

Who Can Separate Us from the Love of Christ?

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[0 : 00] She was only five. She was only five when Pol Pot took control of Cambodia with his Khmer Rouge forces in 1975.

Her name was Lung Ong, one of seven children in a rich and educated family living in Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia.

But when Pol Pot and his forces arrived in Phnom Penh, her family, along with dozens and dozens of other families, fled.

Fled with just the things they could carry on their back or put in a little wagon which soon broke down and was left behind. Very little money, only the clothes they wore, a few pans, a bit of food. And they fled and walked as far and fast as they could from Phnom Penh. Hundreds and thousands of people fleeing the Khmer Rouge.

[1 : 03] And for weeks and months, she and her family eked out an impoverished and malnourished existence in the fields of northern Cambodia.

Trying to keep out of trouble, trying to keep out of the way of the Khmer Rouge, trying desperately to find enough food to stay alive. And yet being forced to work many hours each day, even a young five-year-old, Lung Ong.

But perhaps worst of all of this whole terrible and terrifying situation was the forced separation from loved ones.

Two of her brothers were sent to work in other places. The family was breaking down and being separated. Love was being separated.

But worst of all was when the forces came to take her father, take him away to shoot him. Because they knew he was educated.

[2 : 04] And that was the sort of person that the Khmer Rouge wanted to kill. No longer was he able to protect and to provide for his family. And then a bit later on, as the situation got even bleaker, her mother sent three of the children, who were still alive, off in separate directions, in a desperate attempt to try and keep at least one member of the family safe and alive.

Worst of all, in those sorts of situations are the heart-wrenching, gut-disturbing, tear-jerking times when loved ones are forcibly separated.

Separated from the love of a parent, of a spouse, of a child. We've seen an astonishing love story in Paul's letter to the Romans.

Words. God, out of his great love, sent his son to this world to die for us. Words that are all too familiar to us, and yet speak of the greatest love ever.

A God who not only sent his son to die for us, but to die for us so that his death would atone for our sin. Sins that we deserve to pay for with our own death, his son atoned for by dying in our place.

[3 : 33] Not only that, but also to appease the wrath of God against sin and sinners. We, though helpless sinners, consistently falling short of the glory of God, spiritually bankrupt, are nonetheless forgiven out of an extraordinary act of love and mercy from God the Father and his willing Son.

So that we are justified by God, declared righteous in his sight, acquitted for our sins, so that we no longer have the burden of guilt and the threat of condemnation hanging over us.

Not only so, but God's love also broke the power of sin's reign and dominion through the death and resurrection of Jesus also.

So now that we can live a new life for God, a life to please him, still struggling with sin as we've seen, for example, in Romans chapter 7, but struggling with sin confident that the victory has already been won through and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But even more, God's love did not end then. So out of his great love, God's Holy Spirit dwells within us and pours into our hearts the very love of God.

[4 : 57] So that God's love is not just something that happened then and happened out there, but something that is implanted within us, bubbling over, abundantly filling our hearts by God's indwelling Holy Spirit.

And now, as we've seen in recent weeks, we have a new relationship with God, with the sovereign, awesome, almighty and holy God. We can approach him with confidence and call him our father, our dad, because God, out of his love, has established a new relationship with us, a relationship of family intimacy by planting his Holy Spirit within us.

But even more than that too, the love of God's Holy Spirit inside us means that we groan for heavenly glory. We ache for the day when we'll see God face to face.

We ache for the day of our adoption, when the love of this father who's adopted us into his spiritual and heavenly family will be fulfilled and complete for eternity.

Then we will be conformed to the likeness of his only son, Jesus Christ, so that we bear the family likeness, a likeness of God's love.

[6 : 16] This is the greatest love story. There is none that comes anywhere close in all of world history. This is the greatest love from a loving God and a loving son of God.

It is sacrificial love. It is costly love. God's own son was put to death. For us, though we were unlovely and unlovable, sinners, wretches, rebels, though we were.

What kind of love is this? The songwriter asks. What then shall we say in response to this love?

In a world like ours, isn't it a bit unreal, a bit fanciful or even fantastic? It's hardly down to earth. In a world that is full of hate, decay, frustration and futility, isn't this love a figment of imagination or wishful thinking?

What do the Christians who are now imprisoned in Kabul think of God's love now? A host of forces are arrayed against them. Their lives are threatened, surely one day to die, at the hands of the evil Taliban.

[7 : 36] Hasn't God's love given up on them? Or what about those Christians who are grieving in Pakistan today, this week, because of the massacred death in the last few days of Christians and the burning of churches in that country?

Where is God's love for them now? But even back home here, Christians who pray day by day for their children to become Christians and do not see any obvious answer to those prayers, has God's love stopped with them and not being passed on to the next generation?

Or what about Christians at school or in the workplace who face some hostility or mockery, ridicule or rejection because they are Christians?

People who seek to put them down, to laugh at them, to mock their standards and faith and beliefs? Where is God's love? For them. For you.

Or the Christians who suffer. Bereavement. Loneliness. Fear of old age or the future. Fear of war, perhaps. Those who are fearful of senile dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

[8 : 54] Fear of illness, job loss, distress or discomfort. Where in the midst of those situations is the love of God now?

Did it stop at the cross? Did it stop 2,000 years ago with a sacrificial and generous act but then somehow God's love was so fully expended it withered and died? Exhausted in Jesus' final breath? Paul climaxes Romans chapter 8 with four extraordinary questions. You may like to open your Bibles to page 919 to see one of the great passages in the Bible.

One that is worth our while remembering, knowing, believing and trusting for the rest of our lives. Romans 8 beginning at verse 31.

What then are we to say about these things? About the greatest love story of God's love for us sinners?

[10 : 00] What should we say? Paul could have asked his next question as, who's against us? And we could easily respond listing beyond our fingers and toes even, people who are institutions, who governments, countries, who are opposed to us, who are opposed to God and the Christian faith.

There's the Taliban and there's non-Christian parents or uncles or aunts or grandparents or kids at school or people in the workplace. We could answer that question with dozens and dozens of answers, who's against us?

But Paul doesn't ask his question like that. He throws out his question like a taunt or a challenge. It's a question that really almost has no answer because he asks it if God is for us, who is against us?

Well, there are lots of people against us. There are lots of people against God and Christians around the world and in our own country in different ways. But if God is for us, then anyone and everyone who is against us is in effect insignificant because if God is for us, that is all that counts and all that matters.

And the question in effect demands silence because it forces us to acknowledge the perspective that all the hosts of evil arrayed against us now and in world history are nothing.

[11 : 26] If God is for us, the gates of hell never against the church shall prevail, said the old hymn. And it's true. The reason for Paul's phrasing the question like this comes in the next verse, verse 32.

He who did not withhold his own son but gave him up for all of us, Jew and Gentile, Jew and non-Jew that is, will he not with him also give us everything else?

Paul's argument reminds us of what he'd said back in chapter 5. God's done the hard thing for us already. The hard thing is giving up Jesus to die for us.

If God's done that for us, then God's not going to withhold everything else because that's easy. It's small by comparison. The big thing is giving up Jesus to die for us.

It's done. Finished. But just the fact that it's done 2,000 years ago doesn't mean that God's love stopped there. But actually it's a guarantee of God's enduring and continuing love even to this day and for eternity.

[12 : 32] Will he not give us all things? Literally is what the end of verse 32 says. And remember last week that all things work for good for those who love God. So will not God give us all things?

All things may not be actually good on the surface or easy or comfortable. But all things are for our good. And God will indeed give us all things for our good.

And the guarantee of that is Jesus' death for us. Question 2 has a similar sort of twist in the question.

Who will bring any charge against us? Well that's how Paul could have asked the question but he doesn't. Who will bring any charge against God's elect?

The elect are literally the chosen. Those who were described in the verses immediately preceding as we saw last week as those who are foreknown by God having had a relationship established before the foundation of the world by God and predestined by God for eternal glory and conformity to the likeness of Jesus.

[13 : 40] They are the elect. Christians are the elect. All Christians are the elect. So by asking the question this way who will bring any charge against God's elect we realize that in the chain of verses 30 and 31 that we saw last week foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified there is no place for any charge against us because we're justified.

The charges are dropped because Jesus has died for us. That's what justified is about. Declared righteous, acquitted. And so in the end there may be many who bring charges against us but none will stick.

quite possibly those Christians if not already will be put to death in Kabul for proselytizing Muslims and having Christian propaganda.

They'll be found guilty probably by some Afghan court. But in the end what charge stands?

An Afghan court's guilty deserving death or God's not guilty forgiven by Christ. You see the charge that will stand will be God's not theirs and they will rise to heavenly glory if indeed they are Christians trusting in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 00] The third question follows immediately on it's a variation of the second. It's in verse 34. Who is to condemn? And again we might say well there's a whole host of people who seek to condemn us.

People all through the last 2,000 years have tried to condemn God's people Christians and before that God's people the Jews as well. Satan indeed seeks to condemn to accuse us of all sorts of things even to force us into self-condemnation.

Sometimes in our despair at our own lives we might think we stand condemned before God and that Jesus might even condemn us on the final day because of our ongoing sins. That's a perverse thought Paul says.

See how he answers his question in verse 34. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died. Yes, who was raised. Who is at the right hand of God who indeed intercedes for us.

Notice there the four things about Jesus that show that there is no way he will ever condemn us. He died for us. He rose from the dead. He's ascended to the right hand of God the Father and there now still today he intercedes praying advocating for us to God the Father.

[16:09] There's no way that Jesus will condemn us because he'll undo his work on the cross. He died for us. He's hardly going to make his death worthless by now changing his mind to condemn us of sins that he indeed died for and atoned for.

There is none to condemn in the end because God's statement of there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus stands for eternity.

notice again Paul's grounds of confidence. His grounds of confidence are not in his own ability his own faith his own missionary zeal his own Christian maturity far from that there's no mention of that at all but Paul's confidence stands firmly and securely in what Jesus has done.

Jesus who was given up by God to die for us rise from the dead ascend to the right hand of God the Father and there to intercede for us. There is the confidence there is the assurance that there is in the end no one against us who counts no one who can bring a charge against us that will stick for eternity no one who can condemn us in the light of God's statement there is now no condemnation. You see for Paul the cross of Christ is not just a demonstration of God's past love as though he can look back into the distance for him of 30 years for us 2,000 years and think yeah once upon a time God loved me but for Paul the cross is a guarantee that God still loves him.

[17:43] He hasn't undone that love. The greatest thing has been done already and God's love endures. That brings us to the fourth the final the climactic question of these last verses of Romans chapter 8.

He asks in verse 35 who will separate us from the love of Christ? Who's going to tear us away from Jesus' love for us?

In a sense similar to what happened to that young Cambodian girl in effect her father torn away from her separated from his love protection and provision. Who's going to do that to us from the love of Christ?

And Paul is in a sense again challenging or even taunting us to name someone. Come on you name someone something some institution that will separate you from the love of Christ.

Come on find something. Well hardship he says no way doesn't matter what hardship you endure in life ostracism rejection suffering whatever it is it will not and cannot separate you from the love of Christ.

[18:53] Well distress no way again no distress that you face in this life will separate you from the love of Christ. What about persecution? Persecution that may see you die for Paul writing this letter it was just at the beginning or just before the beginning of Nero's evil reign as Roman emperor when many Christians were put to death for their faith.

He knew the threat of persecution he'd experienced it in many towns beaten almost to death in some places. No not even persecution and not even persecution to the point of death that can't separate you from the love of Christ doesn't mean persecution won't happen but it cannot separate you from the love of Christ.

What about famine or nakedness there surely is something that indicates a separation from God's love because Jesus very words in the Sermon on the Mount said that God will provide for us food and clothing as our daily isn't that an indication that God's love is now absent no way Paul's saying here what about peril danger of some sort no there is no danger that can separate us from the love of Christ or the sword warfare maybe even warfare in fighting against Christians persecution again no even that cannot separate you from the love of Christ for it's written and he quotes from Psalm 44 for your sake we are being killed all day long we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered the words of the psalm here are speaking of the people of God who are righteous and yet they are suffering some form of warfare or persecution unjustly they're crying out to

God for action and Paul appeals back to the psalm to show that those situations cannot separate from the love of Christ from the love of God even when God's own people unjustly suffer it is not a demonstration of separation from God's love Martin Luther the German reformer nearly 500 years ago wrote a hymn the lines of part of the lines of which were and though they take our life goods honour children wife and those who mean us ill should ravage wreck or kill the city of God remain that is we remain within the bounds of the love of Christ even if they kill us take away all that we have and all that is precious to us we are not separated from the love of Christ no Paul says in verse 37 in all these things we are more than conquerors literally super conquerors through him

who loved us that is through

Jesus death and resurrection again that's where his confidence so firmly lies now that's not a glib triumphalism Paul's not saying here everything's going to be fine and dandy hunky dory thank you very much but he's saying that whatever happens however bleak or bad it is humanly speaking we actually are more than conquerors through Jesus nothing and no one can separate us from his love God will not be beaten God will not abandon God will not give up and God will not let go the chain from prehistory to the end of history has no weakest link we we are foreknown we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus we've been called in history we've been justified through Jesus death declared righteous our sins forgiven and we will certainly be glorified at the final end that chain is certain and sure and strong and nothing and no one in history can ever break that chain that

[22 : 49] Paul went through in verses 29 and 30 and so he says in his climax of this chapter I am convinced that neither death nor even life and all its vicissitudes and uncertainties nor angels or rulers spiritual powers any authority governmental or spiritual nor things present nor things to come that is nothing in time nor powers whatever they are and whoever they are nothing in space neither height nor depth neither the heights of drug induced euphoria or the depths of manic depression can separate us from the love of God nor anything else in all creation you think of something it could be added to the list it cannot separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord you see in the end there's no one to condemn and there is no one to separate these majestic verses are fundamental to the kind of

God we believe in and who is revealed in scripture a God who is absolutely sovereign no opposing force comes anywhere close to thwarting or frustrating his purposes for our good to be conformed to the likeness of Christ and be glorified forever he is faithful the love that he demonstrated on the cross 2000 years ago remains his love today it hasn't dried up or withered somewhere in history he's generous because he gave the most precious thing his only son Jesus Christ to die for us and not only that but will he not also give us all things Paul asked in verse 32 truly this is a love that will not let us go some years ago I used to share a house with a friend who just bought this house it was a renovators dream that is it was a dump I was given the main room so that

Rob could quickly fix up the spare room the second room and then we would swap and I would have a decent room for the rest of the time and then he would do up his own room my room the main room had leaks it had falling damp as well as rising damp that is the water came down the inside of the wall when door that didn't close apart from that it was fine Rob promised that he'd soon fix things up two years later I left that house to move to another house the same problems in the room still existed nothing had been done you see some jobs just never get finished even in the room that he was in only half of the work had been done in two years and for many of us our lives are littered with unfinished jobs and projects our gardens are full of them but what we see in these verses in

Romans is that God finishes the job we are renovators dreams spiritually we're dumps and God doesn't just begin a work in us but he will complete it on the day when we are finally and fully conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ in glory and what Paul is underscoring here and in the last couple of passages we've looked at in recent weeks is that we can be certain absolutely certain that nothing will stop God finishing the job in us he won't give up and nothing will force him to give up and nothing will force us to be separated from the love of God we can be sure of that he will surely complete us so that we will stand in glory like Jesus Christ renovated completely isn't that something to give thanks to God for ought not that statement of

God's sovereignty generosity faithfulness and abundant love move our hearts with gratitude not just today but every day what shall we say then about these things if God is for us who can be against us he who did not withhold his own son but gave him up for all of us will he not with him also give us everything else who will bring any charge against God's elect it is God who justifies who is to condemn it's Christ Jesus who died yes who was raised who is at the right hand of God who indeed intercedes for us who will separate us from the love of Christ will hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword as it's written for your sake we are being killed all day long we're accounted as sheep to be slaughtered no in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us for

[28 : 16] I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to

separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord how deep the father's love for us how vast beyond all measure that he should give his only son to us to his father's ■■■■■ Question The chapter of the Theót of the letter the