

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ

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[0 : 00] It's a pleasure to be here with you to share in your worship this morning, and I'm sure to benefit from your fellowship on my own part, and hope that God blesses world to each one of us this morning.

Meet us where we are. I want to turn to Romans chapter 8 and read from verse 35.

Romans 8 and verse 35. 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.

No, we regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through whom we loved us.

[1 : 08] For I am sure that neither death nor life nor dangers nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation would be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? We call this the epistle to the Romans and rightly so.

But it wasn't addressed to the city of Rome or to all Romans. It was a powerful city full of powerful men and women, of enduring influence, immensely wealthy, in so on way also, so religious.

But the epistle is directed to a small, small group. Insignificant people called the saints in Rome or the Christians who were then the church of Rome.

And it's to them this small group of the non-influential and the non-powerful that Paul writes.

[2 : 48] And he does so at one level he shared with them what he knows of the glory of God's gospel. but also to encourage them. Because glad as he is that they are coming to follow Jesus Christ, he knows that's going to cost them.

It's going to mean so much in terms of persecution and hostility and so much discouragement.

And so therefore he sends his message to them to prepare them for what may be the cost to them of their own discipleship.

And it is summed up in this great statement here, this rhetorical question, no one shall separate us from the love of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And I want to explore this with you this morning for just a little. First of all, what love is Paul talking about?

[4 : 02] There are loves and loves and from many loves we shall one day be separated by time, by time, by space, by human fecalness, by death itself.

but from this love nothing will ever separate us ever, ever, ever, because it's the love of Jesus Christ, not our love for him which can be fecal and can so often turn cold.

But his love for us is that love that is steadfast, unsure, and certain.

and what stands out here so very plainly is Paul's assurance, his absolute certainty that he himself is an object of that love, that Christ loves him and that in him God loves him and Paul is sure at a personal level that is the case.

He speaks in Galatians in these terms, the Son of God, he says, loved me and gave himself for me.

[5 : 46] Not simply God loved the world, not simply God is love, that God loved me, God's Son loved me, that is Paul's assurance.

And that is the common position of the apostles of the New Testament. They know that God has loved them at an individual level.

Nothing shall separate us from God's love, Paul says, just at the end of the chapter. And the apostle John likewise, behold, the love God assured towards us that we should be called God's children.

That assurance that God in Christ had loved him and that his name was engraven on the palms of God's hands and his name was in the Lamb's book of life.

That marvelous certainty that what Christ had done on the cross of Calvary, he had done for him, for Paul, personally, that was Paul's great certainty.

[7 : 12] He himself an object of this divine love, this love in the Lord Jesus. This love that had laid hold of him and had so gripped his heart and that led him and his whole generation of believers to cry from their heart, Abba, Father.

They were sure of God's love, of God's fatherly care. They had that certainty, that conviction. When you go back to the former Shemell, Luther and Calvin, they had no doubt about it.

They had their dark moments, but still always they knew in the darkness that God's love was there. That was their grace certainty.

And it's this love, Paul says, that will never let go. This love that will never, never, never give up on them.

And yet the apostle knows too that many forces will try to effect that separation. There are so many elements and powers in the world and so many certain elements too that can assault that assurance and assault that love.

[8 : 45] And so Paul details them very carefully those things that may seem to be effecting a separation between ourselves and God's love.

You see that in the verses that follow here in this great chapter. For example, there he says that shall tribulation.

And in many ways that word sums up so much else because it's a word that means literally crushing. and sometimes we feel so crushed.

And that's what Paul feared from these believers because there was this possibility of reality indeed or persecution of nakedness of famine and peril and so on and some days they would feel so crushed.

But Paul is saying no that's not going to separate you from God's love. And again he goes on with some more detail to itemize other elements that can perhaps seem to separate us from God's love.

[10 : 07] Shall he say things for example he mentions there a way down in verse 37 and verse 38 neither death nor life.

death separates us from so much from each other our communities from what we've ignored in this world but it doesn't separate us from Christ or his love on the contrary it brings us closer closer to him to our place where we see him face to face where he sees glory and to the wonder of his father's love for him.

So we write over so many many loves till death has departed and sometimes we fear bereavement more than we fear death itself but not here there's no till death has departed here nor will life do it it will throw so much at us but still it can't separate from the love of Christ it can obscure it it can hide it behind a cloud which we may deem to be God's own flowering face it may cause us doubt it but it doesn't defect any separation

I say I mention so sometimes we walk in darkness and there is no light but still we keep on walking because we trust in the name of the Lord and we trust in the love of the Lord and so not death not life not those great powers angels principalities powers the demonic even Paul says supporting some unfallen angel with all his glorious powers were to try to come between you and God's love even such a potency couldn't separate you from God's love the powers of hell and pandemonium they unleash all their ferocity and deploy all their cunning and all their skills and all their experience and they do it every day and sometimes in ways that so scare us but they can't separate us from the love of God nor height nor depth sometimes we feel oh God is so high and so far above us cannot possibly love us we so small individuals congregation this gathering this morning larger than many similar gatherings of the land and yet small by comparison with world population and God seems so high so glorious can God bend so low to know me

God knows me God God has got my name in his book my name in the palm of his hand can it be that one who inhabits eternity who is high and lifted up that he can know me love me and hold my hand can it be that he knows and loves his congregation I like to think this morning that God has foreseen this congregating this coming together from all eternity and everyone God intended to be here is here and each one is here for a reason we don't know what that reason is but that there is a reason we must not doubt

[15 : 32] God in the heights watching us present with us in the heart that everyone loves him and this aggregate of warm faiths gathered together in his name that is here and then the depths sometimes we are so low so despondent respondent swayed down by anxiety and by guilt and oh yes these things put a cloud on God's love and they obscure his face but they don't do away with that love behind a frown in providence he hides a smiling face

I know it sounds so cliched and yet you must believe it because someday you'll very survive and depend on you cling to that great hope you're at the lowest possible level the lowest ebb in your life perhaps but still you cling to this that nothing separates you from the love of God neither height nor depth nor things present nor things to come the present the present not perhaps as we might wish for any of us fear and that presence may obscure the love but it cannot do away with it or come between us and

God's irrevocable commitment to you a believer as a very important person a C.V.I.P. of the first magnitude from God gave his own son and on whom the blood of that son is sprinkled as a great identifying mark so that wherever you are in this wilderness speed at the polar extremes or at the equator in Arctic wastes or desert sand God's love knows exactly where you are and what your needs are and so the present whatever it is today and it's only here for today that present can't separate you from God's love things to come how our imaginations work on the future and what darkneses and perils and pits it can create for us but yet you said that in this context things to come they may scare you some predictable like old age and some not but whatever whatever it is it is God's future tomorrow is in the hands of the one who loved you remember

Revelation 5 who's got the scroll and that scroll that book with all that's to happen in history it's in it that's the big book and in it there's the whole of the fallout from Iranian attacks on aircraft and the follies sometimes of our own democracies they're all there and there's a little book well it's not little it's a huge book and it's got the names of a vast multitude that no one can number and you're my little name it's in the book and you're tomorrow you're things to come you're things to come and in that book your future save in the hands of God and then Paul has this climax which we can almost fail to notice nothing in our creation because he's saying this to us all these terrifying forces that bring such clouds and that have such power over our imaginations you know he says they're only creatures they're finite they're limited they're not all that wise not all that powerful remember this is the creator's love the love of omnipotence the love of all invincible all mightiness nothing said the Lord himself can pluck you out of your your father's hands hell will try and so often will this world try to pluck us as individuals and congregations out of God's hand but they can't because he is his hand of omnipotence and so he's saying to us we are more than conquerors through him that loved us not only conquerors but hyper conquerors more than conquerors through him that loved us all these forces so inspiring and so terrifying but you surmount all the difficulties and you conquer as individuals and also as churches and congregations and so

Paul says this love is not going to stop or be diverted you can't be separated from it and what does that mean this love is always working for us let me just highlight two points quickly first of all Christ is interceding for us he's praying for us we pray for each other I pray for you you pray for me and that's reassuring but there is this there is God's own son with all the authority of that status and all the eloquence of his own self-sacrifice on the cross of Calvary and he's praying for every single believer here and he's praying for this congregation and for the church in the island and the church national and the church worldwide he's interceding and what strikes me in a way is this that often what he's praying for is father hear their prayers because they don't think much of them themselves and they don't always know what to ask for but hear their prayers they're not two separate intercessions ours and his but he's praying that

[24 : 13] God will hear our prayers often not fluent or articulate or well defined but I read somewhere this week a prayer that said Lord you know the name of the need behind my every groan God knows the name of the need that we can't put words on and the love that prays for us at God's right hand nothing can separate us me you from that love that's the first thing and the second is this that God's love is still working all things together for good to those who love him for you all things

I remember my first sermon in this pulpit around 1965 for some reason I preached in my youthful folly on that text but it stood me in good stead many had a since God slammed us and let go it's still working it has a great objective and the most amazing objective to conform us to the image of his own son to make us Christ like you you I can understand that me that's amazing conformed to the image of God's son we live in a world of projects a world of targets

God has his project and his target to make you Christ like and to use his church towards that end for the glory of his own name where God begins wherever God began where there were signs that he had begun a good work had begun the signs were there things may happen that may seem to us to call that beginning in question but where God began God completes you may know there's a place in Auburn called McCaig's Folly a wealthy man began to build a great local facility but he died and when he ran out and he stands there still as a monument perversely to his ambition

McCaig's Folly he began but did not complete there are no folly in God's kingdom love when he begins he finishes and so today as we respond to this love we love him because he first loved us that love liberates that assurance sets us free it energizes it inspires us does it not the love of Christ constrains us to love his people to love his church I want you to love his church I want you to work for it be committed to it why has an end in itself love no it's never that but this church is in

God's hands an instrument of Christian good and God knows how much this community needs this church every one of us must commit himself herself to that mission to that objective unitedly coherently cooperatively it is so easy to be discouraged remember the words of Hebrews 12 lift up the arms that hang down and strengthen the feeble knees the devil loves to afflict the church with spiritual rheumatism where you can't lift your arms and you say

[30 : 06] I've lost the use of my knees not if we look steadfastly into the love of God this God in the same chapter God his son not sparing gave him to die his own son and God is saying to us follow that whatever the cost whatever the pain to reciprocate by the grace of his own love the love he has shown us to serve God and for you to serve this community may God grant its soul let's bow heads in prayer oh lord bless your word to us feebly spoken yet such power inherent in it use it oh lord to revitalize us to maintain the life that we have lord give us through your word the assurance how much you care for us and take from us lord all you find offensive still in us for our saviour sake amen