

Lesson 23: Who Shall Separate Us? (8:35-39)

The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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Who Shall Separate Us from the Love of Christ (8:35-39)

It is God's activity in the interest of our salvation that is under consideration here in these verses. "All things" here are all things that God has done: **he predestined us** (decided beforehand to redeem all those "in Christ"), **called us** (through the gospel of Christ - the good news of God's deliverance "in Christ"), **justified us** (through transforming us from existence "in Adam" to existence "in Christ"), and **glorified us** (by restoring us to the status of beings created in the image of God). Then in verse 31 Paul asks, "What shall we say to all this?" His answer: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" His question concerns our redemption from the powers that had enslaved us - the satanic forces of darkness and evil.

What God has done demonstrates his will concerning our salvation. He has, again, become our Creator. He has made us new creations "in Christ," which occurs in our conversion to Christ. "In Christ" there is a reign of grace (*charis*) which empowers us in our struggle against the satanic powers endeavoring to "reclaim" us by drawing us into the service of the flesh, which he accesses through our self-willed defiance of the will of God.

Essentially, we are talking about a re-enactment of the story of Adam and Eve and the fall of man. Paul is saying in these verses, there is no force on this earth that can draw us away from God's love, with the exception of our own choice to walk away, as was the case with the first Adam. But aside from our own free will to self-destruct, there is nothing which can take away our salvation.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or

hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
³⁶*As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long (and we survive because of our will to do so, with the help of God); we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.* ³⁷*No, in all these things (adversity, suffering, and evil) we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons (all sources of conflict and temptation, not of our own making or choosing), neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,* ³⁹*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 (a promise of his care, not a promise of his usurpation of or control of our will or freedom of choice), (8:35-39).*

The love of Christ is a manifestation of God's love, the love of God expresses or personified. ***Nothing can withstand God or do contrary to the will of God unless he allows it to do so.*** When God created man in his image, after his likeness, he created man to be a physical being, a spiritual being, an intellectual being, an emotional being, and a volitional being. To be a volitional being is to be given the capacity to choose and the freedom and ability to make choices. This is where the exception to the above statement is found. Man, as created by God, is a free moral agent; he has a will of his own and may exercise his will at will.

The relationship between God and man, for good and for bad, is directly related to this aspect of man's nature. God wills to love man and to be loved by him, but this relationship is to be mutual on the part of both God and man. God's decision has been revealed to us; he wills to love us, and desires that we love him in return. The love God has for his creation is referred to throughout the New Testament with the Greek "*agape*," which means, "good-will toward." God has only good-will toward us and wills only good for us. The problem is that mankind, as a whole, has not made that decision with reference to God. This is a decision that must be made on an individual basis, person by person, one person at a time. To love God is a decision we make as individuals. It is our choice and God will not usurp our freedom to make that choice. He has made us free moral agents (or beings) and will not violate our freedom to choose. We are free to decide what we do, what will happen to us, and even where we will spend eternity. Our "free will" is a gift of God and we are the ones who will be held responsible for the exercise of that gift. All decisions have consequences, and these consequences are a part of the function of the

universe God created and the dwelling place he gave us within it. He desires that we spend our lives living in concert or at one with his will; and his will is “good-will” toward us – “*agape*.” That promise has been made to us and there is no force on the face of this earth or above or below this earth that can turn God back on his commitment of love to us.

This is the point of the Paul’s statements in the Romans 8:35-39 text. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Paul asks. The answer to his question is: no force on earth, above the earth or from beneath, can separate a man from God against his will. Whatever happens, we can rest assured that God’s promise of love for us will always be there, his will for us will always be good-will toward us, “*agape*.” With this knowledge, every believer should be filled with such a vigorous faith and enlivened spirit that it would be as difficult to draw the believer away from God, as it would be to destroy light by throwing into the darkness.

But, as difficult as it is to believe, there are those who do not will to be loved by God, who do not choose the fellowship of God, who would rather live in darkness than in the light, who love the darkness and hate the light of God’s presence in their lives. What causes this is very difficult to understand for those who love the light, but God warns us that it is a reality we must be willing to acknowledge.

The Power of the Darkness

The power of darkness is formidable, and it is a reality. Jesus said to the chief priests, the temple guards, and the elders who came to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest him, “Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when **darkness** reigns” (Luke 22:53). In the prologue to the Gospel of John, the apostle wrote, “The light shines in the **darkness**, but the **darkness** has not comprehended it” (John 1:5). He says again in 3:19, “This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but men loved **darkness** instead of light because their deeds were evil.” Jesus declared to the people of Jerusalem, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in **darkness**, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12); and in 12:46, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in **darkness**.”

Paul, at the time of his conversion, was told by Jesus, “ I will rescue

you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from **darkness** to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:17-18). In Romans 13:12, Paul wrote, “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of **darkness** and put on the armor of light.” Then again, in Eph 5:8, he reminds the Christians in Ephesus, “For you were once **darkness**, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light;” and in 5:11, “Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of **darkness**, but rather expose them.” Then in Colossians 1:13, he tells us that God, “has rescued us from the dominion of **darkness** and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” He tells the Christians at Thessalonica, “You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the **darkness** (1 Thess 5:5).

The Apostle Peter, in his first general letter to the Christians distributed throughout the Mediterranean world, reminds them that they, “are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you,” says Peter, “may declare the praises of him who called you out of **darkness** into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). Then again, the Apostle John gives expression to this concept in his first epistle. He writes, “This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no **darkness** at all” (1 John 1:5), and in the next verse, “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the **darkness**, we lie and do not live by the truth. In 2:8-9, he informs his readers, “I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the **darkness** is passing and the true light is already shining. Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the **darkness**.” In verse 11 he says, “whoever hates his brother is in the **darkness** and walks around in the **darkness**; he does not know where he is going, because the **darkness** has blinded him.”

It is the case that there are those of the human race who dwell in the darkness, love the darkness, and hate the revelation of God’s presence in their world, as though it is an invasion of their darkness. From what John tells us in 1 John 2:11, there were those of the community of believers, to whom he has reference in his first letter, who were “walking in darkness.” Those who had come into the light had again returned to the darkness. The Apostles Peter also speaks of those who had returned to the darkness after having come into the light.

. . . a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. ²⁰If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²²Of them the proverbs (Prov 26:11) are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud," (2 Peter 2:19-22).

But, as formidable and pervasive as the darkness is, Paul assures us that we have nothing to fear from it, unless we give ourselves over to it.

No Force of Darkness is Capable of Separating the Believer from the Love of Christ

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither 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 8:35-39).

Paul's use of the masculine pronoun "who," rather than "what" [shall separate us], makes it appear as though he is giving these things personification (i.e., ascribing personality to things without life). Shall **trouble** (*thlipsis* - tribulation, to be afflicted; a pressing together, pressure, used of stomping grapes; often in the NT, that which tests one's resiliency or character), or **hardship** (*stenochori'a* - from a compound of "narrow" and "space" - distress or anguish), or **persecution** (*diogmos'* - from *dioko*, to pursue, to rush or chase after), or **famine** (*limos'* - the idea of destitution, famine, hunger, scarcity of food), or **nakedness** (*gumno'tes* - naked, bare; nakedness of the body, being without clothing), or **danger** (*kin'dunos* - danger, peril; exposure to possible harm or injury), or **sword** (*ma'chaira* - this is the three-quarter sword used by the Roman soldiers as an instrument of force, war, or battle; a symbol of power, authority or often of government

oppression).

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

“I am persuaded,” says Paul, that there is nothing in creation, apart from our own self-willed defiance, that can separate us from the love of Christ’s love. **Neither death nor life** - nothing in this life and nothing in death can separate a believer from God's love. The fear of death for the believer is gone as well as any circumstances of this present life. **Nor things present nor things to come** - nothing in our present experience, nor anything to come, can separate us from God's love." Neither the evils we now fear, nor those that may await us; nothing now existing, or anything which shall be, has the power to take you away from God against you will. **Nor height nor depth** - nothing in the heights or depths of the universe has the power to separate the believer from his God. No one, no thing, at any time or any place, can ever destroy our relationship with God. Only our self-willed defiance can do that. **Nor angels nor demons (principalities nor powers)** - these are angelic and demonic powers. Perhaps, evil angels, or angels in general; principalities (*archai* – chief ones) and powers (*dunameis*); are expressions used of “the chief of the rulers” of the air, with “powers” being his demonic forces. **Nor any other created thing** - no one or no thing of the whole of creation, "no *other* created thing," can separate us from God's love. I can, however, separate myself from him through self-willed defiance of his will and the rejection of his love.

Conclusion

Nothing in God’s creation can take us from God if we will to serve him. Neither angels nor demons, or principalities or powers, nor any other created thing or being can separate us from God. We have nothing to fear concerning our salvation. As long as our will is one with the will of God and our desire is to love and serve him, we have nothing to fear from the realm of death, or this life, or anything from our past, our present, or our future; nothing in the heights or depths of the universe, not angels, not demons, nor any being of creation can take us from God

against our will. If man is lost it will not because of a choice God has made. God has made it the responsibility of man to choose his place in eternity. God has done everything to show man his “good-will (i.e., *agape* - love)” toward man. If a man wills to reject the love of God and live his life in defiance of the will of God, he has no one to blame for his lost condition but himself. Fellowship with God is a mutual choice; God has made his choice, the only choice left is man’s choice.

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