

6. The New Assurance (8:31–39)

Verse 31 begins the last section in Romans 8, and as one man has said, it is the highest rung in the ladder of comfort demonstrating our security in Christ. We are presently loved by Christ, but how can we be assured that Christ is going to love us to the end? How can we triumph in every circumstance of life?

8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

“These things” in verse 31 refers to Romans 8:24–30; Paul is asking what can we infer from what has just been said about our predestination? If God has predestined our salvation (from beginning to end), then who can alter our destiny? The answer, of course, is no one! If God is working for us, nothing can prevail against us. As the verses that follow demonstrate, if God is for us it doesn’t matter who or what is against us.

8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Furthermore, Paul points to the character of God. God’s character is richly shown in that God gave His one and only Son (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8) to become a substitute for our sin; and if God gave us that which He held dearest, why would He refuse to give us lesser blessings? He wouldn’t. If He freely gave us His Son, He will freely give us all things.

Notice Paul says, “How shall He (God) not *with Him* (Christ) also freely give us all things?” Christ is included with the Father as the source who gives us all things freely.

8:33 Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.

8:34 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.

Verses 33 and 34 refer to a legal context. The elect are those in verses 28–30 who have been chosen for salvation. Paul asks, is it possible for any creature, whether mortal or spirit, to bring a charge against us that will overrule our standing before God? No, for God is the One whom we have sinned against and if He has already declared us righteous (we are justified), who can call God’s judgement wrong and find us guilty? In Romans 8:30, those whom God predestines, He justifies.

There is no accusation or any other consideration that has escaped the mind of God that could cause Him to reverse His decision in our favor. He sees all. He knows all. His decisions are without error. Romans 8:1 says, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” “We can therefore confidently challenge the universe, with all its inhabitants human and demonic: Who is he that condemns? There will never be any answer” (Stott, 257).

Christ’s death removed all ground for condemnation. In addition, His resurrection was evidence that His death was accepted and that His claims were true. Furthermore, Christ is in a position of authority, exalted to a place of universal dominion (Psa. 110:1; Eph. 1:20; Rev. 3:21; Heb. 1:3) at the right hand of the Father; if He acts as our advocate and pleads our case before God, we can be assured *even today* that God will hear Him.

This is why Paul has such security. The actors in our salvation are God and Christ, not us. We do not earn our justification; God justifies. We do not plead our case based on our merits; Jesus died, was raised, is at the right hand of God, and intercedes for us. God has done the work to secure our salvation so it cannot fail.

8:35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

8:36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

This is the last step and the climax of Paul's argument. There is absolutely nothing that can separate us from God's love for us in Christ.

The difficulty that many of us face is that we don't have confidence in His love because the circumstances we find ourselves in don't appear to come from the hand of a loving God. In addition, we know that we don't deserve God's love. "How can an infinitely pure God love those who are defiled with sin, who are proud, selfish, discontented, ungrateful, disobedient? But this is the very thing we are required to believe, not only as a condition of peace and hope, but as the condition of salvation. If our hope of God's mercy and love is founded on our own goodness and attractiveness, it is false hope" (Hodge, 290–291).

8:35b–37 is an amplification of the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Are troubles (oppression of various kinds) or hardship (stressful circumstances occasioned by dangers and threats and worries) or persecution (active opposition from the enemies of the gospel) or famine¹ or nakedness or danger (hazards commonly encountered in daily life—see 2 Cor. 11:26–27 and 12:10) or sword (execution) adequate to separate us from God's love for us in Christ? They are not. The godly have suffered in all ages and it didn't separate them from God's love; "as it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered'" (8:36; Psa. 44:22). Death cannot separate us from the love of Christ—to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). We will suffer as the saints before us have suffered, and we will see the love of God poured out on us just as it was on them.

Understanding our status in Christ is what allows us to face tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword with confidence knowing that none of those things will separate from the love of God for us in Christ.

8:37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

Our victory is tied to the gospel. "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." (8:37). Just as the hand of God is intimately involved in our salvation from beginning to end, assuring that we will reach our destination, so our triumph in tribulation is assured, for it is not dependent upon our own strength but the power of Him who loved us.

This is a counterintuitive verse. It tells us something that appears to be the opposite of reality. Christians can undergo famine, suffering, persecution and may even be killed; they appear to be defeated or are barely surviving. But Paul uses a powerful verb (ὑπερνικῶμεν - *hupernikomen*) to

tell us that Christians don't merely survive these things; they are overwhelmingly victorious in them. The present tense verb indicates a continuous, present action. Even in the midst of their sufferings and persecutions Christians experience a continuing and unmistakable victory. They are not victorious due to grit, determination, luck, or chance; they continually and powerfully triumph over these things *in Him who loved us*. They *are conquering even in the midst of* suffering and death because they are united with Christ.

The world would never call persecuted people or someone who is destitute or suffering "overwhelmingly victorious." But then again, they did not see the cross as a victory either. For Christians all things are working for good (Ro. 8:28). All things are conforming them into the image of the Son (Ro. 8:30). They *will* be glorified. In the end, no one in heaven will be looking back wistfully at earth. Christians will not simply win; they will conquer overwhelmingly. As Paul said, to live is Christ and to die is *gain*.

If we think the Christian life is about barely surviving, we will miss out on the power that God wants us to have as believers. It's the power to face death, the power to face disease, the power to face adversity, and the power to realize that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

Verse 37 also teaches us that we are to have an attitude of conquering, as well. Although we may weep with others, we do not grieve as others grieve. We can endure any of these things because our horizon is not merely an earthly life but an eternity; with our future safe with God there is nothing we will face that can defeat us.

**8:38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,
8:39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

In verses 38 and 39 Paul heaps thought upon thought to demonstrate with absolute certainty the impossibility of being separated from the love of Christ. When Paul says, "I am convinced" we know he is getting to the heart of the issue.

The power, love, and wisdom of God does not result in us escaping from trials; rather, they promise triumph in these things.

- Nothing in life or death (nothing that happens to us in life—see 8:35—or in death)
- Neither angels or principalities (no spiritual power, whether good or evil [principalities can be either a reference to the demonic or earthly powers])
- Nothing present, nor things to come (nothing that occurs in history, in the realm of time, whether it is in the present or related to the uncertainty of the future)
- No power
- No height nor depth (no spacial location; Psa. 139:7–10)
- No created thing ("Created things" includes everything that exists, except God. There is much in creation that can destroy us. We can drown in water, be burned in fire, crushed by rocks or landslides, eaten by lions, or infected with microscopic bacteria. All of these agents of our destruction are created things.)

But none of these things has the power to separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Schreiner summarizes verses 35–39:

Paul deliberates upon what could possibly sever us from Christ's love, and those things which are most likely to remove us from His saving grasp are introduced: the pressures of life, persecution, lack of food and clothing, the prospect of death, angelic powers, etc. The worst that life can throw at us is contemplated, for it is precisely these things which would be most likely to detach us from Christ's love. Paul affirms with confidence, however, that none of these things will prevail over the love of God and Christ. He is convinced that there is nothing in the created world that can uncouple us from Christ. Indeed, we are "more than conquerors" through Christ. We are "more than conquerors" because God turns our enemies into His servants and uses them for our benefit. A God who uses even the most terrible things for our good will see to it that none of these things remove us from His love. Indeed, He will use them to make us feel His love more profoundly and deeply. Paul introduces persecution, famine, the possibility of martyrdom, and present and future troubles because these are the elements of life which conspire to snuff out the faith of believers. These are the things that taunt believers with the horrible thought that God does not care, that Christ does not love them. A departure from faith does not occur in a vacuum. The sufferings of everyday life and its pressures are the things that could cause believers to renounce Christ. Paul's point here, however, is that the most terrible things which one can conceive of will not have that effect in the lives of believers. They will never deny Christ nor shrink back from Him. They will "hang on" not because of the strength of their will and their indomitable courage in the midst of difficulties and sufferings. They will persist because the love of God will never let them go. They will persevere in the faith because God's love has grasped them and will hold them securely in the midst of the vicissitudes of life. If this passage merely says that God loves believers no matter what happens, but we may still depart from his love, then it is cold comfort indeed. Our prime concern is not that God will cease loving us. We know He will be faithful to the end. What worries us is that we will deny Him, that we will turn our backs on the faith, and renounce our first confession. This text assures us that we will not do so. We will remain true to God, not because we are so noble—but because Christ is so loving. Nothing, not even ourselves, can ever cause us to renounce the love of God which has invaded our lives.

NOTE 1: It is obvious from this passage that Christians undergo trials and suffering as part of the Christian experience. Verse 38 even mentions famine and nakedness as trials that threaten to separate us from God's love. We may conclude that this contradicts Jesus' words in Matthew 6. After warning the disciples not to worry about food and clothing He says, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). When Jesus says that we should not be anxious about what we shall eat or drink because our Father knows what we need, He doesn't mean that God will exempt Christians from the sufferings common to humanity, rather, it means that if famine strikes, it will not cut us off from the love of God. In the midst of suffering we have the assurance that God knows our needs, acts in love, and that even suffering is working out His good purposes. Because of this we do not need to worry about the future.