

# The Love of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn to the chapter we read, Romans chapter 8. And we'll take up the reading at verse 35 again, page 1138 and verse 35, where Paul asks this all-important, crucial, fundamental question, which is this, that who, he says, 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 have been 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 persuaded 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.

Christians find themselves asking two questions about their own security and assurance that they are, in fact, indeed Christians.

The first question is, does God love me? And the second question is, if he does, is there anything that can change that?

Anything in all the world? Will there ever come a day or will there ever be an event in which God will change that love in any way? And when you think about these two questions, there cannot be two more important questions by which I am assured, by which I have that certainty as a Christian that God loves me and that he always will love me.

[ 2 : 25 ] If the answer to the first question is no, then I am completely lost and there's no point in asking the second question.

If God does not love me, then I don't need to bother asking, will he, was there anything that can change that? But it's a very important question, just the same.

And that's a question that we can put to anyone here this evening who's not a Christian. How important is it to you this evening to know that God loves you?

Is it something that's high priority or low priority? Is it something that you can't get away from or is it something that you never think about?

Where is that question in your mind this evening? If for you it is a burning question, then God is speaking to you and God is drawing you to himself.

[ 3 : 29 ] Make sure you listen to him and make sure you ask him to continue speaking to you and to draw you, to show you what it means to enter into his kingdom.

If the answer to the first question is, yes, God loves me, but the second one is, yes, that love can be changed, then it means that his ongoing love for me is conditional and it means that I could never sleep at night again, not knowing whether today God has actually ceased to love me because of something that has happened or because of something that I have done to drive that love away. Furthermore, if that has happened, I don't know if I can ever get it back and even if I do, I might lose it again and I might lose it a thousand times and worst of all, when I die, I might die not having God's love in my heart and in that case, I will be eternally lost.

Meanwhile, I can never be sure of whether God loves me today, so how can I pray with any kind of confidence? If somebody asks me, what does it mean to be a Christian, I can never really give them any confident answer because I don't know whether I am a Christian, I don't know whether God's love has been lost or whether he continues to love me or whether I've done something to affect that love or to spoil that love or to change it in some way, so I begin to flounder in what I say and my witness is completely destroyed because I am not sure, I don't know, God's love changes, it's here today and gone tomorrow depending on what I do and the level of my obedience and my faithfulness to him.

So you see, it's an important question, it's an absolutely crucial question. If, however, the answer to the first question is yes, God loves me.

[ 5 : 37 ] And the answer to the second question is no, nothing can change that love. Then I can say with absolute certainty that I am a child of God who is saved by grace and eternally secure.

And it seems to me then tonight that there is no more urgent task than to answer those two questions. And I hope that by looking together at those two questions that that will be the basis of our coming to the Lord's table next Lord's Day.

What about the first question then? Does God love me? Where do I go to find the answer to that question?

Well, whatever else I do, I do not listen to voices in my head. And I'll tell you why. Because if I begin to listen to voices in my head telling me one thing or another, I don't know whose voice it is.

That's the problem. So I don't listen to voices in my head. Neither do I rely on my own feelings.

[ 7 : 05 ] Because my feelings vary from one day to the next. And if today I feel good as a Christian and feel secure as a Christian, it might be easy for me to say, God loves me.

But tomorrow, if I don't feel good as a Christian, particularly if things have gone wrong in my life, I don't feel as secure in my own heart, then I'd be tempted to say, well, I'm not so sure.

I can't do that. I've got to have more assurance than that. Something that varies from day to day depending on my own feelings. Neither can I go to my life and ask myself, how well does my life correspond with what the Bible demands of me.

How well do I obey? How good is my life? If you want to put it that way. How faithful and obedient I am. Because if the strength of God's love for me is dependent on the quality of my obedience to him, then I'm all over the place.

And God's love has to be all over the place. And I can never be sure of whether that love is there or not. So if we can't go to any of these places, where can we go to?

[ 8 : 28 ] Well, I'm sure you've guessed the answer already. It's an answer that I always give and it's always given from this poor. But there's only one place where we can go to find the answer to that question and that is to the Bible.

That's what we're doing tonight. We're looking at the Bible. The Bible is the place where God speaks personally to us. And if this question is an important question at all, the answer will be in the Bible.

We can be absolutely sure I will find the answer there. Where will I find the answer? Where do I find the love of God expressed in an unmistakable way?

Well, I can go, for example, there are many places I can go. One of these places is Romans chapter 5 and verse 8. You can look it up when you go home. It's one of the most precious verses in the Bible.

A verse I go back to time and time again and here's what it says. It says that God demonstrates his love. It actually says that God demonstrates his own love.

[ 9 : 32 ] A love that you won't find anywhere else in this world. I'm not saying there's no love in the world. There is love. Thank God there is love in this world between one person and another, within families and friends and between husbands and wives and brothers and sisters and all of these.

There is love in the world. We'll come on to that in a few moments' time. But yet, the Bible says that God demonstrates his own love as a love that is entirely unique.

And we'll see that in a few moments. And it goes on to say he demonstrates. In other words, he shows, he reveals, he makes his love known. It's not a hidden love.

We don't have to climb the depths of the most remote mountains to find God. You'll find it clearly demonstrated. And here's what it says. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

That means that tonight, that if you want to find that unique love of God, you go to the death of Christ. You go to the place where Jesus laid down his life for us, the place that called Calvary.

[ 10 : 38 ] That's where God demonstrates his own love for us. That's one of the places in the Bible that we go to have a clear, unmistakable declaration of the love of God.

You see, when it comes to a subject like this, you can't get better than this. You can't get more crucial, more important than this. Our relationship to God, our eternal destiny, lies on this question. Absolutely crucial. And that's why I believe that there is such a silence with us this evening. Because you agree with me.

There cannot be a more crucial question than this one. And God knows that. And that's why he has given us a clear, unmistakable answer in the cross.

God demonstrates his own love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. But someone must say, well, that's Paul, isn't it?

[11:44] He was a follower of Jesus and he's speaking to the church and they are elect. They are the people of God. How can I know this love for myself? And how can I know whether I am elect or not?

We've just been reading this chapter and here we have it again in verse 28. We know that all things work together. Sorry, verse 29. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

That's the answer, isn't it? And that's the difference between me and what the Bible calls those elect people. They're the ones who know God's love in their own hearts and in their own lives.

Where does that leave me? Well, it does because that's the crucial question as well. The Bible tells us to make your calling and your election sure. And once again, let me say this.

If that question is uppermost in your mind, if it burns within you, then God is speaking to you. And God will show you the answer.

[12:51] Believe me, those who seek God, if you're really searching the truth tonight, you will find it because God is personal and God deals with us through the Bible.

So if that question is uppermost on your mind, you keep asking it and you keep seeking. The Bible tells us, seek the Lord while he may be found. Make it an absolute priority in your life.

This is reality. God is speaking to us. I believe that he's doing that. I believe he does it regularly and that he does it through the Bible and that his word is powerful.

But here's the answer to it. You see, Jesus, he knew all about what the elect were and this is the way he put it. If you go back to John chapter 6 and verse 37, again you can look it up.

This is what he says. He says, all that the Father give me, and he's talking about people, all those whom the Father give me, that's the elect, will come to me.

[13:52] Now do you see what he's saying? You see the simplicity of what he's saying. Yes, there are those who God has chosen. That's his business. But the mark, the way that I know that God has chosen me, and I can't understand why, but the way that I know is not because I look at my life and I see myself better than anyone else.

Believe me, I don't. I can't understand it. And yet, that's what the Bible says. The only reason I believe it is because the Bible says it. Why do I know? Because God, he has thrown me.

Because I've come to him. And when Jesus talks about coming to him, he's talking about those who come to him in faith. Believing and trusting and resting in Jesus and in him alone.

So, go back to that chapter, John chapter 6 and verse 37, where Jesus says, no one can come to me unless the Father draws him.

But he says, all that the Father gives me will come to me. So, here's the test. Are you going to come to Jesus?

[15:04] That's the only question that we're left with this evening. Will you come to Jesus? See, we're left, the question is left with us on what we will do with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ is the key. So, here, so, the Bible leaves us, I hope you'll agree with me, the Bible leaves us in no uncertain terms as to what God asks us and invites us to do.

To come in faith and trusting and turning away from our old life. From all that is wrong and all that is sinful in our lives and come and to trust and to rest in Jesus.

And when we do that, the Bible promises that we will know, that we will experience the new life, what it means to be born again.

It's also important to ask, well, we've asked the question, what does God love me? But we haven't asked the question that perhaps lies behind that, which is, what is the love of God?

[16:13] Perhaps you feel tonight that you can take that word for granted, love. It kind of rolls off your tongue. You wouldn't even think about it. Some of you tonight wouldn't even think about it.

Well, of course he does. That's what the world at large, if you go out in the streets tonight, go out in the streets and the villages and the towns and the cities, you say, well, does God love? And they'll say, of course he does. That's his job.

That's what makes God, God, God. And those of them who know the Bible, perhaps they might even be able to quote the verse that God is love, isn't he? And for many people it's their excuse to

live any kind of life that they want in the belief that in the end everything will be okay.

You ever heard of therapy buddies? I hadn't heard of them until quite recently until I came across them on the internet. No, I saw them on a news program on TV.

It's this person, this guy in America who started up a company and he's made these oversized kind of cuddly creatures and it's the most ridiculous thing you've ever come across.

[17:19] You buy these for about \$50 and if you hold it and you hug it there's a wee mechanism that goes inside and it says this, everything will be okay.

You ever heard of them? They're selling millions of them. Came across recently a site on Facebook on the internet where a designer label has been designed with the same message everything is okay.

It's easy for us to say that, isn't it? We live in the comfortable West. It's quite not surprising you find that kind of message in the West, eh? Where the biggest problems that we normally encounter are burning the toast in the morning and the car breaking down on the way to work.

That's the kind of typical problems that frustrate us in the West and where we need to hear this message oh it's okay everything will be okay in the end. You try telling that to somebody in Somalia who's lost their whole family in a bomb.

You try and tell that somebody who's been grossly abused in Iran this evening in an awful Iranian jail and he'll tell you don't give me that. Everything is not okay and everything will not be okay.

[18:30] You tell that to somebody whose life has been scarred this evening by betrayal and by violence. That's the kind of place that we need to go to if we get this idea that somehow or other that we can relax in the knowledge that everything is okay.

It isn't. We live in a world where everything is not. It's far from it and to be honest if that's the message that God brings me to that brings me no comfort at all because it means that some people who perpetrate the most horrendous crimes will get off that's the message for them as well.

God is saying the same thing to them. It doesn't matter what you do everything is going to be okay.

Is that really what God is like? You honestly believe that that's what God is like? Well I'll tell you this if that is what God is like I don't want him.

If God has no justice if there's no justice in the universe then that means nothing to me. I'll just go home and I'll just live the best that I can and I'll just kind of muddle along until I die and just hope to be honest I hope that Dawkins is right and that there's nothing after death because if that's the message of God thankfully tonight that's not the message of the Bible.

The message of the Bible is that there is justice in the universe. The reason there is justice is because God is just and the reason why we rise up in indignation and anger when we hear about injustice and cruelty in the world is because we have implanted within us that sense of outrage because God is perfectly just but here's the problem God doesn't tell one set of people to stop doing what they're doing without telling us to stop doing what we're doing.

[20:20] It may be different but the seeds of deceit and selfishness and violence and hatred lie within us as well and every single one of us to a greater or lesser extent is guilty before God is universal in his holiness and every one of us has to stand before him accountable to God this evening and that's not a comfortable answer so I guess that's why we look for this message everything is okay it's not it's not and I hope we wouldn't expect it to be I hope that tonight we know that if we were to stand before God tonight it would be the most enormously uncomfortable horrendous experience because right away right away we would be shown to be what we actually are we would be faced with ourselves as we actually are compared with the glory and the majesty and the purity and the holiness of God that's what we have to contend with now here's the message of the Bible

God has reached and this is I tell you the most amazing message and this is what makes the gospel so incredibly unique that this same God who is perfect in holiness and justice and righteousness and goodness has reached out his perfect unstained love towards that lost and filthy and shameful world without compromising his justice he hasn't lost his justice he hasn't lost his sense of punishment for those who are wrong but he has reached out into this world in love to forgive us and to cleanse us and to change this world by changing individual people like ourselves in the gospel how did he do it how could that possibly how can

God remain as he is perfectly holy and just and yet how can he how can he just change a lost world without without changing himself well he did it in Jesus by becoming one of us by entering into this world as God and as man and then not just not stopping there but going to the cross and laying

down his life on the cross so that through his suffering and death the son of God himself suffered the wrath and the punishment of God that we deserved so that we in coming to that death and entrusting in what Jesus did at Calvary could find forgiveness a new life you see God did two things he did something to his son in Jesus he did something to his own son the Bible tells us that he made his own son to be sin for us and that means it means that he made him to be a sacrifice for our sin that's what

God did to his own son and in so doing he poured out channeling and focusing his own perfect anger on his son as he became guilty for our sin but he did something to us as well through Jesus he brought about a new life within us so that first of all our sins are forgiven can I ask you this question this evening do you have the forgiveness of sins have you experienced the forgiveness of sins I don't mean God feeling sorry for us I don't mean the pity and compassion of God we've all heard about compassion this week haven't we where the Scottish government had compassion on a man who was convicted of the Lockerby bombing in 1988 and because of that compassion because he's a dying man he's only got three months to live that they set him free out of compassion well that may or may not be other

I don't know I'm not going to get into the question as to how right it was or otherwise but I'll tell you this that there was a vast difference between showing compassion to the Lockerby bomber and when God says to us your sins are forgiven I'll tell you how because that man tonight I'm assuming he's guilty he was convicted of it he goes back to Libya he may be a free man in the eyes of the law but he is as guilty as he was all those years ago nothing can remove that guilt the longest jail sentence cannot remove that guilt but I'll tell you what God does to us when a person as you and I come to Jesus and as we trust by faith in what he has done for us God literally removes our guilt now let me tell you something nobody can do that you can never find that anywhere else in this world no human power has the authority to remove someone's guilt the highest court in the world cannot remove your guilt they can punish you but they can't remove your guilt if you are guilty you're guilty before

[ 26 : 00 ] God but God says your sins and your iniquities are cleansed washed washed and that and that and that the worst sinner in the world tonight can be saved you know some people are outraged at that they think well that's unjust but that's when we think that we're better than them that's a bit like those people who were with Jesus in Luke chapter 7 when that woman of reputation came in and started washing his feet with her hair and with her tears rather and she was so broken because she had been brought to realize the extent of her lostness but brought to realize what Jesus had done for her and the rest of the people were outraged they said this can't be right that a person like this look at her we are much better than her what they didn't realize was that they thought that religion was only for good people but Jesus came to show that forgiveness is for bad people like you and I tonight bad people people who need him people who need washing and forgiveness tonight that's what the love of

God means and if it doesn't it's meaningless to me if it doesn't mean that my sins are forgiven and I'm brought into a relationship with God forever then what else does it mean what good is it to know that God loves me but I can say tonight that in Jesus God does love me but here is the second question and the second question of course is the question that Paul asks in this passage can anything change that love it's an important question isn't it love always involves a relationship and so does the love of God involves a relationship and that relationship involves commitment and dependency your whole life then depends upon the other person the person that you love I suppose the greatest example of that is the love between a husband and a wife once a girl and a boy discover that they love one another and the greatest demonstration of this is marriage in the world that's what marriage is always meant to demonstrate the love between

God and his people highest demonstration of that when a man and a woman they discover that they love one another then the step is commitment commitment and it's a one way commitment in which there's dependency upon one another and that dependency is made on the assumption this person will not and if I have a bad day and I lose my temper and I'm grumpy and I'm acting all funny and out of character and all the rest of it I know that even if we fall out and even if we argue and we go through rough times with one another I know that that person is still going to be there that's what it means and as such it's a demonstration we can afford to be intolerant of one another we think we have this right and I'm talking to myself I'm talking to Christians you know the

Christian need to be you talk about tolerance today we know all about tolerance we know it because we we practice it we ought to practice it in our lives I'm not talking about the tolerance that says everything is good that's the world's definition of tolerance I'm talking about tolerance with one another and bearing with one another forbearing one that's what the bible says putting up with one another out of love love is hard when we practice it in this world and anytime we have any doubt as far as that's concerned you just think of this what does God have to put up within me can I imagine the kind of the kind of awful I do in my life against God and yet I can wake up every morning on this assumption on this knowledge that God has never changed his love for me and will not do so that's the one certainty that I have in this world and the apostle is working through that very question he knows how important it is as he finishes this great chapter he's worked his way through the Christian life he's gone from asking who will deliver me from this body of death he's gone from working all the way through the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian and yet he's leaving these questions that he knows that the Roman Christians are going to be asking and if they were asking these questions then we are asking look at what they are asking can anybody be against us well we know that we have an enemy verse 31 but Paul says this listen if God is for us then who can be against us is there anything missing in my life has God left anything out of my life Paul says listen to this he says he who did not spare if God did not spare his own son but gave also with him freely graciously give us all things we have everything in Jesus nothing has been missed out and he goes through all of those questions that surprisingly or otherwise we all ask from time to time now here's the last one is anything able anything at all able to separate me or to change [ 31 : 34 ] God's love for me in this world and beyond so he works his way through it he let's the people that they were surrounded with and yet Paul is taking one by one he sat down and he sat down and do a lot more more study of what

God says in the Bible and he says this I am and this conclusion of verse 38 is this after all I've studied I am sure the AV says persuaded persuaded now how do you become persuaded of something well you don't become persuaded about something in a moment in time you only do that at the end of a process of thought and prayer and working things out for ourselves and he says that you take everything death let's look at what he says give me five more minutes please let's look at how Paul after this long long time of reflection he's thought about life or death can death do anything to change your life and he's talking about the things that can happen in this life the kind of crisis that the Roman Christians were facing day by day or even death itself for many of those Christians they knew that they faced death by way of persecution you see it was dangerous in those days to be a

Christian just the same way as it is dangerous in many places now to be a Christian we know nothing of that but then but that's the way it was in Rome at that time but even death itself cannot separate me and I'm glad that the apostle has said that because death of course is the great separator isn't it as far as we are concerned my wife and I we took a walk yesterday into the Gress cemetery it's a place where many of our own relatives have been buried and you know the great difference between walking in a cemetery that you know now and having done that 20-30 years ago is this that you know the people who have been buried there it's quite a solemn thing grave after grave I knew that person I remember what he looked like I remember speaking to him I knew him one by one and now it's all changed they're gone death is the great separator isn't it that's what we know

I don't need to tell you this you know it from your own experience and Paul is saying look I know that but there's one thing that death itself cannot separate us from and that is the love of God in Jesus Christ because it extends beyond death see God is able to extend he promised life everlasting life that goes beyond and he's promised that the person who trusts in Jesus he'll take that person to be with himself forever in love where we will enjoy within perfection the love of God in Jesus Christ what about angels or rulers what does that mean well Paul again what he's doing here is he's he's trying to think of every element in the universe whether it's physical or whether it's spiritual here he's talking about a collective term for beings which we cannot see now the bible tells us all about that there are angels but there are also demons and sometimes the bible talks about demons and the devil's angels as rulers in the heavenly places that's what he means here and there is some

I'm not sure how but there is some connection we can call it an interference if you like between the spiritual beings angels and demons and what goes on in this world remember job what happened to

job at the very beginning where satan himself went to god and he asked permission to ruin job's life take away everything that he leaned on now that shows us again that there is some connection and paul is asking well if that connection is it able to change look how much change there was in job's life he lost everything he lost his family he lost his goods he lost his riches his home everything and yet he rose out of those awful dark days saying this I know that my redeemer lives you're tempted to believe that it was through that very process of unimaginable pain that job was taught that crucial lesson

[ 37 : 15 ] I know that my redeemer lives things present or things to come things present or things to come what's that that's the language of time isn't it he's looking at every possible element in this life things present but things to come how many of us tonight you fear the future I don't believe there's anyone here tonight who hasn't at some point feared what might come we don't know what's around the corner and the very fact that it's uncertain to us it fills us with fear have you ever woken up through the night and you begin to think you can't sleep I don't know what it is about through the night but you begin to think of things everything gets turned upside down you begin to fear what this might happen that might happen the next thing might happen before you know it you're thinking of all the worst things the most horrendous things that can happen and some of us spend even our waking moments wondering about all of these things putting all the scenarios together what will I do how will

I cope and Paul is saying well the love of God in a person's life means that God will give you the grace that you need and that is a promise he will give you what you need but not now at the time he will give you it even although you can't see it at the time he will give you it because of that love upon which everything or height or depth time is gone the language of space height or depth it symbolizes it symbolizes the vastness of the universe but it also symbolizes the variation that can take place in our lives life's experiences one day we can be at a wedding the next day we can be at a funeral one day you can be celebrating the next day you can be in the depths of despair there are good times and bad and sometimes we think that because life is so changeable and variable so unpredictable perhaps God's love is not as constant as we nothing nothing says Paul is able to separate us from the love of

God in Jesus you see how important this was for a people who were facing death by prison and by gladiators and by lions they had no idea what lay in front of them Paul had no idea he worked this out for himself in a Philippian jail and he was this is the conclusion he came to he said I he said for me to live is Christ and to die is gain that was the conclusion for me to live is Christ and for and to die is gain many of these people face death all the time continually because of their faith in the Lord and it was also important as it is tonight because of the kind of world in which they live they didn't know whether they'd be able to maintain their obedience to Jesus to maintain their witness how many of you are like that I am how many of you are aware of how quickly you could fall of how vulnerable you are as a

Christian I am I can tell you if you feel vulnerable tonight I do too you say you're a minister you're not vulnerable of course I am I'm as weak as anybody else so what do I depend on on my own faithfulness on my office on my uniform by no means I depend only on Jesus Christ and what he has done for me does backsliding affect God's love for us no it changes many things it changes your confidence in the Lord it changes the way you feel it changes spoils your witness it makes you utterly miserable I can tell you from my own experience as a young Christian you're never going to find that happiness and contentment and joy if you're a backslidden Christian if you're backslidden tonight then come back come back to the Lord and yet not even backsliding can separate you from the love of God in Christ and the reason I'm saying so confidently come back is because God's love for you hasn't changed so you can come back and know you can lay hold upon that love you know this time has gone this chapter is full of nothing have you ever noticed how full of nothing this chapter is it's very important to recognize that I was saying that in the morning we've been going through through this chapter in the morning that's why I'm spending a wee bit more time on it this evening it starts off with nothing there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and as Paul comes to the conclusion he's nothing after nothing who shall if God is for us who can be against us nobody nothing he who does not spare his own son gave him up for us all how will he not up he won't nothing who shall bring any charge against God's elect nobody who shall who is going to condemn us nobody because Christ Jesus died who will separate us from the love of Christ nobody nothing will separate us it's on the basis of that nothing that we come confidently to

the

[ 42 : 43 ] Lord's table next week and I'm asking you the question is there another nothing who or what should prevent you from coming to the Lord's table next Lord's day if you are following Jesus trusting in his death alone by faith alone by his grace alone on him alone the answer is nothing let's pray father in heaven we pray that you will bless your word to us this evening Lord richly bless us we ask and go before us and part us with your blessing and stay with us through the coming week in Jesus name Amen