsewhere that each individual marriage is an orchestration by God and **"What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mark 10:9).**

Of course we see failures in this quite frequently. This is due partially to general human sin and weakness—infractions of the marital vows by one or both parties. But it is also due to a diminished understanding of the nature of the relationship. The passage just quoted in Mark is preceded by Jesus teaching that the husband and the wife are **“no longer two but one flesh” (Mark 10:8).**

We makes jokes about the two being one when we take cuts in the potluck line and we seem to somewhat grasp the concept but I fear we don't always take it to heart. Our failure to appreciate the oneness we have in and with Christ undermines our marriages and vice-versa—our failure to appreciate the oneness we have with our spouses undermines the picture it is to give regarding our very faith.

Paul presses the analogy in Ephesians where he admonishes husbands to love their...

**...wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church (Ephesians 5:28, 29).**

Following this illustration, one would no more consider walking away from a marriage than they would consider cutting off a perfectly healthy arm or leg. Even the cases of justifiable divorce we see in Scripture (adultery and desertion) are not the person walking away from the marriage but going through the proper (and usually heartbreaking) channels of determining that the perpetrator has walked away from their covenantal vows.

Yet we live in a culture where people walk away all the time for less than sufficient/biblical reasons. Although they might use a traditional vow such as “as long as we both shall live,” what they mean is “as long as you keep me happy.” The marriage is often entered into with that focus.

Even premarital counseling (which can be very helpful) often, unwittingly, caters to this. It can revolve out issues of compatibility. This is not necessarily a bad idea. It can be illuminating to discover things about yourself and potential spouse which may be points of difficulty. But there is no

guarantee that the issues of compatibility when you're 23 and 25 are going to be the same issues of compatibility when you're 33 and 35 with four children.

All this to say that in the minds of many, marriage has been reduced to a complicated form of living together—of shacking up as it has been said, provided both parties live up to the expectations of their spouses. One is hard-pressed to think of an unhealthier disposition to carry through a marriage than the daily threat of defection. We don't think of our bodies this way—as if my rib cage will leave if my femur spends too much money. We don't generally even think of our children that way. It is easier to think of them as the **“flesh of my (our) flesh” (Genesis 2:23)**, a phrase designed to capture the relationship between man and wife.

## **A Covenant—A Promise**

But it is the marriage which provides the most appropriate picture of the gospel—the relationship between Christ and His church—because it is not based upon genetics, whether it is my own actual flesh or my children. Marriage is the best picture because it is based upon a covenant; its foundation is that of promise—of vows or oaths.

When the author of the Hebrews sought to instill strong encouragement into his readers to hold fast to the hope set before them, he didn't appeal to genetics or ethnicity or any other human attribute but to God's character and oath.

**For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope**

**that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 6:16-20).**

Jesus, as the divine spouse, has made a promise to His bride —**“I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5)** We see a similar promise given to Jacob, Israel, Joshua, Solomon (Genesis 28:15; Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5; 1 Chronicles 28:20). There is simply not a comparable spouse in all of creation. His conviction and faithfulness for His bride breaks beyond the borders of our contemplations.

May I submit that the feeble nature of our assurance (the certainty that we are saved and forever will be) is due, in part, to our neglect in understanding that the inseparable unity that we enjoy from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord is grounded in His unfailing commitment to us over and above our commitment to Him. Jesus sees Himself as the true spouse, where we, often times, think of ourselves as merely living together—we think God might leave us if He grows weary of us or maybe we’ll leave if things get tough or something better comes along.

## **The Fruit of His Covenant**

Of course someone might object, saying “But aren’t we to be committed to Christ? Are we not called to a life faith and repentance?” And certainly the answer is ‘yes’. But this is where the message becomes remarkable—that our commitment, our faith, our repentance (our side of the deal—however you want to put it) is not merely our thoughtful response to God’s wonderful offer. No, our commitment is the necessary fruit of His commitment.

We choose because we have been chosen (John 15:16, 19); we love because we have been loved (1 John 4:19); we seek to apprehend Christ because He has apprehended us (Philippians 3:12). How else could the apostle enter into this most formidable list of opponents (death, life, angels, powers, etc.) with such a

solid conviction of their inability to accomplish that which they seem hell-bent on achieving? When Paul writes **“I am persuaded”** *pepeismai* in verse 38, he doesn’t mean mildly convinced but firmly assured.

I don’t think it is necessary to pursue a detailed analysis of this list of opponents. The list is not exhaustive but it is designed to represent that which is exhaustive. Simply put, nothing in **“death nor life”** has the power to sever the bonds of this divine matrimony. If all the **“angels”** *angeloi* (and here he main mean fallen angels) **“rulers”** *arche*, **“powers”** *dynameis* in the **“present”** or in the future from the **“height”** of heaven or the **“depth”** of hell marshaled all their energies to wrench us from the hands of Christ, it would be an exercise in futility on their part.

In light of these things it becomes perplexing how anyone can possibly draw the conclusion that our success in salvation is left, even to the slightest degree, to the strength, will, power, intellect or goodness of our own fallen hearts? Those holding this position offer a take on this passage that bears brief discussion.

### **My Own Will—My Own Choice**

It has been said that what we see conspicuously absent from the list is the human will—“those outside forces will fail,” it is proposed, “but what of my own self, my own choice?” They say this as if their own will does not fall under the category of **“any other created thing” (Romans 8:39).**

With all due respect, I fear these people miss the point of Paul’s encouragement. For if we are dependent upon the unfortified will of un-tethered human choice, which of us when barraged with the unvarnished forces of legal charges, condemnation, angels, principalities, powers and death itself, have the fortitude to stand? If these enemies perceived one iota of unassisted human volition, would they not pounce upon it like syringe of poison—a gateway to the crumbling of our entire souls?

The great promise that we shall never find ourselves separated from the love of God contains, within that promise, His gracious preserving of our faith, which is the instrument through which our redemption is applied. Nothing can separate us from the love of God because we are **“in Christ Jesus” (Romans**

**8:39).** We are His very body (Colossians 1:18). T. R. Schreiner aptly states:

**Affliction, persecution, famine, death, and so on are mentioned because these are the sorts of things that would cause a believer to renounce faith in Christ.<sup>1</sup>**

Let us be clear, it is not through the will, might, effort of power of man that the oppressed and persecuted saint can claim such a victorious title, but **“through Him who loved us.”** The height and the depth of darkness are no match for the boundless **“width and length and depth and height”** of God’s love communicated to the saints in Christ (Ephesians 3:18).

### **But I Don’t Feel the Power**

I’m guessing most of us don’t feel quite that strong. Even in light of Paul’s glorious revelation of the power at work within us—God’s ability to **“do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20)**—we don’t feel that kind of power at all! Sometimes people search for the power through special spiritual gifts or high powered prayer meetings or church services, yet it is intermittent and elusive.

We seldom consider, in the face of our own depravity, the power of God already executed on our behalf—a power that triumphed not only over the devil (Colossians 2:15) but over our naturally recalcitrant hearts. That we believe at all is abundant evidence of the power of God already unleashed.

### **More Than Conquerors**

I have entitled this five-part series *More Than Conquerors* and I would like to conclude with a short look at what that phrase could possibly mean. With all the difficulties and enemies brought into the spectrum of the apostles’ discussion you might think that he would say something like “in spite of all these things we are

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<sup>1</sup> Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Romans* (Vol. 6, p. 466). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

more than conquerors.” He rather says **“in all these things”** *en toutois pasin* believers are more than conquerors or beyond conquerors *hypernikomen*—literally hyper-conquerors. How so?

I have a relative who is a DEA agent. He was telling me of a training program he was involved in where the instructor was advising the young law enforcement agents to “empty the canoe.” This was designed to aid in overcoming the natural frustrations that come when engaging the criminal element. The illustration is meant to give a picture of being in a canoe in a lake and being continually bumped into by a person in another canoe. You’re going to begin getting frustrated and angry with that person because they just keep bumping into your canoe.

But if the other canoe has no person in it—if it’s an empty canoe simply moved by the tide, it still may be an annoyance, but there is no one to be angry at; it’s just the current. I appreciated the picture given there. But Paul goes well beyond the image of an empty canoe. In a ocean full of hostile canoes God has ordained every canoe, every captain of every canoe and every ripple of every current to direct our canoes—our very hearts and souls—to the precise destination of His purpose—which is to be **“conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29).**

This is a choice made by God according to His own divine pleasure and purpose in eternity past. It is a chain that cannot be broken (Romans 8:29, 30) neither by the power of hell nor the weakness of sinners. He will not forsake His bride for whom He gave Himself. He has made a covenant to sanctify, cleanse, wash and present her to Himself a glorious church without **“spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:26, 27).**



## Questions for Study

- 1 In what ways is the Christian faith like a marriage? How does our view of marriage affect our faith and vice-versa (pages 2, 3)?
- 2 Why is marriage such an appropriate picture of the gospel? How does the author of Hebrews encourage his readers (pages 4, 5)?
- 3 How does a proper understanding of the marriage analogy aid in our assurance (page 5)?
- 4 How can we be confident that all those enemies of which the Apostle Paul writes will not succeed in separating us from the love of (pages 5, 6)?
- 5 Is it possible that the one thing that can separate us from the love of God is our own will? Explain (pages 6, 7)?
- 6 Why do you suppose you don't feel the power of which the Apostle writes (page 7)?
- 7 In what respect are God's children More Than Conquerors (pages 7, 8)?

