

Romans 8:38-39 (NKJV) (sing a debtor to mercy and how firm a foundation)

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Focus on these two verses:

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

39 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.

Last week we looked at all the things that cannot separate us from the love of Christ. They are **extreme circumstances**. And the Apostle Paul knew what he was talking about. He had been through them. It is easy to forget in the relative comfort of **our lives** just what **his life** consisted of. What we believe in **theory** he had tested **in reality**. We see examples of every one of the dangers listed in verse 35 faced by Paul multiple times. And he could say that in all these things **we are more than conquerors, or we are winning a most glorious victory**.

And remember, we are winning that victory, not by our superior will power or our prowess at living wisely. No, we are winning the victory **through Christ who loved us**. And do you remember the verb tense used here? It is aorist. He loved us once in the past and that love has accomplished our good forever. Aorist- once and done.

Note that we are conquerors **through Him who loved us** in verse 37. Note also the reference to **the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**. Everywhere you go you find people who don't hesitate to talk about the love of God in glowing terms. They describe a general **good will** exuding from some kind of superior power. And they will tell you that this goodwill is a source of very positive things. And we are supposed to believe that we can all come together under this big **love umbrella** and serve this **kind** God together, no matter what name we might give to this God.

Well, this type of nonsense was not new in Paul's day either. So he defines exactly what he means by the love of God. He is talking specifically about the love of God **that sent His perfect son** to die for a bunch of **absolutely reprobate and disgusting sinners like you and me**. When **we** start defining the love of God like

Paul defined the love of God, we will find our **list of friends** grow shorter and shorter and we will find the **hatred** of our enemies **intensify**. Most people don't want to hear that this is **the only kind of love** that will allow them to commune with God. Most people don't want to hear that they fully deserve the wrath of God and that God will most certainly deliver it to them. And so most people will not submit to **the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**. They will not bend their knee and confess, "God save me the sinner". They will be too busy saying, really, I am not that bad. In fact I'm not near as bad as a lot of Christians I know.. bla bla bla. If you are not in Christ this morning, if you view the love of God as something other than a situation where you are damned by your sin and you need a savior to pay your sin debt, you are in mortal danger. Because God only offers His salvation in this one narrow way. I beg you to reconsider Paul's argument in the book of Romans and receive the true love of God in Christ Jesus.

Last week Paul took us to the mountaintop vista of the things that could threaten our salvation and we saw that there was no threat left standing. This week Paul is going to expand that list. He is going to take the argument of how strong our salvation is to its climax. He is going to finish his presentation of the Gospel message that he began in Chapter 1 verse 16 and end it with the orchestra blazing at full volume. When he finishes this verse, we will see that we have no enemies that can conquer us, absolutely, ever.

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

Paul was persuaded.

Persuaded means to convince by argument, to rely by inward certainty.

In the Greek the verb tense is passive. What that means in its context is that Paul has come through a process of persuasion to **a settled conclusion**. He didn't persuade himself. Something persuaded him. What Paul is saying is that **he believes** the argument he is setting forth. He isn't just preaching **a doctrine**, he is teaching **a conviction**. He is retelling us **the reasons** he has believed and **those reasons** completely changed his life. Remember that Paul risked his life multiple times in order to preach the gospel. When he was sitting in prison he had lots of time to rethink his position. He had lots of time for doubts and questions to set in. Paul had to know that **what he was preaching was the absolute truth** if he were to remain **willing to die for it** and to **ask others** to be willing to do the same. I believe that Romans is his response to those kinds of questions. Paul could lay out the whole presentation in a logical manner because he relied upon those

truths for **his own assurance**. Paul had to have an answer to his own questions. And Paul had a great mind. So it would take rock solid truths to convince him. And that is what he presents to us.

We also have to consider that what he was preaching was very **unpopular** to those of his own bloodline. They had the weight of thousands of years of tradition to push at Paul. And they did it with a great sense of conviction. How could Paul stand up to them so ferociously? **He had to be convinced**. He had to know that the truth he was presenting was **truly** the truth. And he had to know that it fit together from beginning to end. And he had to know that **this faith, this belief** was worth dying for. It could not be something that, in the end might leave him high and dry. It could not be something that he could lose at any moment. So when Paul says he is persuaded, he is saying a mouthful.

Our church at Ferndale seems to have a reputation of being knowledgeable. That is largely due to Mikes years of study and hard work. I know I wasn't exactly a "quick study" and I suspect that is true of many of us. So we are knowledgeable, but **what are we persuaded of?** You see, when we are **persuaded** like Paul was **persuaded**, we will **live** like Paul **lived**. If someone watched our lives this week, watched the choices we made regarding the words we said, watched the choices we made regarding our use of free time, watched the choices we made regarding how we influenced others, what would they say **we are persuaded about?** Are we persuaded that maximizing our enjoyment on this planet is our top priority?

Are we persuaded that being occupied with our own interests is what we are all about?

Are we persuaded that when the lives we live **look different than the scripture we read** that it is ok to bend scripture to fit our current walks?

Or are we persuaded that this gospel we have been studying is **so glorious**, so wonderful, **so undefeatable**, that it is worth any price at any time in any location for any person? That is where Paul's persuasion took him. And logically, that is where it must take us. That is the strength of Paul's argument.

Now, note what he is **not** persuaded of. Paul is not persuaded that things on this earth are going to get better. He never presents his persuasion as a method of improving the quality and enjoyment of this life. He said that if the resurrection is not true, we are more miserable than the lot of unbelievers that surround us. We are the biggest fools if there is no eternal reward. Paul is not one of those who would be glad to have been a Christian, even if the claims of Christ are false.

There are those who argue in this fashion to get people to decide for Christ. But they are speaking as fools.

What Paul **IS** persuaded of is that the salvation of God will overcome every enemy that comes at it. And the assumption is that some of these things **will** come at it. And most of these things are not pleasant. He has already taught us **how to reckon things**. We reckon that these current sufferings are light and pleasant compared to life in eternity with Christ. That is how we are to reckon.

And here comes what Paul is persuaded of. He has a list of things that, as big a foes as they might be, cannot separate us from the love of God.

The first is neither death nor life.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 (NKJV)

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-

52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

55 "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Paul is stating that we have victory over death through Christ. And the resurrection of Christ proves that this is not an **unwarranted** claim. Christ proved He won the victory over death. We will be talking about that next week for Easter. Death is swallowed up in the victory that Christ won for us. So death cannot separate us from the love of Christ.

Now how about life?

Revelation 1:17-18 (NKJV)

17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.

18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

Our Lord is the Lord of both life and death. You could think, you know, it is safer to die right now while I know that I am in the faith. If I continue to live I may fall away. I may throw away my faith.

Well, we know from Scripture that if faith is alive it will continue. Since it was put there supernaturally by God, it is not something we can remove. Here in Revelations Christ makes clear to John where Christ stands in relation to both life and death. He is the Lord of life and He is the Lord of death as well. He holds the keys. He is the locker and the unlocker of Death and Hell. He is in control of the whole process. And He lived, He died, He lives again. He rules the process from every possible angle. Neither life nor death can prove to be an obstacle that **God's love through Christ** will not overcome. Christ is the boss of both.

nor angels nor principalities nor powers,

There are several different opinions about what the word angels here means. They could be good angels or fallen angels. It makes most sense to me if it is referring to fallen angels. The emphasis would be that these enemies are spiritual enemies that live in the spirit world. If it were just **us** against **them** we would not stand a chance. If given the access, they could come into us and make us do whatever they want us to do, like they did in many of the demon possessed people in scripture. They are certainly powerful.

Principalities means the first place, principality, rule, magistracy

These are the power seats. They are the ones calling the shots from a spiritual perspective.

Colossians 2:15 (NKJV)

15 Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

We see that even though the devil and his demons are given a lot of leeway to accomplish things in his children, his power over the saints has been completely severed. He has been disarmed. We see how much we are empowered in the next passage.

Ephesians 6:10-13 (NKJV)

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

As we fight with the weapons of warfare provided to us by God, we are given protection from the harm the devil intends against us. Our enemy is not people, at least they are not the source. The enemy is the devil's legions carrying out the devil's work. We are told that if we resist the devil he will flee from us. We no longer have an excuse to be carried away in evil plans. We have the power in Christ to send him running.

Powers is basically referring to supernatural powers or forces. We see some of the supernatural power displayed when people in the New Testament are demon possessed. These men could do things that were beyond their human strength. Without a doubt the Devil has been given power. His demons have also. But they are on a very short leash. They must ask permission to be able to use that power. We have seen in the last couple of verses about angels and principalities that Christ is **supreme** over these things. Even if the devil were to show up in your living room with all the rage against Christ that he has, you, through Christ, could withstand his attack. You could resist him and you could cause him to have to leave. That is what this scripture is telling us. So we need not fear these powers. We should not be **flippant**. These are serious matters. Some resistant against these powers requires prayer and fasting Jesus said. But they cannot overcome a believer. They cannot separate a person from Christ, no matter what powers they may possess.

nor things present nor things to come,

Now Paul talks about time. Where is Christ right now? He is seated at the right hand of God. And what is He doing there? He is interceding for the saints. He is applying to them all the benefits he gained by His death. So what fear should we have for things present? We are given promise after promise about what resources we have in this life. We know that Christ is looking out after us. No temptation happens for which there isn't a way of escape. Nothing happens to us that we are not given the resources to handle. We know **that** because God has **promised it**.

But what about the future, what about things to come? Well we know that things will get worse and worse, but no matter how bad they get not one promise of God will come undone. We still have the power to **overcome** and the devil **cannot undo** our salvation. Future sufferings will be met with future graces.

Even in Revelations we see that it is only Christ who is worthy to open the seals. What this means is that Christ is not reacting to a future that is out of control. No, Christ is in control of the timing of each event. The seal gets open when He is good and ready to open it. We need not fear the present or the future. They are both solidly in our Saviors controlling hand.

39 nor height nor depth,

What about the heights. What about the dangers from those powers that sit above where we can see or imagine. What about the spiritual realms where God sits. What about that whole arena?

Ephesians 1:18-23 (NKJV)

18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,

21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,

23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

So who is at the height? Who is the top authority under God the Father? God the Son- Christ Jesus, our Interceder. So if Christ is at the height of the heights, we cannot possibly have anything to worry about. We know that Christ is not going to separate us from His love? We have already shown that this would be impossible.

How about depths?

Ephesians 4:8-10 (NKJV)

8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

9 (Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

We have nothing to fear of the depths. Christ has been there and He is in charge everywhere. There is no place out of His domain. There is no part that He has not experienced and overcome. So we cannot persist in fearing the depths.

nor any other created thing,

We know for sure that **our Creator** will not separate us from His love for us. We have seen that every **created thing** we can think of is also under Christ's sovereign reign and there is nothing under it that He has not conquered for His saints. He has addressed those things that so quickly put a label on our fears. I may fear **tribulation** or **distress** or **persecution** or **famine** or **inadequately facing the elements** or **going hungry** or **having people murder me**. I may fear **death now** or **what can happen to me in life**. I may fear **spiritual forces and spiritual powers**. I may fear **what may happen in this current time** of history or **what may happen later on**.

We are very good at thinking of things to be afraid of. And we know intuitively if there is something to fear, **we have an excuse** to not live like Christ said to live.

We have an angle whereby we don't have to **trust God** in some area of our lives. And if we don't have to trust it, follows that we do not need to obey.

But Paul uses this catch all. He is essentially saying, I have covered just about every fear from a threat to our salvation that I can think of. But just to spread the net so wide as not to miss anything, let's throw this in. **No created thing**.

That about covers it. There is not any **one**. There is not any **thing**. There is not a truthful situation that we can imagine that could separate us from the love of God.

I would like to apply this first as an exhortation and second as an encouragement. Do you know what you are saying to God when you cling to your fears about these items severing you from God's love? You are essentially calling God a liar. Now I know that this is never what we intend. But it is without doubt **what we do** when we refuse to believe God's word.

Paul has granted us this teaching to calm our fears. He has given us good solid thinking to take the **ground out from under our fears**. If you are imagining a situation that you think will undo you as a believer, you are using your imagination **sinfully**. He has promised that nothing that **happens to you** will sever you from the love of God. We must claim this by faith and move on. There is no promise in all that Paul said that the road **will be easy**. But we can know with **absolute certainty** that at the end of the day nothing will separate a believer from the love of God.

Now the encouragement-

We do not need to live frightened lives, insecure lives, shaky lives.

Are you persuaded? Have you allowed the apostles words to speak to your soul?

What Paul has laid out is the **absolute guaranteed result** of the Gospel taking a hold on your life. From God's perspective what God has started is as good as finished. We are given instruction after instruction in scripture as to how to live the Christian life. And it is assumed in every page of scripture that our wills will be actively and fully engaged in this project. And it matters **a lot** what we do. But it doesn't matter in the way we would naturally **think** it matters. Our trying hard cannot **add** one iota to our justification. But our trying hard will **show evidence** of the new life that has been placed in us. We will never **earn** our salvation. Such a thing would be impossible. But we will **prove** our salvation. And we will be conformed to the image of God's Son.

And in this process that God has put in place, a believer will never, in any way, at any time, for any reason be severed from the saving and redeeming love of God. There will not come a point where you will sin a sin that is too great or do a thing that is unforgivable if you are a child of God.

Are you persuaded that this is true?

Are you persuaded that this is true for you? Paul was. And we can be too.

This is the culmination of the Gospel message. Our Lord wants us to rest secure in His love. He does not want us doing things **to earn** love. He wants us doing things **Because we are loved**. He wants us doing works based on trust in His character.

Our Lord would have every believer taking these promises to the bank. God's children are not meant to live like children in foster care, uncertain of their future. We are to live as adopted children of the king.

There are two hymns I would like to close with.

How Firm a foundation- John Keith?

1. How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said—
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?
2. "Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.
3. "When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee thy trouble to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

4. "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not harm thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.
5. "The soul that on Jesus doth lean for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

A debtor to mercy alone Augustus Toplady

A debtor to mercy alone,
Of covenant mercy I sing;
Nor fear, with **Thy** righteousness on,
My person and offering to bring.
The **terrors** of law and of God
With me can have nothing to do;
My Savior's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view

The work which His goodness **began**,
The arm of His strength **will complete**;
His promise is yea and amen,
And never was forfeited yet.
Things future, nor things that are now,
Not all things below nor above
Can make Him His purpose forego,
Or sever my soul from His love.

My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on **His heart** it remains
In marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven.