

Romans 8:31-39 “Loved in Christ”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama.! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! We're talking this summer about our union with Christ, about this glorious truth that God has placed us in Christ and Christ in us and how that reality impacts every aspect of our lives. Each week so far as we've talked about being located in Christ, being defined in Christ, being blessed in Christ, we've mentioned every week the idea of being loved in Christ, but it deserves a closer look.

One of the big life questions that we all ask is, how can I find love? So we're going to look at a bunch of passages this morning, but I want to start in Romans 8.

If you've never read Romans 8, it's a magnificent chapter that begins with this declaration that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 17] Forgiveness, pardon in union with Christ. But as Paul continues, he says, there's even more than that. We're not merely pardoned, but we're truly adopted into God's family.

So that even when things are difficult in our lives, we can know that he is working them all for our good, right? We're going to pick up the reading at verse 31 of Romans 8, as the crescendo peaks. I could say this every week when we open God's Word, but these words I'm about to read could change your life. They could transform your eternity.

They could impact every day that you have between now and then. Not my words, God's. Listen to the wonder of his love.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

[2 : 33] Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? 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. So 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. 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 height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Father, thank you for love like that. might we hear it and see it and feel it by your spirit.

[3 : 50] Might we know more of it and share more of it today. Come and work in each of our hearts. We ask by your word in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Look at those last two verses again. Secondly, I am sure 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 creation will be able to do what?

To separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. There it is. In Christ Jesus, living in that unbreakable union, you can never be separated from God's love.

Inseparable. Nothing can do it. Not anything spiritual or physical. Not your sin. Not their sin against you, as a derogates to tell these women.

Nothing. That's really the takeaway today. That's it. I can give it to you right here up front in three words.

[5 : 14] God loves you. That's all I got. God loves you. And some of you may be wondering, did he forget he's not talking to the nursery kids this morning?

Why do we need to hear this again? I knew that before I came to church. 30 minutes for that? It's going to take him that long? It always takes him that long. Well, some of us need this message because in our particular tribe, sometimes we skip over love to focus on the legal realities of our salvation because we know well the enormity of the debt of our sin.

And we see that. And we calculate in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. We add in his imputed righteousness. We carry the one.

And we conclude that God has to forgive us and let us into heaven because we receive Jesus by faith alone. Now that is good stuff.

And those are important legal calculations to be made. But sometimes we forget that all of that glorious theology is part of a love story where the God who made you for his own glory is redeeming you into relationship with him that is to be eternally delightful, full of love.

[6 : 50] Others of us need this truth because life is so bad that most days it feels like I must not be loved.

Maybe you can relate to some of the women that Deer was sharing about. Maybe your story is different but life's hard enough and bad enough that it doesn't feel like the one in charge loves me. My kids are wandering away from what I want for them. My job is uncertain and it's unfulfilling anyway. My last doctor's appointment, my last bank statement was alarming.

Life is so hard I'm not feeling the love, God. Still others of us need to listen because I know the reality of my heart.

I live with myself. I'm deeply unlovable. If anyone knew, and God knows by the way, no way could he love me.

[7 : 57] For others, the people supposed to show God's love to us have been such a distorted reflection of it that we're not sure anymore about a loving God.

Others of us can sense that we're living life looking for a spouse or a friend or a career to affirm us, to fill up our love tank and we keep coming up empty and at the same time crushing them in the process.

Still others of us are living with a deep feeling that we were made to love God, family, neighbors, enemies, at least someone and we're not sure where to find resources to do that.

We feel like we're empty all the time. I don't know where you are in that but God wants to look at every one of his children to hold your face in his hands and to say this morning, I love you.

That means I have a deep affection for you, a high value of you, a deep commitment that is unshakable to work for your good.

[9 : 17] In fact, nothing can stop me and nothing can ever separate you from my love. Jesus didn't twist my arm with salvation mathematics when he went to the cross.

No, it was because of the great love with which I loved you that I united you to Jesus in the first place that I made you alive together with him.

It was because of my great love, Ephesians 2. And you remember last week, Ephesians 1, it was in love that I predestined you to be adopted, that I set out to welcome you into my family as a son or a daughter.

Children of God by faith through Jesus Christ. God says, my love is not a momentary feeling.

It's not a high value now that may go down when you have a bad day. It's not a one-time gift of grace, but it's a permanent commitment that I am working everything for your eternal good.

[10 : 24] You remember what we read earlier in this service? Love never ends. And you may think, yeah, not this love never ends. When you are in Jesus, nothing can separate you from God's love.

Paul gets specific for us, not tribulation, our suffering and painful circumstances, not distress, our fears and anxieties, not persecution, Satan's attacks, not famine or nakedness, threats to our health and safety, not danger or sword, our harm or even our death.

Nothing can separate you from God's passionate, personal, persistent love. It's as Sally Lloyd-Jones describes it so well, a never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.

If you and Jesus are inseparable, then you and God's love are inseparable. Amen? That's the truth. I told you that's the message.

That we need it in so many ways. That we struggle to embrace it for so many reasons. So I want to spend just a few minutes together asking God to help it sink deep into our hearts.

[11 : 54] That's what He wants. He wants us to know it and believe it and He's going to help us with that this morning. using many of our senses to embrace His love.

First, hear His love. Hear it straight from the lips of Jesus first. John 17, Jesus is praying.

He's talking to His Father on His way to the cross. I in them and you in me. He's talking about our union with Him. I in them.

so that the world may know that You sent me and loved them even as You loved me. Father, You love them even as You love me.

His one and only Son begotten and beloved by the Father before all worlds. The perfect image of the invisible God.

[12 : 58] Oh, how the Father loves Him. Can you even imagine how much He loves Him? He loves Him to the moon and back and beyond and listen, listen, so does He love you.

Jesus says it. You're hidden in Christ. You're covered by Christ. You're united to Christ. so He loves you that way.

Maybe this will help you a little get at what we're thinking here, what the Bible's describing. When it speaks of union with Christ, the Bible speaks of the analogy of marriage, right?

In particular, that we, God's people, are the bride of Christ. So here, we would be loved by our father-in-law because He loves His Son.

Let me very carefully preface this example with I love my in-laws. But I've got to tell you, if they met me on my own, I'm not sure they would love me.

[14 : 14] I mean, let's just be honest, I am an extreme extrovert who can talk until I wear them out. I am a planner with a tight schedule, especially if you travel with me on a trip where I've created the itinerary.

I often don't love their animals the way that they do. Theoretically, hypothetically, I could drive them crazy.

Amen. That was a big mistake on my part, wasn't it?

Just softball. Well done. But they have never known me apart from their daughter.

never. Never. Never. They have loved Christy since before she was born. So because she loved me, married me, is connected to me, they love me.

[15 : 29] And I really do believe that with Bob and Deb. love love but that loving in-law relationship is certainly not to be taken for granted, is it?

In our broken world, sometimes in-laws resent you. Sometimes they tolerate you but they honestly feel that their child could have done better.

No, no show of hands, but you're feeling it. Some of you know that truth. Not in God's family. No, no, no.

Listen, the bride of Christ is actually a gift given to the Son by the Father. Remember how that kept coming up in our study of the Gospel of John?

So God loved us but never apart from loving us in Christ. From the very beginning He united us in Him so that He could love us and we would never drift in and out of His good graces based on our failures.

[16 : 36] We've been connected to, covered by the perfect Son. Listen, I'm not making this up.

Listen to Jesus again. He is the crown prince, the heir to heaven's throne, the apple of His Father's eye.

You loved them even as you loved me. I've told you every week that union with Christ means whatever happens to Jesus happens to you.

Now you believe God loves Jesus. Won't you believe that God loves you too? That's what He says.

You can hear God's love for you from the lips of Jesus.

You can hear God's love if you listen to the songs of His people in the Psalms where His steadfast love that endures forever is sung of hundreds and hundreds of times.

You can hear God's love if you listen to His voice to the prophets. They speak to His beloved people. Jeremiah 31, I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

[17 : 44] An everlasting love because you're precious in my eyes, Isaiah says, honored and I love you. I give men in return for you, peoples, in exchange for your life.

Even when you have run away, that's what's going on in Isaiah, you've turned your back on me. God says, I'm going to run after you and bring you back. Listen to chapter 54, God says, with everlasting love I will have compassion on you.

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you. My covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord who thinks you've been perfect. no. Says the Lord who has compassion on you because you need his mercy and his grace. Do you hear his voice this morning?

I love you. I love you. I love you. I'll never stop. Will you believe what he says in spite of what you feel, in spite of the circumstances screaming at you?

[18 : 48] I love you. I love you with an enduring, everlasting love, an unbreaking, always and forever love. But most of us need more than just words, don't we?

I told you I've got plenty of words, so Christy hears I love you from me more than she can stand some days. Maybe you've felt what I know she has at times, something like, why don't you stop talking about it so much and actually do something about it?

Show me! God won't stop telling us, but he will show us because he wants us to see his love too. How'd he do it? He came in the flesh, didn't he? For sake of time, let's just skip straight to the cross, okay? Where we already know we were crucified with Christ.

We were really mysteriously united to him in his death, but he's the one who personally, physically suffered and died as he showed us the full extent of his love, as he loved us to the very end.

[20 : 07] Romans 5, 8 reminds us that God shows his love so we can see it. He shows his love in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

In other words, God sent his perfect son to rescue very imperfect people, to die in their place. How deep the father's love, giving his only son his treasure in order to make a wretch his treasure. The father turns his face away from the son of his delight so that wounds that mar the chosen one bring many sons to glory.

See? Look! Behold what manner of love the father has given to us that we should be called the sons of God.

[21 : 08] Adopted, chosen, brought into his family because of our relationship with his son. This is why the Bible says the father sent the son.

at just the right time so that we could be sons of God. Galatians 4. This is love.

How do we see it? 1 John 4. Not even our own love for God, although I hope that we do love him, but that's not even really what love is.

I mean, how could we not love God when he rescued us as orphans and lavished his grace upon us and making us his sons, heirs? Not that, but that he loved us and sent his son to pay the penalty to cover all of our sins.

Survey the wondrous cross. See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down.

[22 : 18] Did e'er such love and sorrow meet or thorns compose so rich a crown? Have you looked at the cross of Jesus today to see his love?

Have you spent an hour there lately at the foot of the cross just taking it in, letting his love sink deeply in? Have you let it be more than just a passing thing you've heard or you were to sense to, but actually starts to change your heart?

I mean, just look at the ways we show our love. We show our love by waking up so that our spouse can sleep, by eating our kids broccoli so that they can focus on dessert, disadvantaging ourselves for the advantage of one we love, right?

how much further does Jesus go to do that for you? Have you contemplated what it feels like when someone takes something that you hate for you to give you something that you love?

And Jesus has done that with the worst possible thing, eternal separation from God and his love. And Jesus takes your separation to bring you back to him.

[23 : 42] God gave you his best when you were at your worst. He loves you. And the reason I'm talking about contemplating and meditating, slowing down with this is that God wants it to go beyond our ears and our eyes to our hearts through our whole beings.

Puritan preacher Thomas Goodwin noticed a beautiful example of this one day as a father and a son were walking together down a street and he saw them coming towards him.

They were just kind of walking a few feet apart when suddenly the father bent down and he grabbed his son and he swept him up into his arms and he hugged him and he kissed him and he told him I love you so much.

He just held him for a minute while busy people passed by them on either side. And then he put him back down and they walked on together.

And Goodwin said he looked and he realized that the boy was objectively, legally, just as much the father's son on the ground as he was in his arms.

[24 : 56] Right? But he subjectively, experientially felt the truth of his sonship, the relationship, the safety, the love, so much more in his father's arms.

That's what Paul's getting at, I believe, earlier in Romans 8 when he talks about our adoption and helping us get to the point that we know God loves us and is working for our good and can't be separated from us.

Look at verse 15. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. See, he's wanting you to experience not fear. That's an experience, an emotion, right?

When cars are rushing by you and people are everywhere and there's chaos around you. And you're in the street and you have a father somewhere but you feel alone and afraid.

[26 : 04] You have a spirit of fear. Paul says, no, no, God wants you to experience something else. Holy Spirit comes to pick us up, put us in our father's arms so that we feel the reality that we're held and we're safe and we can cry, Abba, Father.

It's part of why we need to pray, by the way. You don't need to pray because I told you to. You need to pray to cry out, Father, not because praying makes you more a son of God than you were before you prayed.

Praying doesn't make you a child of God. No, prayer makes you more aware of your father than you were before you prayed. It taps in to the unparalleled access that you have to the throne room of heaven, to the king of glory himself.

It crawls up into his arms, doesn't it? To feel his love that was already there, but it needed to seep deep into your heart, Jesus says. Spend some time calling God Father, depending upon him, remembering that he delights to give good gifts to his children.

He is that kind of perfect father for you now and always. Let the Spirit call you to that. Psalm 90 says, Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

[27 : 36] Psalm 90 is a prayer here, not that God's love would be good enough to satisfy us, okay? It is. But that we would feel it, that we would experience it that way as it leads to joy and gladness in our lives.

This is another way that being in Christ, loved in him, transforms your life. You weren't meant to be satisfied with merely human love.

God didn't design you that way. So when you try to make a husband or a wife, a boyfriend or a girlfriend, a child or a parent, satisfy you, it doesn't work.

It doesn't last. It can give you a taste, a picture, a glimpse of what you're longing for, but your heart was made to be satisfied only in this perfect and permanent love of the one who made you for himself.

So remembering, feeling how deeply loved you are in Christ actually frees you from searching for love, for value, for security in someone else's arms.

[29 : 00] Why? Because you've already got it in your father's. It does something else. It also frees you to love and be loved selflessly, at great cost, even when they and you are imperfect and to rejoice in such imperfect glimpses of the perfect lover.

Both of those. You don't have to run after human love to find life, but you're freed now to enjoy glimpses of that love. God loves us so well, doesn't he?

One more way you experience it. Zephaniah says when we feel his love, it quiets our noisy hearts. I don't know if there's anybody else in here, but I've got a noisy heart.

This verse in Zephaniah 3 says God's love calms our restless, anxious, fearful souls. This is the difference that being loved in Christ makes in hard times.

When everything around us screams that we can't possibly be loved, that we must have fallen out of God's good graces and that makes sense to us, we know we deserve that.

[30 : 24] But the world seems to be spinning out of control. Where's the God who loves me? Is he looking out for me? I've messed up so much, he probably will never do anything good for me.

And Zephaniah says don't be frantic. Don't try to earn your way back into God. Don't forget how even imperfect parents often love their children on bad days.

So let God's perfect love quiet you this morning. Hear his love. See his love.

feel his love. You have been married to his son. He has paid the most precious price ever to have you as his own.

He has adopted you into his family. He has given you his spirit so that you can crawl up into his arms anytime and talk to him even when you don't know what to say.

[31 : 23] He has loved you with an everlasting love like the eternal love between father and son from which you can never be separated.

So child of God come taste his love as well as what he wants for you. He's set the table.

What a father who knew how much we would need his love. Who knew how much we would struggle to let it sink in and really be embraced and change our hearts.

So he keeps giving us himself a taste of the way he most fully showed his love. A picture of relationship shared intimately around a table.

That's what he made you for. The love story that will never end because his love will never end.

Jesus said it this way on the night he was betrayed he told his disciples that story as he took bread and broke it and gave it to them as I ministering in his name give this bread to you.

[32 : 34] And he said take and eat this is my body given to you do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way he took the cup after supper and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

You shout the truth that he loves me enough to give his life for me. If you trust that Jesus gave his body and blood on the cross for you because of how much he loves you then don't let what you have done or how you feel be more important right now than what he has done and how he feels about you.

You believe this and come and celebrate with him. If all of this talk about love sounds like love that could be life changing to you but you're honestly just not sure about Jesus yet then I want to offer you once more his invitation.

We would love to talk with you more about him. He wants to invite you not to these elements this morning but to crawling up in your father's arms and actually knowing his love and resting there forever.

[34 : 06] So feel free to come and observe. Come let us pray with you or if you prefer stay where you are and contemplate these things yourself but for all of you child of God or one who's wondering about that my prayer is that none of you would leave here and miss the display of the greatest love ever given.

When you were at your worst God gave you his best his son because he loves you let's pray and we'll eat with him. Father might it be that we would actually taste some of your love that would sink so deeply into us that nothing could be truer nothing could be more certain for us.

Nothing could be more inspiring to us as we live this week. Because you are so good would you take things that are really common would you use them for a very uncommon holy purpose in our hearts to build our faith to bring us to bow the knee and embrace the love of a God who loves us when it doesn't make sense and when we don't deserve it.

Thank you for meeting with us this morning that we might believe you don't just love us from afar but you love us hand in hand and even getting up in your arms right now.

Work by your spirit in our hearts in Jesus name. Amen. For more information visit us online at southwood.org