

Today's Sermon

The Love of God

Romans 8:34-39

Pastor Corey Millican, GCBC, March 6, 2022

When we worship God for his various attributes, it's important to remember that though we are adoring one facet of the diamond, so to speak, that we do so in relation to the other attributes! Just like you can't really appreciate the radiance of one facet of a diamond, without the others letting in light to make it sparkle - God's love is inseparably connected to his other attributes: wrath, jealousy, kindness, faithfulness, holiness, etc. So it is with God's love.

A Missionary who knew God's love

There was a missionary born in 1794 - Allen Gardiner - missionary in many places, but notably on Patagonia, where Charles Darwin had researched and found the people too evil in his first encounter (and then noticed a vast difference after Allen had been there). Allen experienced many physical difficulties and hardships throughout his service to the Savior. Despite his troubles, he said, "While God gives me strength, failure will not daunt me."

In 1851, at the age of 57, he died of disease and starvation while serving on Picton Island at the southern tip of South America. When his body was found, his diary lay nearby. It bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds, and loneliness. The last entry in his little book showed the struggle of his shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God."

This is the context of Romans 5-8 for how Paul expresses the attribute of God's love. The context is Paul dealing with one of the issues that Christian's (especially early on) struggle with the most - even some who have been following Christ for many years! **ASSURANCE**. That is "uncertainty about the reality of our faith and genuineness of God's love for us. This is the 'problem' of assurance."¹ And, trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword - all give a terrible feel for the range of pain of the "sufferings of this present time" (8:18). But, we need to remember - as those who are in Christ - that Romans 8 begins with 'no condemnation' by the wrath of God (v. 1) and ends with 'no separation' from the love of God in Christ (v. 39).² This is the unbreakable tie that binds us to Him forever as we struggle through this life, on our way to glory.

What is Love?

We read in 1 John 4:8 that "God is love". The highest type and form of love mentioned in the New Testament is that love captured in the Greek term *agape*. This love is **self-giving**, even **sacrificial love**. And this is the love that describes this attribute of God. The **self-sacrificial quality** of God's love can be seen in the gift of the Son by the Father, in the **self-sacrificial death** of the Son for those who were at enmity with Him, and in the new life He freely and sovereignly gave to those dead in their transgressions and sins.

Love is so central to His being that the apostle John can say "God is love." John is not limiting God's essence to love—he is not saying "Love is God." He is affirming that love is central to all that God is and does.

We know what his love is, and we know that He loves us. But, how does God love us currently? And, as we battle to believe in the finished work of Christ, when the unfinished work of

¹ Ferguson, Sinclair B. *Maturity: Growing Up and Going On in the Christian Life* (57)

² Ash, Christopher. *Teaching Romans: Unlocking Romans 1 - 8 for the Bible Teacher* (Teaching series) (Kindle Locations 3229-3230).

sanctification can be so discouraging, is it possible that Satan or circumstances or sins could possibly upend or overturn this love?

This morning we will see the glorious attribute of God's love, and the greatest exercise of his love is his sustaining work of those He has redeemed with his Son's precious blood. Let's turn our attention now to **the unbreakable tie that holds us** seen in Romans 8:34-39, God's love for us in Christ.

We will notice three things about God's love from Romans 8:34-39 - **the grand "so what?"** of Romans 5-8.

1. Christ is loving us now - "...separate us from the Love of Christ?" (v.34 & 35a)

Illustration: A husband or wife might say of their spouse who has gone on to glory: "Nothing could separate me from their love!" She might mean that the memory of his love will be sweet and near and powerful all her life. But that is not what Paul means here when he says, "*Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ.*"

Question: Why can Paul say in verse 35 that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ? Is this just some kind of cheesy, sentimental, emotional "bandaid"...a throw away statement?

How does he know that? The reason Paul can say that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ is because of the objective, historical display of that love of God for us in the cross of Christ.

Romans 5:8

"But God is demonstrating (Present, Indicative, Active, 3rd, Singular)³ His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

And, because Jesus resurrected from the dead, and is alive.
In Romans 8:34 it says plainly,

"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."

And so, He is still loving us right now.

He is at the right hand of God and is therefore ruling for us.

He is interceding for us, which means he is seeing to it that his finished work of redemption does in fact rescue and save us hour by hour, and bring us safely to our eternal home.

And, as Romans 8:22 tells us, anything that might be lost or destroyed here in Christ is made up for and will be restored in the new earth!

His love is not just a memory - like ours, of a loved one. It is a moment-by-moment action by the omnipotent, living Son of God, to bring us to everlasting joy and rest.

Often, we think of what Jesus did for us at the cross. And this is glorious - who could deny that? But, we must also remember how He is loving us even now; what is He doing? Even now, He sits at the right hand of His Father, and "He always lives to make intercession for those whom He loves and has saved.

³ "Note the present tense. God continuously establishes His love in that the death of Christ remains as its most striking manifestation." - Vincent's Word Studies.

"Any accuser—Satan, circumstances, sins—shrivels in stature alongside the risen Christ who is interceding for us at God's right hand." (Robert W. Yarbrough)

How might Christ be praying for us? Look through John 17 for Jesus' prayer requests...

2. This love of Christ is effective in protecting us from separation ("remove/depart") (v. 35, 39) God's love described in Romans 8 is a specific love for his people (not universal for all) — that is, those who, according to Romans 8:28, "love God and are called according to his purpose." This is a particular love.

This is the love of Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." It is Christ's love for the church, his bride. Christ has a love for all, and he has a special, saving, preserving love for his bride. You know you are part of that bride if you trust Christ. Anyone — no exceptions — anyone who trusts Christ can say, "I am part of his bride, his church, his called and chosen ones, the ones who, according to Romans 8:35, are kept and protected forever no matter what."

3. This love does not spare us from calamities in this life, but brings us safely through them to everlasting joy with God (vv. 36, 38, 39)

What kinds of things does Paul have in mind? Well, there's no peril, or disaster can separate us from the "love of God in Christ"?:

"Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"

36 As it is written,

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

He quotes Psalm 44 in verse 36 - a Psalm of suffering in the life of God's people (probably in exile). Paul makes the Psalmist's testimony his own.

Death will happen to us, but it will not separate us.

Death will happen to us, but it will not destroy us - because of Christ's powerful work of love in the past and right now, we win.

In fact, Paul coins a new phrase/word (**hyper-nikao**) - "**we are super conquerors**" (*Pres. Ind. Act. 1st, Pl*). So when Paul says in verse 35 & 39 that the "sword", or accusers, or circumstances will not separate us from the love of Christ, he means: even if we are killed, we are not separated from the love of Christ.

So the sum of the matter in verse 35-39 is this: Jesus Christ is right now powerfully loving his people with omnipotent, moment-by-moment love that does not always rescue us from disaster but protects and preserves us for everlasting joy in his presence even through suffering and death.

Closing Illustration:

Sometimes it can be difficult for us to comprehend these attributes of God - something like Jesus interceding for us right now, or God loving us and caring for us when so many things seem to go wrong in our lives. Pain. Suffering. Betrayal.

Maybe you're thinking: "I don't know if I've ever tasted the goodness and love of God..."

To you who say you have never tasted the love and goodness of God, I say, you have tasted many of its appetizers. Have you ever looked up at the sky? Have you ever been hugged? Have you ever sat in front of a warm fire? Have you ever walked in the woods, sat by a lake, lain in a summer hammock? Have you ever drunk your favorite drink on a hot day or eaten anything good? Every desire is either a devout or a distorted enticement to the glory of heaven. You say you haven't tasted God's glory. I say, you have tasted the appetizers. Go on to the meal. Go on to God himself.⁴ ...come to Christ, and He will love you with an undying love; protecting your joy in Him forever by His grace.

God's heart is large and open to you, through His Son. Do not wait to draw near to Him!

Matt 11:28-30 - "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Transition:

God's faithful love is the source of our hope of forgiveness (Neh. 9:17). God's love enables us to approach Him and worship in His presence with reverent fear (Ps. 5:7). God's love endures "forever" (1 Chron. 16:34, 41; 2 Chron. 5:13; 7:3, 6; 20:21). In His love God pursues elect sinners as a husband pursues an unfaithful wife to bring her back to Himself (Hos. 3:1; cf. Isa. 54:1–10). He chooses to "love them freely" so that their backsliding is healed, His anger is propitiated, and His new life makes them fruitful (Hos. 14:4–8). Praise God for His relentless, pursuing love of sinners!⁵

In all these things" (v. 37; see v. 35) that could seem to defeat God's people, God and the "elect" (v. 33) whom he loves remain united and inseparable, now and forever (vv. 38–39). This is God's love on display...he will not let you go!

Application:

Love others fervently and sacrificially in the church of Christ (Eph. 4:32; 1 Peter 1:22). The gospel both reveals God's love and prompts us to love each other as God loved us (1 John 4:10–11). Do you see this love for the church in you - examine yourself for practical fruits of love.

How has love cost you time, money, and energy? John says, "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Worship God for His love. This was the response of Moses when the Lord proclaimed His goodness and the greatness of His love: "And immediately, Moses bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped" (Ex. 34:8).

"Give thanks to him, and bless his name, For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever; and his faithfulness/truth to all generations" (Ps. 100:4–5). How can those of us whom He bought with His blood do any less?

⁴ John Piper, Devotional excerpted from "God's Ultimate Purpose: Vessels of Mercy Knowing the Riches of His Glory"
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/go-on-to-the-meal>

⁵ Beeke, Joel R. . None Else: 31 Meditations on God's Character and Attributes (pp. 88-89). Reformation Heritage Books.