

# What shall separate us from the love of Christ?

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[0:00] 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. No. In all these things. We are more than conquerors. Through him. Who loved us. For I am sure. That neither death.

Nor life. Nor angels. Nor rulers. Nor things present. Nor things to come. Nor powers. Nor heights. Nor depth. Nor anything else. In all creation. Will be able to separate us.

From the love of God. In Christ Jesus. Our Lord. Amen. Before we have a look at that. Shall we. Let's sing another song.

We are going to sing. A debtor to mercy alone. And I believe that is number. Seven. Is it seven seven seven? Seven seven three. Seven seven three.

[0:55] Seven seven three. Amen. Please be seated. Let me pray.

And then we'll have a look at this. Some points from this passage. Our Father we thank you so much for these words that we have just sung.

And the words that we have just read. From this glorious book in the Bible. We thank you for the comfort and confidence and encouragement that it gives to us.

Lord I pray that as we meditate upon these things for the brief few moments this evening. That these words will become our words. That you would so speak to our hearts.

And that you would prepare us as we come to the table. So by your spirit. Take the words of this feeble and weak and sinful person Lord.

[1:57] And by your spirit would you please apply them to each and every one of us. And Lord our prayer is that Christ would be among us this evening. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

Well just by way of context. Many of us are familiar with the book of Romans. Romans is if you like Paul's magnum opus.

It's his most profoundly theological and systematic letter. But it's not a systematic theology.

It's not a doctrinal tome. It's a real letter that's written to real people in a time in history.

For their encouragement and their upbuilding. And I think that's helpful to remember. Because it's filled with wonderful doctrine and truths. The church in Rome was probably a mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles.

[2:57] And who Paul was writing to to cement their unity. Because there were Jewish and Gentile segments of the church.

Where there was it would seem some division. Some disunity. Some misunderstanding. And what Paul was seeking to do was ground them all. In sound doctrine. The doctrine of salvation by grace alone.

And justification by faith alone. And it reminds us doesn't it brothers and sisters that doctrine unites. Doctrine unites. Romans in the early chapters.

One, two and part of chapter three. We're confronted with pretty bad news. Most of the time. Paul is just hammering home.

The bad news. That we are all utterly and radically depraved. It doesn't matter if you're a religious and zealous law following Jew.

[4:01] You are still under the wrath of God. It doesn't matter if you are a pagan Gentile. That has never known the law. You are still under the wrath of God. It's that those early chapters really are designed so every mouth may be stopped.

And that the whole world is held accountable to God. And then in chapter three, verse 21, we see this beautiful, this glorious gospel light break forth.

And we see the righteousness of God through faith is manifest. And justification by faith apart from works of the law is set forth.

And then in chapter four, we see Paul bringing out some examples from the Old Testament.

Probably to his Jewish hearers that this was always the way. This isn't just a New Testament phenomenon.

This is something that was going on in the Old Testament. And he brings out Father Abraham, that great father of the faith, to demonstrate he was in fact justified by faith.

[5:07] He mentions David as well. In chapter five, he shows that the blessings that flow out of our justification. Blessings such as peace with God.

And then chapter six, we see how the believer can know true freedom. Freedom from sin. And how the believer has undergone a radical change.

And then chapter seven speaks of the believer's relationship with the law. And then that brings us up to chapter eight, which many, many have said is the greatest chapter in the Bible.

And I'm sure for many of you here this evening, chapter eight will be a source of great comfort and encouragement. It's full of glorious doctrine, this chapter. It's full of assurance.

It's full of comfort. And if you notice, there aren't really any commands. Paul speaks of the life in the spirit. He speaks of sanctification, the mindset on the spirit.

[6:08] He speaks of putting sin to death. He speaks of our adoption. He speaks of our future glory. And God's work through salvation.

Works of salvation through this, what some have called the golden chain of salvation or redemption. So our predestination, our calling, our justification and our glorification.

And that brings us to the portion of scripture we'll be looking at this evening. The verses that I read earlier from 31 to 39. And here I think we have some of the most comforting, encouraging and strengthening portions of scripture in the entire Bible that speak of our security in Christ.

Paul presents this section with, really, it's a series of questions where he's piling up encouragement after encouragement and arguments in response to allegations and accusations that are leveled against God's people.

And there's a boldness here in Paul's delivery, isn't there? Paul, he's boldly challenging the enemy, the opposition. It's almost as if he's saying, come on, give it your best.

[7:27] Come on. And I want us to think of this in three main points. I was wondering whether just to use the questions, and in hindsight, that might have been better anyway. I have three points to hang our thoughts on.

The God who is for us gives us all things. The God who is for us justifies us. And the God who is for us makes us more than conquerors.

So my first point, the God who is for us gives us all things. Paul starts in verse 31. What shall we say of these things? What shall we say to these things?

And by these things, my understanding is he's speaking predominantly of what he's just said in Romans 8 prior to this. But he's probably speaking about all the glorious things he said about the wondrous gospel from Romans 3 all the way to Romans 8.

All the things he's been declaring of the gospel. And then he says, if God is for us, who can be against us? His first question. And I think it's good for us just to pause for a moment.

[8:35] Just to ponder on the fact that our God is for us. I'm looking around. I know you all. We're here tonight as believers. We're here who are people who our God is for us.

It's a wondrous thing, isn't it? You think this is the God who created the universe. And by his providence upholds the universe. Sustains the universe.

By his eternal decree has brought everything into being that we see and that we know. And this God is for little sinful you and me.

It's remarkable, isn't it? And then Paul goes on to say, who can be against us? Now, by saying who can be against us, I don't think Paul is saying that how could we possibly have any enemies?

God is for us. Therefore, we have no enemies. That's not his point. What he's saying is, well, actually, we have many enemies, don't we? If we think about it, we have enemies within.

[9:37] We have enemies at home, don't we? Within our own hearts, our flesh, our sinful desires. We have enemies in terms of the world and the world system that's always railing against us as Christians in one way or another.

There's demonic forces and there's a devil. So we have enemies. However, what Paul is saying, he's saying, who can overcome us?

Who can ultimately defeat us? Who can spiritually have the last word? Who can ultimately succeed in our destruction?

It made me think of 1 John 4. You don't need to turn there. I'll read it out. You know it well. He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

We have many enemies, but we have a great God who is for us. And Paul goes on to say, goes on to say in verse 32, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all.

[10:48] He did not spare his son, but gave him up. I love parts of the scripture where you get these succinct and pithy few words that kind of convey the gospel in a really powerful way, in just a few words and with such clarity.

And I think you have one of them here. He did not spare his own son. I'd like us just for a couple of moments, just think of this word spare. I think it's really helpful. One man says that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, this word spare is always spoken of in the context of guilt or the guilty.

For example, in Deuteronomy 7.16, where Israel's enemies, where the Lord is instructing Israel to consume all the people that the Lord your God gives you over to you.

Basically, he's charging Israel to bring them to utter destruction. And then there's a part in Deuteronomy where it says in 7.16, your eyes should not pity them.

And in the Greek Septuagint, that word is translated as spare. In 2 Samuel 18.5, in that awful situation that David found himself in, where his son, Absalom, had rebelled against him.

[12:14] And he's instructing, he's giving instructions to his military men, Joab and Abisha, to go after Absalom. He says, deal gently for my sake with the young man, Absalom.

And the Greek translation of that in the Septuagint is spare him. So on one hand, he's saying, in Deuteronomy, he's saying do not spare. And in Samuel, they're saying spare. But in both instances, it's dealing with guilt and the guilty.

Then you might think to yourself, well, how can this word be used in the context of our sinless Savior, Jesus Christ? The one who did not sin.

Well, it's because he's taken upon himself our sin. I mean, in Corinthians, Paul is as bold as to say that he's become sin for us. He's taken upon himself to such an extent that he's associated with our guilt and our sin.

Although he did not commit sin in any way. But he's associated with guilty sinner. And he's taken upon himself the penalty and the punishment for our sin.

[13:26] Our Savior was not spared. And that's a wonderful thing, isn't it? Because we've been spared. This is the heart of the gospel, brothers and sisters.

This is atonement. This is penal substitution. This is satisfaction. Now, some have charged us to believe this with believing in something they have called cosmic child abuse.

I remember some years ago, I was a pretty early Christian then. There was a book going around, doing the rounds. And this charge was leveled against Christians that believe this, that this was akin to cosmic child abuse.

I didn't know much then, but even my instinct then told me, this is really wrong and this book is not good stuff. And I actually threw it away and I'm glad I did. But this isn't, that is totally incorrect.

This is not cosmic child abuse. Jesus went to the cross and he accomplished everything needed for our redemption willingly. That's so important.

[14:29] John 10, 17 says, For this reason, the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord.

This is willing. This isn't being forced or coerced against his will. And here we see propitiation, the appeasing and satisfying of anger.

We also see redemption here. Did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. It was for us and we were brought back by Christ's blood.

The source of this satisfaction of God's wrath is divine love. It's divine love in the mind of the triune God in eternity past.

Christ providing divine payment for our sin was not a matter of him having his arm twisted.

Sometimes the gospel is presented like that.

[15:33] There's a reluctant Christ that, oh, okay. No, no. This was, in the eternal counsel, in the counsel of peace, Christ agreed with the Father to come to do the work of redemption.

Divine love to pay the penalty for your sin and for my sin. And as we take the supper, it would be good for us to think, just for a few moments, of the agony, the sacrifice, the pain that our Savior went through on that cross for us, as he was not spared and fully given up for us.

Then Paul goes on to say, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Graciously give us all things.

We see here the wondrous generosity, the provision, the abundance of God towards his children.

And you may be wondering, and I certainly was, what does Paul mean by the all things?

Paul's arguing from the greater to the lesser here. He's saying, if he has given us his son, will he not give you freely and graciously everything that you need?

[16:53] It's wonderful news. All the blessing that you need, all the prosperity you need to bring you home to glory, everything you need spiritually now, you can be assured that he will give this to you.

But what's your grounding for that? What is the grounding for that? Well, the grounding for that is he did not spare his own son. And we need so much, don't we?

Forgiveness of sin. The Holy Spirit to fill us and renew us. Don't we need courage? I need courage so much every day.

Don't we need strength? Strength to just to face the day sometimes. Assurance of faith. Grace. So much grace for our missteps and sins.

Because we do continue to sin. And he gives us all that we need. And you notice it's with him, with Christ. All of this is in union with Christ. So the God who is for us gives us all things.

[18:01] So the God who is for us justifies us. He justifies us. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? We move here to the legal courtroom imagery.

And here we see that God's verdict is final. He says here, it is God who justifies. Who can condemn us. There's no appeal court beyond him.

Either for us or for our accusers. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. As many of you know, I work as a social worker.

And it's quite common in my work to have complaints made against you. It's not fun, but it is common. Understandably, people are very unhappy. You're involved in people's family lives.

And it's a very sensitive matter. What people will often do, they'll have a complaint that they'll want to bring against you. And the first thing I'll try and do is say, look, let's discuss this and see if we can resolve it.

[19:05] And work together to come to a resolution. But often people don't want to do that. And what they'll say is, no, I want to speak to your manager. Okay? So they'll go to your manager with the complaint.

And then if they don't get what they need from your manager, they'll say, well, look, I need to go higher than this. So they go through HR. Or maybe they go to the head of service. So they speak to the head of service. And it goes on.

But eventually they hit a ceiling. It gets to a point where they cannot take their appeal any further. There's a sense in which you are vindicated. It's gone as far as it can go. And that's kind of what's happening here.

It is God who justifies. There is no further one can go. Justification is a glorious doctrine that we do well to remember and constantly dwell upon, meditate upon, be grateful for.

The fact that we have been made righteous. It's a legal declaration. It's Christ's righteousness credited to your account.

[20:09] It's not something so much that happens within you. That does happen in the Christian life. That's sanctification. But this is something that happens to you. It's the opposite of condemnation. Earlier in Romans 8, there is therefore no condemnation.

Because we are justified. That is such good news. How many people feel the weight of condemnation? When you look around you and you see the world around us, the weight of condemnation is upon so many people.

But in Christ, there is this good news of justification. This declaration. You're free. You're justified. And in the supper, we can celebrate glory in this.

It's a wonderful truth that we are no longer under condemnation. As a believer, if you've sinned this week, today, yes, that needs to be dealt with. That needs to be confessed.

But you are not under the condemning power of the law. You are free. You are justified. It reminded me of the Old Testament picture in the book of Zechariah. The picture of Joshua the priest, the high priest.

[21:15] He's before the angel of the Lord. And he's before Satan who's accusing him. And you remember that picture. It's a wonderful picture. He's clothed in these robes that are kind of full of, I think the literal word is excrement.

It's filthy. Filthy. And Satan's accusing him. But the angel of the Lord commands those around him to take that filthy robe off him.

And then to clothe him in that righteous, pure vestment and a turban. Those priestly vestments. And it's a wonderful picture of justification, isn't it? Being declared and righteous.

You notice that this wonderful truth, it's reserved for God's elect in verse 33, the end of there. It's God's elect. Those who are chosen. Often when we think of the doctrine of election or being chosen, we can think of this in a rather cold or clinical way.

I put it to you, brothers and sisters, that this is a really beautiful and humbling doctrine. It's a wonderful thing, isn't it, to think that you have been chosen by God.

[22:22] It shouldn't bring about any kind of arrogance or haughtiness. What it should do, if it's the real deal, what it should do is bring a spirit-wrought humility.

Why me? Because you know there was nothing in you that God saw. And we all know ourselves and we know our own hearts. It speaks of free grace, doesn't it?

It's not based on anything we've done. God doesn't look through the corridors of time and think, oh, I think Jerome's, you know, got some real potential, so I'll choose him. No. No. It's just all bottomed out in his free grace.

And when we think of this, it's important to remember it's God's job to do the choosing and electing. It's not ours and it's not ours to know. This is the secret things belong to the Lord.

But it's our job to be faithful. So the God who is for us justifies us. But the God who is for us makes us more than conquerors.

[23:24] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? As I was thinking about this, I've been reminded recently just by stuff I've been reading and hearing in church and out.

There are two themes that kind of run through the scriptures. Two themes that you see. One of the themes is affliction. It's just everywhere.

The affliction of God's people. But another theme is victory as well. That is also prominent in the scriptures. And they almost kind of run kind of in tandem in many ways.

And they relate to one another. And I was fascinated because I think here you kind of see that. In verse 35. Verse 35 says, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness? What a list of words there. I was thinking of this word for tribulation, for example.

[24:25] It's a word that kind of denotes pressure. It literally means to be pressed down upon. You think of being so squeezed you can barely breathe.

It's acute distress and pressure. Phlipsis is the word. It's real difficulty. You imagine crushed grapes. That's literally the kind of thing it means. And when we look at this list, we think, you know, persecution, tribulation, distress. And, you know, if you drop your eyes down, for your sake, we're being killed all the day long.

How do we think of the church? What comes to mind when we think of the experience of the church? Paul said, this is the experience of the church. Often. He's quoting from Psalm 44. As God's covenant people are afflicted and suffering death at the hands of those who opposed God. And I was thinking about this. I think we in the West, and certainly us here in Brighton, when we read this, there's kind of not a literal correspondence to our experience in many ways, is there? [25:39] We certainly face pressures. But I've been recently looking at a little series with my son Isaac on the covenanters. And I was struck at the pressure, the persecution, the killings, what they went through as a church, as God's people.

And actually, it made me think that probably we're a bit of an anomaly in history. That we've probably got it pretty good compared to most. Here in the list, we see God's people facing death, famine, scarcity, want, nakedness and sword, violence.

Now, this may not be our experiences. And we may think, well, that's for those guys in history, like the covenanters and so forth. But actually, if we were to speak to our Iranian or Nigerian brothers and sisters, their lived experiences might be very, very similar to what we're seeing here.

But I want us, as we come to a kind of close of this part of our time, really, to think of closing out on victory.

We've been thinking of victory, even if you're not aware of it. I think, actually, in Phil's series on Revelation in the evenings, you'll notice a kind of a common refrain in Revelation.

[26:58] It's overcoming, overcoming. And there's cycles of, you know, great tribulation but victory. And this is the Christian life, isn't it? And we see here in this wonderful bit in verse 37.

No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors. I love this word for more than conquerors. It's a compound word. And it literally means hyper-conqueror.

A hyper-conqueror. Hyper, we know what that means, kind of, don't we? Beyond, over, above, surpassing, exceeding. You all know the word for conqueror because many of you, well, you might have trainers with this word on it.

If you've got Nike trainers on, that's, I think, the root of the word or something to do with it.

Hyper-conqueror. Literally an overwhelming conqueror. A decisive, exceeding victory.

It's remarkable, isn't it? And it's through him who loved us. The him here that's spoken of. No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[28:07] Of course, the him is Christ. And you might be thinking, well, at what point is Paul talking about? When did he love us? Well, certainly in eternity past, he loved us because he chose us.

But yeah, I think he's probably alluding to his work on the cross more than anything. Can't be sure of that. But certainly by his cross work, he demonstrates that love so profoundly.

But it wasn't just his dying on the cross that demonstrates his love for us. Not just that. We're conquerors because we are united to our conquering king.

And he demonstrated his conquering power through his resurrection, his rising from the dead. And it was most magnificently displayed in his ascension and his ongoing intercession for us.

And he intercedes for us as our representative. Isn't that wonderful? He's interceding for us. He represents us to the father, our conquering king.

[29:11] And we're more than conquerors with him. As we think of the cross, it's really important we do think of substitution and propitiation and all those wonderful things.

But I do think it's important that we broaden our horizons to also consider that wonderful, victorious, conquering work of Christ as king in vanquishing Satan, our enemy on the cross.

That's important. I ask you, do you see yourself as a conqueror? Do you see yourself as one who has victory over spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, the devil?

Is victory something that only certain Christians that have a kind of elite view of Christians that have an extraordinary measure of the Holy Spirit and the special?

Are they the only ones that have victory? Or is victory for us as just normal, ordinary Christians? I think as ordinary believers, we have an overcoming power working in us.

[30:25] We're spiritual warriors. We're spiritual soldiers. We are overcomers. This isn't just for an elite force of Christians. This is for us. Remember, our principal enemy is not people, but the devil and his demons.

And I love what the Heidelberg Catechism says. It says that as a member of Christ by faith, speaking of union with Christ, we share in Christ's anointing that with a free and good conscience we may fight against sin and Satan in this life.

It's a lovely picture, isn't it? We're fighting. We're soldiers. We're in the battle. We're more than conquerors. Let's be encouraged. I know we feel weak.

I know we look weak. And I know just turning up can be difficult enough. I know that so well myself. Sometimes I get to church and it's like, oh, I've got here.

I've just arrived. What a morning. And I'm sure many of you feel the same. And I know it's hard and we often don't feel like conquerors and overcomers.

[31:27] But let's be people of the book. Let's consider what the Word says just a few places before I close. John says that we have overcome the wicked one. He doesn't say we might overcome.

We have overcome the wicked one. 1 John 5, 4-5 says, everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. Have we been born of God? Yes. And we've overcome the world.

And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

That's an encouragement, isn't it? I was greatly helped by Paul in Romans 6, 11. In Romans 6, 11, Paul says something really interesting. He says, consider yourself or reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to Christ.

He doesn't say, well, wait and see how you feel. And if you feel the kind of warmth and the glow. He doesn't say, you know, work. He says, no, consider, reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to Christ.

[32:32] And I think that's something we need to exercise as believers. Yes, there is another truth. We are sinners. Yes, we are afflicted and we are downtrodden. We often feel low and we are low.

But there is also the other truth that we consider ourselves dead to sin. And we are. Paul says it here. We're more than conquerors. In response to the question raised in verse 35, who shall separate us?

Paul closes this section with absolute unwavering certainty that nothing can sever you from his love. Whether that be all the dimensions of time and space.

Whether it be the spiritual beings of angels, of demons, of creative powers. Nothing, nothing will be able to sever or separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And that is good news. So as we come to the table, let's just remember that our God is for us in giving us all things, isn't he?

[33:42] He shows that in the table. Our God is for us in that he's justified us. And what a great picture of that we have. Communion. But our God is also for us in that he does make us more than conquerors in Christ Jesus.

Amen. Amen. I've just realised I haven't got the over. But we are all familiar here.

I'm not sure we necessarily need that for the table. But I will turn to 1 Corinthians. I'm going to pray. Then we'll come to the supper. And if time permits, then afterwards we can have a time of prayer. Maybe some prayer in response. Maybe not rushing to kind of pray for our needs.

As important as those are. And we must do that. But just to respond to God and maybe what he's saying to us by his spirit. Father, I do thank you for the word that we've just been considering.

[35:09] And the glorious truths of our state in Christ. I thank you for the word that we're afflicted people that know tribulation and persecution and distress and even death, Lord.

Although it does tell us that. Your word does tell us that in these things we are more than conquerors. Thank you for the union with Christ that we can enjoy.

Our great representative who is interceding for us. Thank you that he was brought so low into this world. That he faced the most awful and unimaginable distress and tribulation.

He was pressed, literally squeezed. Until his death on that cross. A life of sorrows. A life of disappointment. A life of associating with sinners and sin.

A life of judicially being seen as guilty. Not knowing the vindication and not knowing true justice when he was before Pilate.

[36:19] Yet he went to the cross as our representative. As our sin bearer. As our saviour. And in the cross he absorbed and took upon himself your wrath.

That was justly poured out against sin. That we so deserve because you were a just and righteous God. But Lord, through your mercy and through your love you spared us.

We have been spared and you didn't spare your son. And thank you so much for that, Lord. And thank you that we can celebrate that. And even more, Lord.

We can celebrate that on the cross there was a wonderful demonstration of victory. And the kingship of Christ. Ruling over all angels and principalities and evil spirits.

And ruling over our sin. Ruling over the condemning law. And that he rose again conquering death. And he has ascended. And we thank you for our great saviour.

[37:15] And please would you be with us by your spirit. To give us a fresh realisation of these things tonight. As we come to your table. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.