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“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31–39).

All three of my kids, at about age two, went through that dreaded period of time called separation anxiety. If you're not a parent, it's awful. All your child wants is to be with you and most often they want mommy! With our first child, we didn't know how to handle it. We'd try to leave Levi with a babysitter or drop him off in the church nursery but he would cry and scream until we'd come back and sweep him up into our loving arms. As seasoned parents, when it came to our third child, we had no problem dropping him off and letting him cry it out! Thankfully, all my children grew out of that phase and as far as I know, there was no permanent damage done!

I want to talk today about a different kind of separation anxiety, one that has to do with our relationship with God. One of the most basic questions we all have to deal with as we grow up in our relationship with God is this issue of anxiety and fear over the possibility of being separated from him and his love. Is there something we could do or something that might happen to us that could ever separate us from his love? I talk with believers quite often who live with this fear. Some of you are struggling with this very thing today. Perhaps the joy of your initial experience with Jesus has worn off and you wonder why? You might be less transformed at this point in your life than you thought

you would be and that causes doubts as well. The Christian life may be more difficult than you expected and you wonder if maybe somehow God has turned against you. All these feelings and doubts are common. You do something, or something hard happens, and a voice within you whispers, “Is God still there? Does Jesus still love me?”

Karl Barth, a world renowned theologian of the twentieth century was once asked by a reporter, “What is the most profound thing you've learned in all your studies of the Bible?” His answer? “Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so.” This is the issue the apostle Paul addresses in Romans 8:31-39. Paul has just finished giving us an unshakable promise that, *“In all things God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.”* He nailed home this truth by revealing an unbreakable chain of five links. In eternity past God set his love on us and predestined us to become like Jesus. He called and justified us. And one day he will glorify us.

In light of all this, Paul asks in v. 31, *“What, then, shall we say in response to these things?”* What things? All that he has been talking about in chapters 5-8. He'll go on and show how no one and nothing can ever separate us from the love of Christ. And the way he builds his argument is by asking five questions that get to the heart of the matter. Each of them deals with a different reason we might doubt his love. In these questions, he is challenging anyone and anything, from earth to heaven, to answer him. But, there is only one answer to each question. Paul is not just passing along information. He wants us to internalize, believe and celebrate an incredible truth about God, one that gives us absolute security and identity—you are loved by God.

### **The Work of God for Us in Jesus Christ**

#### **Question #1: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

Paul didn't simply ask, “Who is against us?” We all know the answer to that! There are plenty of people who are against us as followers of Jesus. We struggle with our own flesh and sinful desires. We live in a world that is constantly stripping us down with its lies; it's against us. We also have a very real adversary, the devil, who prowls around like a lion looking to devour us. Not to mention the various people and situations that are against us. All those reasons can easily lead us to believe that God has forsaken us, that God no longer loves us. But, Paul makes it absolutely clear, God is for us. God is on our side. How do we know this to be true? He told us earlier in v. 30: God has fore-loved,

predestined, called, justified and glorified us. If this is all true, then who can be against us? Absolutely no one! What can be against us? Absolutely nothing can ever oppose us. God being “for us” is most clearly seen in his giving of his Son Jesus Christ and that leads us to the next question.

**Question #2: “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?”**

Paul did not ask, “Will God graciously give us all things?” The answer to that is no. God has promised to supply all our needs, not all our wants. God is not a heavenly butler we call when we need something. So, how can we be sure that God will supply all our needs? Paul points us to the cross. The God who gives us all things already gave us the most precious thing, his one and only Son. Is there anything more God could have given us? No. In Jesus, God gave us everything. The cross is the guarantee that God will graciously give us all things.

In verse 32 Paul reflects back on Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis. Remember the story? God asked Abraham to take his one and only son, the child of the promise, up to Mt. Moriah and sacrifice him on an altar. Abraham obeys the Lord and just before the knife is plunged into Isaac’s chest, an angel of the Lord tells him to stop. Instead, a ram is sacrificed in place of Isaac. The book of Hebrews, commentating on this story, tells us that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. Paul uses the same language that describes what God did for Abraham to describe what God did for us. William Barclay puts it this way, “It’s as if Paul is saying, ‘Think of the greatest human example in the world of a man’s loyalty to God; God’s loyalty to you is like that.’” When we read the story of Abraham almost sacrificing his son, we think, “That’s insane!” And it is. But, that is exactly what God did for you.

Paul then moves from the greater things to the lesser things. If God didn’t spare his own Son (the greatest thing), then doesn’t it follow that he would give us all the things we need (lesser things)? If God gave us what was most valuable to him, then can’t we trust him to take care of our every need? Even when we don’t understand what he is doing. Even when we struggle to trust him. Even when things don’t go our way. John Stott says, “The cross is a guarantee of the continuing unfailing generosity of God.” The cross determines his love for us and our value to him. God’s love for you was forever defined by the cross. You are so valuable to him that he willingly gave up his Son. That’s love. This brings us to the third question.

**Question #3: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.”**

Paul did not ask, “Who will accuse us?” There are many voices that can and will accuse us. Sometimes it’s our own conscience. Ever do something that leaves you feeling guilty all day? Sure

you have. Other times, it’s not our conscience, but it’s the devil himself. He is called the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10). Some of you are feeling that heat right now. He has been telling you all morning why you shouldn’t be at church and why you don’t belong here. And if those two things aren’t brutal enough, people can be incredibly mean. Just this week a pastor friend of mine made a light-hearted political comment on Facebook and one of his “friends” jumped all over him. The post was quickly hijacked by this guy who said some really hurtful words towards this pastor who finally had to unfriend him and delete his comments from the post. Even though lots of people accuse us, Paul is not talking about any of those kinds of things.

The imagery of these verses is the court of law. Here is what he is saying: since God is our judge and has already declared us not guilty, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who else can accuse us? Spiritually speaking, since you have been called, chosen and justified by God, who can accuse you? You are innocent of all charges. That verdict can never be reversed. That means no allegations can stick. Surely Paul had in his mind what the Prophet Isaiah said about this, “*He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up*” (Isaiah 50:8-9).

If you have ever had any legal troubles or have been called in front of a judge before, it can be a scary and anxious place. Just the thought of that can put knots in our stomachs. Even if we are innocent, there is this nagging worry that a slick lawyer or an angry judge could make our lives miserable. You and I have been called into God’s courtroom. But, your defense attorney is Jesus Christ and your judge is God the Father. For some of us the charge is lying. You know you’re guilty but suddenly Jesus says, “I’ve paid for that.” The next charge is cheating in school, “I’ve paid for that.” Maybe you’ve had an abortion, “I’ve paid for that.” The next charge is cheating on your spouse, “I’ve paid for that.” Every single sin you can think of gets named and after each one Jesus says, “I paid for that.” No charge against you and me sticks because Jesus Christ has fully paid the price for **all** your sin. His atonement was final. The judge happily sets us free. In verse 34, Paul gives even more evidence of our innocence before God and that brings us to the fourth question.

**Question #4: “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”**

Again, Paul is not asking a naive question. No doubt there are plenty of people who want to condemn us. Sometimes even our own hearts condemn us (1 John 3:20). Paul doesn’t deny that we don’t have critics, haters, enemies and even the demons of hell who all want to condemn us. But, his point, like the one before

is that all their condemnations fail! Why? Because of Christ. Jesus rescued us from condemnation in his death and resurrection. Paul started Romans 8:1 with this powerful truth, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Now he circles back around to remind us that the very sins that could condemn us, Jesus died for. Jesus not only dies for those sins, but he was raised on the third day demonstrating his final defeat of sin, Satan, and even death.

If that were not enough, Paul tells us how not only is the Holy Spirit praying for us, but Jesus too is praying for us as he is seated at the right hand of the Father. That means Jesus occupies the place of supreme honor as he waits for his final triumph and return to earth. So, no one can ever condemn us because right now Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. He’s our heavenly advocate and high priest who’s constantly reminding God the Father of his love for us. In his book entitled *Prayer* Philip Yancey writes, “As Jesus once prayed for Peter, now he prays for us... In fact, the New Testament’s only glimpse of what Jesus is doing right now depicts him at the right hand of God ‘interceding for us.’ In three years of active ministry, Jesus changed the moral landscape of the planet. For nearly two thousand years since, he has been using another tactic: prayer.” Jesus not only defends us in the courtroom, but he also loves us and has entered into a relationship with us that can never be separated. And that’s the focus of verses 35-39.

## The Love of God for Us in Jesus Christ

### Question #5: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

We’ve been climbing a grand staircase here and this is the top step. It’s hard for us to understand God’s love because the word love has become polluted and cheapened. In the same breath we say we love God and we love Philz coffee. The Super Bowl half-time show ended with the phrase, “Believe in love.” What’s that even mean? Twice, Paul uses the word love in this passage and he could have chosen a number of Greek words for love:

**Eros**—a love based on feelings. Erotic love.

**Phileo**—a love based on mutual benefits, brotherly love.

**Agape**—love that is sacrificial and unconditional.

Which word do you think he used? Agape. It’s really hard for us to accept and believe this kind of love because we are so conditioned to get what we deserve. But, God doesn’t love you any more or any less for whatever you did or did not do. He loves you because he loves you. Paul does mention several possible things that could separate us from the love of Christ: Trouble? Nope. Hardship? Nope. Persecution? Nope. Famine and nakedness? Nope. Danger or sword? Surely the risk of death can separate us? Nope.

In verse 36 Paul quotes from Psalm 44:22 which describes the persecution of Israel by the nations. His point is the people of

God have always dealt with suffering. Paul could speak of these things with confidence because he had experienced them all. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:23b, *“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.”* Roman Christians were also experiencing some of these things as well. A few years after this letter was written, Christians would be burned alive for the entertainment of the Emperor Nero. They would be clinging to this promise more than ever.

In verse 37 Paul continues to talk about God’s love, but he does something interesting, *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”* Wait, I thought God loves us, present tense. Suddenly, Paul says God loved us, past tense. What if my wife introduced me as her husband whom she loved, past tense? I would be offended and want her to describe our love in the present tense! Why does Paul do this? He is pointing to something in the past. The word loved is actually in the aorist tense which is specifically pointing to Christ’s work on the cross. Jesus Christ proved his love for us by his suffering on the cross, so now our sufferings cannot ever separate us from his love. Our confidence is not our love for God but his love for us. No one and nothing can separate us from God’s love. On the contrary, we are more than conquerors!

The word conquerors is another fantastic Greek word: *hypernikáō*. If Paul wanted to say that we are victorious, he could have just said *nikao*. Instead, he adds the prefix *hyper*. We are completely victorious! “So great is the victory that is secured by the loving work of Christ that Paul finds *nikáō* too weak a term. He thus adopts the rare *hypernikáō*. In every test we win the supreme victory; we are “more than conquerors” (TDNT).

In verse 38 Paul concludes this passage with his own testimony to the love of God. He says in the present tense, *“I am convinced.”* That means he has become convinced and remains convinced of this fact, no one and nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. To make his point, Paul describes 10 things that try to separate us from his love. He basically summarizes all of history, all of the known world, and all of the spiritual world. In other words, whatever you can think of, even the most powerful spiritual forces, still can’t separate us from God’s love. He is begging the question, “Are you convinced yet?” There’s not much else Paul could have said. The bottom line is this: God loves us simply because of his choice to love us. There is nothing we have done or nothing inside us that makes him love us any more or any less. He loves us because he loves us.

Why does Paul ask us these questions instead of just telling us what he means? By asking us a question, he forces us to stop and think about it. Allow me to slowly ask all five questions again:

Question #1: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Question #2: "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?"

Question #3: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies."

Question #4: "Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Question #5: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Paul's answer to each question is the same: no one and nothing. His questions all deal with the kind of God we believe in. God is for us; nothing can frustrate his purposes. God is generous;

he didn't even spare his own Son. God justified us; no one can condemn us. God loves us; he revealed his love in Jesus Christ.

Tim Keller said, "The purpose of the questions is almost to beat us out of our disbelief that we are saved totally by grace and are therefore completely safe to face life without fear. It is incredible, relentless, intense logic." Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. God's promise is not that suffering will never afflict us, but that it will never separate us from his love.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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