

## Where is God?

April 1, 2018 Easter Sunday - Romans 8:31-39

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 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.[b] 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 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.

### ***8:31–39 Celebration of the believer's security***

We may view this beautiful, hymn-like celebration of our security in Christ as a response to what Paul has just said (28–30, or 18–30 or even 1–30), but it is better to see it as a concluding reflection of chs. 5–8 as a whole. It falls into two parts. In the first (31–34) Paul reminds us that God is *for us*: in giving his Son, he has at the same time secured for us all that we need to get through this life and attain final salvation. No-one, then, is able successfully to bring any charge against us, to cause us to be condemned in the judgment. For it is God who has chosen us and justified us and his own Son who answers any indictment brought against us. The second part of the hymn (35–39) celebrates the love of God in Christ for us. It is as impossible to separate us from that love as it is to bring a charge against us. No earthly peril or disaster can do so (35b–36). Though such suffering can be expected, as Paul reminds us with his quotation of Ps. 44:22, *in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*. Nor can any spiritual power separate us from

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God's love (*angels, demons and powers* in v 38). Indeed, there is nothing in all creation that can remove us from the new regime in which God's love in Christ reigns over us.<sup>1</sup>

## Romans 8:31-39

### I. Epistolary Introduction—1:1-17

### II. The Way of Salvation—1:18-5:21

### III. The Way of Sanctification—6:1-8:39

#### A. Freedom from Bondage to Sin—6:1-23

#### B. Freedom from Bondage to the Law—7:1-25

#### C. Freedom from Bondage to the Flesh—8:1-30

#### D. A Celebration of Security—8:31-39

Paul is calling on us to think, to reflect deeply on the implications of what he has just said regarding the remarkable blessings of salvation we have in Christ. He does it by asking four questions. But he doesn't simply ask them, he "hurls these questions out into space, as it were, defiantly, triumphantly, challenging any creature in heaven or earth or hell to answer them or to deny the truth that is contained in them" (Stott, 103).

1. God is your *sovereign protector*, or an answer to the question: "If God is for us, who is against us?"—v. 31

Paul's question, "who is against us?", does not mean to suggest that we have no adversaries. Vv. 35-36 describe all sorts of adversaries and enemies and opposition. His point is that no adversary or enemy is of any account when God is for us. Since God is for us, to use the words of v. 28, all things work together for our ultimate good, even those things which our enemies intend for our harm.

Who, exactly, is for "for" us? It is the God who foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified us. If **that** God is for us, who can possibly hope to thwart our ultimate good?

- \* What "God" are we talking about? See Isa. 46:9-11; 1 Chron. 29:10-12; Daniel 4:34-35; Pss. 23:4; 27:1; 46:1-3; 56:3-4, 8-11; 115:3; 118:6-7.

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<sup>1</sup> Moo, D. J. (1994). Romans. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1142). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

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Paul is countering the *fear* we all face: fear of the forces that amass against us, fear of ridicule, rejection, hostility, disdain, even death. Paul is calling on us to make the kind of evaluation that Hezekiah made: “*Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, **for there is one greater with us than with them** ... with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles*” (2 Chron. 32:7ff). Augustus Toplady put this truth in a hymn:

“A sovereign protector I have,  
Unseen, yet for ever at hand;  
Unchangeably faithful to save,  
Almighty to rule and command.  
He smiles, and my comforts abound;  
His grace as the dew shall descend,  
And walls of salvation surround  
The soul He delights to defend.”

2. God is your *supreme provider*, or an answer to the question: “How will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”—v. 32

If Paul had merely asked, “Will God give us all things?” we might have wondered. We might have said: “Well, you know, I need so many things, great and difficult things, ... how can I be certain God will provide them?” But note how Paul asks the question: “*He who did not spare His own Son ...!*” In other words, ***the God whom we ask to give us all things is the God who has already given us his own Son!*** Cf. the argument in Rom. 5:9–10. Cranfield:

“Since God has done the unspeakably great and costly thing, we may be fully confident that He will do what is by comparison far less” (436).

a. God *has done* the *greater* thing—v. 32a

1) negatively: He spared not His own Son

Parents spare their children when they refrain from inflicting the full measure of discipline. Judges spare criminals when they reduce or suspend a sentence. But this is **not** what the Father did with Jesus. “He did not withhold or lighten one whit of the full toll of judgment executed upon his own well-beloved and only-begotten Son” (Murray, 323). There was no mitigation or diminishing or suspension of the penalty.

2) positively: He delivered him up for us all

***“Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy—but the Father, for love!”*** (Octavius Winslow)

[THEREFORE ...]

b. God *will do* the lesser thing—v. 32b

Paul’s assertion is designed to drive home the unshakeable assurance that *whatever is necessary to guarantee the ultimate glorification* of those whom God justified, called, predestined and foreknew, God will do it. If God spared not his own Son, the most precious and costly gift, how could he possibly fail to do all lesser things to guarantee that we receive *everything essential for salvation*?

There is a technical name for this kind of reasoning. It is called *a majori ad minus*, or “from the greater to the lesser.” Piper explains its meaning:

“Suppose two tasks are motivated by the same desire, but one is very improbable because the cost is so high, and one is more probable because the cost is less. If I have the desire for both tasks, and somehow manage to accomplish the costly one, then it is virtually assured the less costly one will be accomplished. Overcoming the greater obstacles assures you that I will overcome the lesser ones” (*Future Grace*, 114).

This is the logic Paul used in Romans 5:6–11. It is the logic Jesus used in Matthew 6:30 when he said, “If God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you, O men of little faith?” The point of his argument is this:

“... it is highly improbable that God Almighty would waste his time clothing field flowers which last only a day. This high improbability is the ‘greater thing’ in his argument from greater to lesser. On the other hand, there is a *small amount of improbability* that God would neglect his Son’s disciples and not clothe them. This small improbability is the ‘lesser thing’ in his argument. So when God overcomes the high improbability and clothes field flowers, he proves that he can and will overcome the small improbability and clothe the disciples” (ibid.).

Paul’s reasoning in v. 32, therefore, is from the hard to the easy, from the greater to the lesser. Again, listen to Piper’s explanation:

“The reason [God’s sparing not his own Son is] the greater thing is that God loved his Son infinitely. His Son did not deserve to be killed. His Son was worthy of worship by every creature, not spitting and whipping and scorn and torture. To hand over his beloved son (Colossians 1:13) was the incomparably great thing. The reason for this is the immensity

of God's love for his Son. This is what made it so unlikely that God would hand him over. Yet God did it. And in doing it he showed that he most certainly would do all other things—all of which would be easy by comparison—to give all things to the people for whom he gave his Son" (114–15).

John Flavel, Puritan pastor from over 300 years ago, put it this way:

"How is it imaginable that God should withhold,, after this, spirituals or temporals, from his people? How shall he not call them effectually, justify them freely, sanctify them thoroughly, and glorify them eternally? How shall he not clothe them, feed them, protect and deliver them? Surely if he would not spare his own Son one stroke, one tear, one groan, one sigh, one circumstance of misery, it can never be imagined that ever he should, after this, deny or withhold from his people, for whose sakes all this was suffered, any mercies, any comforts, any privilege, spiritual or temporal, which is good for them" (*Works*, Banner of Truth, p. 418).

The scope of the "all things" God guarantees includes "all those blessings—spiritual and material—that we require on the path toward that final salvation" (Moo, 583). Packer elaborates:

"Paul is telling us that there is no ultimate loss or irreparable impoverishment to be feared; if God denies us something, it is only in order to make room for one or other of the things He has in mind.... The meaning of 'He will give us all things' can be put thus: one day we shall see that nothing—literally nothing—which could have increased our eternal happiness has been denied us, and that nothing—literally nothing—that could have reduced that happiness has been left with us. What higher assurance do we want than that?" (*Knowing God*, 246).

3. God is your *spiritual protagonist*, or an answer to the question: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?"—vv. 33–34

Again, Paul's point is not to deny that anyone will ever charge us or condemn us. His point is that all such accusations are to no avail. It isn't because we are perfect and innocent. Such charges fail because the penalty which they demand ***has already been paid!***

Paul knows how easily the conscience of some Christians can become sensitive and condemning and insecure. So he speaks

"directly to the fear that present justification may be no more than provisional, and may one day be lost by reason of the imperfections of one's Christian life. Paul does not for a moment deny that Christians can fail and fall, sometimes grievously ... But Paul denies emphatically that any lapses now can endanger our justified status. The reason, he says in effect, is simple: nobody is in a position to get God's verdict reviewed!" (Packer, 248).

a. our salvation—v. 33

- 1) we are elect
- 2) we are justified

If you fear that something in your life may some day render you unacceptable to God, ask yourself this question: “When did God justify me?” Was it not when you were as **ungodly and sinful** as you possibly could be (Rom. 4:5; 5:6–11)? God passed his favorable sentence on you in full view of all your depravity and shortcomings. Who, then, can challenge his verdict? God justified you with His eyes wide open. He knew the worst about you at the time when He accepted you, through faith, for Jesus’ sake. What can anyone tell God about you that He doesn’t already know?

b. our savior—v. 34

- 1) his *crucifixion*

How can anyone condemn (v. 34a) you when Christ has already been condemned in your place? What is left for you to suffer?

- 2) his *resurrection*
- 3) his *exaltation*

The “right hand of God” is a figurative expression denoting the place and position of sovereignty and dominion. “Since he has all authority in heaven and in earth, no adverse circumstance or hostile power can wrench his people from his hand or separate from his love” (Murray, 329).

- 4) his *intercession*

We have two divine intercessors: 1) the HS in our hearts (8:26–27), and 2) the Son in heaven. See Heb. 7:25ff.; 1 John 2:1ff.

“The argument is that no prosecution can be of any avail if Jesus Christ is our Advocate who pleads our cause, and if God the Judge has already justified us” (Stott, 104).

4. God is your *sustaining preserver*, or an answer to the question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”—vv. 35–39

All the items in v. 35, except for the last, are also found in 2 Cor. 11:26–27 and 12:10. “All these, then, Paul himself has experienced, and he has been able to prove for himself that they are quite incapable of disrupting his relationship with the love of Christ” (Moo, 586).

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The list of possible threats to our security unfolds in pairs:

*Death / Life*—Death can't sever our relationship with Christ. In fact, it can only enhance it (Phil. 1:21–23). Nor can anything life throws at us sever us from his affection.

*Angels / Principalities*—Most likely this refers to both good and evil angels. The point is that nothing whatever in the spiritual realm, no cosmic power, whether benevolent or malevolent, can separate us from God.

*Things present / Things to come*—Neither present circumstances nor any future events have the power to sever us from God's love.

*Powers*—This is the only item in the list that appears alone. It refers either to miraculous or supernatural phenomena, perhaps that come from Satan, or is another reference to demons (cf. 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21).

*Height / Depth*—This pair encompasses anything and everything above and below, i.e., nothing above the heavens or beneath the earth or anything in between can sever us from Christ. Cf. Ps. 139:7–12.

Some have found in these terms an astrological reference to the highest and lowest “stars” that people in the ancient world believed determined the course of events in a person's life. If so, Paul would be saying that, contrary to widespread belief, stars neither determine our fate nor do they jeopardize our relationship to God. But whereas the terms are spatial, they should be interpreted metaphorically (cf. Eph. 3:18).

What about *me*? But note well that “tribulation” and “distress” and “persecution” and “famine” and “nakedness” and “peril” and “sword” (v. 35) are precisely the sorts of experiences that might be thought to cause a believer to renounce his/her faith and to apostatize. But “Paul is not only saying that Christ still loves believers when persecution arrives, ... He is also saying that the love of Christ is so powerful that believers will not forsake him despite the sword, persecution, famine, and so on” (Schreiner, 466). Furthermore, anticipating the question, Paul quickly shuts the door on any loopholes. This final negation, *nor any other created thing*, is intended to cover every conceivable possibility: no being, no thing, not even your own self (you, being a *created thing*), can separate you from the love of Christ.

But what if *God himself* should choose to separate me from his love? But the whole point of Paul's argument in vv. 31–34 was to prove precisely the opposite. God has taken the most elaborate, sacrificial, personally painful and costly steps possible to embrace us in his love. Paul's argument is that rather than being against us, God is “for” us (v. 31), rather than taking from us, he “gives” all to us (v. 32), and rather than condemning us, he justifies us (v.

33). Furthermore, on what grounds or for what cause would God reject you or separate himself from you? “Well, my sins,” you would most likely say. But Paul’s argument is that Christ died for those very sins (vv. 33–34). Those sins which you fear might separate you from God were the sins for which Christ paid the penalty. That is why no one can bring a successful accusation against you (v. 33). What sin can you possibly commit that might separate you from God’s love for which Christ did not already pay the penalty?<sup>2</sup>

Verse 31. *What shall we say to these things?* That is, what is the inference from what has hitherto been said? *If God be for us*, if he has delivered us from the law of sin and death, if he has renewed us by his Spirit which dwells within us, if he recognises us as his children and his heirs, and has predestinated us to holiness and glory, *who can be against us?* If God’s love has led to all the good just specified, what have we to fear for the future? He who spared not his own Son, will freely give us all things. This verse shows clearly what has been the apostle’s object from the beginning of the chapter. He wished to demonstrate that to those who accede to the plan of salvation which he taught, i.e., to those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no ground of apprehension; their final salvation is fully secured. The conclusion of the chapter is a recapitulation of all his former arguments, or rather the reduction of them to one, which comprehends them all in their fullest force; God is for us. He, as our Judge, is satisfied; as our Father, he loves us; as the supreme and almighty Controller of events, who works all things after the counsel of his own will, he has determined to save us; and as that Being, whose love is as unchanging as it is infinite, he allows nothing to separate his children from himself.

It has been objected, that if Paul had intended to teach these doctrines, he would have said that apostacy and sin cannot interfere with the salvation of believers. But what is salvation, but deliverance from the guilt and power of sin? It is, therefore, included in the very purpose and promise of salvation, that its objects shall be preserved from apostacy and deadly sins. This is the end and essence of salvation. And, therefore, to make Paul argue that God will save us if we do not apostatize, is to make him say, those shall be saved who are not lost. According to the apostle’s doctrine, holiness is so essential and prominent a part of salvation, that it is not so much a means to an end as the very end itself. It is that to which we are predestinated and called, and therefore if the promise of salvation does not include the promise of holiness, it includes nothing. Hence, to ask whether, if one of the called should apostatize and live in sin, he would still be saved, is to ask, whether he will be saved if he is not saved. Nor can these doctrines be perverted to licentiousness without a complete denial of their nature. For they not only represent sin and salvation as two things which ought not to be united, but as utterly irreconcilable and contradictory.

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<sup>2</sup> Storms, S. (2016). *Biblical Studies: Romans* (Ro 8:31–39). Edmond, OK: Sam Storms.



Verse 32. *He that spared not his own Son*, &c. That ground of confidence and security which includes all others, is the love of God; and that exhibition of divine love which surpasses and secures all others, is the gift of his own son. Paul having spoken of Christians as being God's sons by adoption, was led to designate Christ as his own peculiar Son, in a sense in which neither angels (Heb. 1:5) nor men can be so called. That this is the meaning of the phrase is evident, 1. Because this is its proper force; *own* Son being opposed to *adopted* sons. An antithesis, expressed or implied, is always involved in the use of the word ἰδίους, see Acts 2:6, Rom. 11:24, 14:4, Tit. 1:12. The Jews, we are told, took up stones to stone our Lord, because πατέρα ἰδίου ἐλεγεν τὸν Θεόν, thus making himself equal with God. Christ is in such a sense the Son of God, that he is of one nature with him, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. 2. Because the context requires it, as Paul had spoken of those who were sons in a different sense just before. 3. Because this apostle, and the other sacred writers, designate Christ as Son of God in the highest sense, as partaker of the divine nature; see Rom. 1:4.

*But delivered him up for us all*. He was delivered up to death; see Gal. 1:4, Rom. 4:25, Isa. 53:6, 38:13 (in the LXX.,) and Matt. 10:21. *For us all*; not merely for our benefit, but in our place. This idea, however, is not expressed by the peculiar force of the preposition ὑπέρ, but is implied from the nature of the case. The benefit secured by a sacrifice is secured by substitution. It is offered for the benefit of the offender because it is offered in his place. There is no restriction or limitation to be put on the word *all* in this verse, other than which the context and the analogy of Scripture imposes. God, says Paul, gave up his Son for *us* all; whether he means all rational creatures, or all men, or all those whom he determined thereby to redeem, and whom he had foreknown and predestinated to eternal life, depends on what the Scripture elsewhere teaches on the subject.

*How shall he not also (καὶ) with him freely give us all things*. If God has done the greater, he will not leave the less undone. The gift of Christ includes all other gifts. If God so loved us as to give his Son for us, he will certainly give the Holy Spirit to render that gift effectual. This is presented as a ground of confidence. The believer is assured of salvation, not because he is assured of his own constancy, but simply because he is assured of the immutability of the divine love, and he is assured of its immutability because he is assured of its greatness. Infinite love cannot change. A love which spared not the eternal Son of God, but freely gave him up, cannot fail of its object. "Christus non nudus aut inanis ad nos missus est; sed cœlestibus omnibus thesauris refertus, ne quid eum possidentibus ad plenam felicitatem desit." *Calvin*.

Verse 33. *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?* This and the following verse show how fully the security of believers is provided for by the plan of redemption. What is it they have to fear under the government of a just and powerful God? There is nothing to be dreaded but sin; if that be pardoned and removed, there is nothing left to fear. In the strongest manner possible, the apostle declares that the sins of believers are

pardoned, and shows the ground on which that pardon rests. To them, therefore, there can be neither a disquieting accusation nor condemnation. *Who can lay any thing?* τ ἰ σ ἐ γ κ α λ ἔ σ ε ι ; the word ἐ γ κ α λ ε ῖ ν means *in jus vocare*, to summon before the bar of justice. The question is in the form of a challenge, and implies the strongest confidence that no accuser against God's elect can appear. If the law of God be satisfied, "the strength of sin," its condemning power, is destroyed. Even conscience, though it upbraids, does not terrify. It produces the ingenuous sorrow of children, and not the despairing anguish of the convict, because it sees that all the ends of punishment are fully answered in the death of Christ, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree.

*God's elect*, i.e. those whom God has chosen; see ver. 29. The word *elect* is sometimes used in a secondary sense for *beloved*, which idea is implied in its literal sense, as those chosen are those who are peculiarly beloved. This sense may be given to it in 1 Peter 2:4, "elect and precious" may be *beloved* and precious. And so in a multitude of cases it were optional with a "writer to say chosen or beloved, as the one implies the other. But this does not prove that *chosen* means *beloved*, or that the idea of choice is to be excluded from the idea of the word. *The elect* are those whom God has chosen out of the world to be the members of his family or kingdom; just as under the Old Testament the Hebrews, whom he had chosen to be his peculiar people, were his elect. Men may dispute as to what the elect are chosen to, and why some are chosen and not others. But there seems to be no ground for dispute whether "the elect" mean the chosen. This passage, however, proves that those who are elect, and whose election has become recognised, are in a state in which they are free from condemnation. No one can lay any thing to their charge. The demands of justice as regards them have been satisfied. This is not true of those who are chosen merely to church privileges. There is an election, therefore, unto grace and salvation. The elect are safe. This is the grand theme of this jubilant chapter.

*It is God who justifieth*, Θ ε ὸ ς ὁ δ ἰ κ α λ ῶ ν. Editors and commentators are about equally divided on the question whether this and the following clauses should be taken interrogatively or affirmatively. If the former, the idea is, that as God is the being against whom we have sinned, and who alone has the administration of justice in his hands, if he does not accuse there can be no accuser. Who shall lay any thing against the elect of God? Shall God, who justifies them? In favour of this view is the fact, that the questions in ver. 32, and also in ver. 35, are answered by questions, and hence the questions in vs. 33, 34, are most naturally so answered. Nevertheless, the impossibility of any accusation being sustained against the elect of God, is better expressed by the affirmation. It is God who is their justifier. If he justifies, who can condemn? Besides, according to the current representation of Scripture, God is the judge, not the accuser. To justify, is to declare the claims of justice satisfied. If God, the supreme judge, makes this declaration, it must be true, and it must stop every mouth. No rational creature, no enlightened conscience, can call for the punishment of those whom God justifies. If justice is not satisfied, there can be no justification, no peace of conscience, no security either for salvation or for the moral

government of God. The Bible knows nothing of mere pardon. There can be no pardon except on the ground of satisfaction of justice. It is by declaring a man just, (that is, that justice in relation to him is satisfied,) that he is freed from the penalty of the law, and restored to the favour of God.

Verse 34. *Who is he that condemneth?* i.e., no one can condemn. In support of this assertion there are, in this verse, four conclusive reasons presented; the death of Christ, his resurrection, his exaltation, and his intercession. *It is Christ that died.* By his death, as an atonement for our sins, all ground of condemnation is removed. The death of Christ could not be a proof that the believer cannot be condemned, unless his death removed the ground of condemnation; and it could not remove the ground of condemnation, unless it satisfied the demands of justice. His death, therefore, was a satisfaction, and not merely an exhibition of love, or a didactic symbol meant to impress some moral truth. *Yea, rather, that is risen again.* The resurrection of Christ, as the evidence of the sacrifice of his death being accepted, and of the validity of all his claims, is a much more decisive proof of the security of all who trust in him, than his death could be. See on chap. 1:4, 4:25, Acts 17:31, 1 Cor. 15:17, &c.

*Who is even at the right hand of God,* i.e., is associated with God in his universal dominion. Psalm 110:1, "Sit thou on my right hand," i.e., share my throne; Eph. 1:20, Rev. 3:21. "As I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne." Heb. 1:3, "Who sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high." From these and other passages in their connection, it is evident that Christ is exalted to universal dominion, all power in heaven and earth is given into his hands. If this is the case, how great the security it affords the believer! He who is engaged to effect his salvation is the Director of all events and of all worlds.

*Who also maketh intercession for us,* i.e., who acts as our advocate, pleads our cause before God, presents those considerations which secure for us pardon and the continued supply of the divine grace; see on ver. 26, Heb. 7:25, 9:24, 1 John 2:1. Christ, as seated at the right hand of God, and invested with universal dominion, is able to save; his interceding for us is the evidence that he is willing to save—willing not only in the sense of being disposed to, but in the sense of purposing. He intends to save those who put their trust in him, and therefore in their behalf he presents before God the merit of his mediatorial work, and urges their salvation as the reward promised him in the covenant of redemption. He is our patron, in the Roman sense of the word, one who undertakes our case; an advocate, whom the Father heareth always. How complete, then, the security of those for whom he pleads! Of course this language is figurative; the meaning is, that Christ continues since his resurrection and exaltation to secure for his people the benefits of his death, every thing comes from God through him, and for his sake.

Verse 35. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* This is the last step in the climax of the apostle's argument; the very summit of the mount of confidence, whence he looks down on his enemies as powerless, and forward and upward with full assurance of a final

and abundant triumph. No one can accuse, no one can condemn, no one can separate us from the love of Christ. This last assurance gives permanency to the value of the other two.

*The love of Christ* is clearly Christ's love towards us, and not ours towards him. Paul is speaking of the great love of God towards us as manifested in the gift of his Son, and of the love of Christ as exhibited in his dying, rising, and interceding for us. This love, which is so great, he says is unchangeable. Besides, the apostle's object in the whole chapter is to console and confirm the confidence of believers. The interpretation just mentioned is not in accordance with this object. It is no ground of confidence to assert, or even to feel, that we will never forsake Christ, but it is the strongest ground of assurance to be convinced that his love will never change. And, moreover, verse 39 requires this interpretation; for there Paul expresses the same sentiment in language which cannot be misunderstood. "No creature," he says, "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." This is evidently God's love towards us. The great difficulty with many Christians is that they cannot persuade themselves that Christ (or God) loves them; and the reason why they cannot feel confident of the love of God, is, that they know they do not deserve his love, on the contrary, that they are in the highest degree unlovely. How can the infinitely pure God love those who are defiled with sin, who are proud, selfish, discontented, ungrateful, disobedient? This, indeed, is hard to believe. But it is the very thing we are required to believe, not only as the 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 or attractiveness, it is a false hope. We must believe that his love is gratuitous, mysterious, without any known or conceivable cause, certainly without the cause of loveliness in its object; that it is, in short, what it is so often declared to be in the Bible, analogous to the love of a parent for his child. A father's or mother's love is independent of the attractiveness of its object, and often in spite of its deformity.

*Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, &c.* This is merely an amplification of the preceding idea. Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ, neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, &c. That is, whatever we may be called upon to suffer in this life, nothing can deprive us of the love of him who died for us, and who now lives to plead our cause in heaven; and, therefore, these afflictions, and all other difficulties, are enemies we may despise. "Sicut enim nebulae quamvis liquidum solis conspectum obscurant, non tamen ejus fulgore in totum nos privant: sic Deus in rebus adversis per caliginem emittit gratiae suae radios, nequa tentatio desperatione nos obruat: imo fides nostra promissionibus Dei tanquam alis fulta sursum in coelos per media obstacula penetrare debet." *Calvin.*

Verse 36. *As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long, &c.* A quotation from Psalm 44:22, agreeably to the Septuagint translation. The previous verse of course implied that believers should be exposed to many afflictions, to famine, nakedness, and the sword;

this, Paul would say, is in accordance with the experience of the pious in all ages. We suffer, as it is recorded of the Old Testament saints, that they suffered.

Verse 37. *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, &c.* This verse is connected with the 35th. 'So far from these afflictions separating us from the love of Christ, they are more than conquered.' That is, they are not only deprived of all power to do us harm, they minister to our good, they swell the glory of our victory. *Through him that loved us.* The triumph which the apostle looked for was not to be effected by his own strength or perseverance, but by the grace and power of the Redeemer. 1 Cor. 15:10, Gal. 2:20, Philip. 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Verses 38, 39. In these verses the confidence of the apostle is expressed in the strongest language. He heaps words together in the effort to set forth fully the absolute inability of all created things, separately or united, to frustrate the purpose of God, or to turn away his love from those whom he has determined to save.

*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, &c.* It is somewhat doubtful how far the apostle intended to express distinct ideas by the several words here used. The enumeration is by some considered as expressing the general idea that nothing in the universe can injure believers, the detail being designed merely as amplification. This, however, is not very probable. The former view is to be preferred. *Neither death.* That is, though cut off in this world, their connection with Christ is not thereby destroyed. "They shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand," John 10:28. *Nor life,* neither its blandishments nor its trials. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. So that living or dying we are the Lord's." Rom. 14:8.

*Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers.* Principalities and powers are by many understood here to refer to the authorities of this world as distinguished from angels. But to this it may be objected, that Paul frequently uses these terms in connection to designate the different orders of spiritual beings, Eph. 1:21, Col. 1:16; and secondly, that corresponding terms were in common use among the Jews in this sense. It is probable, from the nature of the passage, that this clause is to be taken generally, without any specific reference to either good or bad angels as such. 'No superhuman power, no angel, however mighty, shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God.' *Neither things present, nor things to come.* Nothing in this life, nor in the future; no present or future event, &c.

Verse 39. *Nor height, nor depth.* These words have been very variously explained. That interpretation which seems, on the whole, most consistent with scriptural usage and the context, is that which makes the terms equivalent to *heaven* and *earth*. 'Nothing in heaven or earth;' see Eph. 4:8, Isa. 7:11, "Ask it either in the depth or the height above," &c., &c. *Nor any other creature.* Although the preceding enumeration had been so minute, the apostle, as if to prevent despondency having the possibility of a foothold, adds this all-comprehending specification, *no created thing* shall be able to separate us from the love of God. This love of

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God, which is declared to be thus unchangeable, is extended towards us only on account of our connection with Christ, and therefore the apostle adds, *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*; see Eph. 1:6, 2 Tim. 1:9.<sup>3</sup>

Intimacy with God is available to you. It is as accessible to you as God's promises. And God's invitation to you to enjoy intimate fellowship with him is that thing that is putting your faith to the test more than anything else (James 1:2–4).

## The Heart of Intimacy

Intimacy is what we call the experience of really knowing and being known by another person. We frequently use spatial language when describing this experience. An intimate friend is someone we feel very *close* to; they know us at a *deep* level. If something happens that damages the intimacy with our friend, they feel *distant* from us. Or a person who doesn't know us intimately knows us at a *superficial* level.

But of course intimacy is not spatial but relational. We all know what it's like to be sitting right next to a person with whom we feel *distant* and we can feel *close* to a person who is four thousand miles away.

“Biblical knowledge is far better than gold when it fuels our trust in God. Otherwise, it only fuels our pride.”

What makes us feel intimate with another person? While there are many ingredients to intimacy and each intimate relationship we have has a different

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<sup>3</sup> Hodge, C. (1882). *A commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New Edition, pp. 451–459). Grand Rapids, MI: Louis Kregel.

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recipe, common to all of them is trust. We cannot be intimate with a person we don't trust.

Trust is at the heart of intimacy. The more we trust someone, the *closer* we let them get to us. The degree to which trust is compromised in a relationship is the degree to which intimacy evaporates.

## The Heart of Intimacy with God

This is as true in our relationship with God as it is in our relationships with other human beings. Our experience of God's *nearness* or *distance* is not a description of his actual proximity to us, but of our experience of intimacy with him. Scripture shows us that God is intimate with those who trust him. The more we trust God, the more intimately we come to know him. A felt distance from God is often due to a disruption in trust, such as a sin or disappointment.

This reality is vitally important to understand. As Christians, we want to experience intimacy with God. With the psalmist we say, "for me it is good to be near God" ([Psalm 73:28](#)). And we want to heed James's exhortation and realize its promise: "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" ([James 4:8](#)). But we can seek that nearness in ways that don't produce it.

## Intimacy Is More Than Knowledge

One common mistake is thinking that nearness to God can be achieved through knowledge accumulation. Now, of course, to intimately know God, we must know crucial things about God. Jesus said, "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" ([John 8:32](#)) and he pointed out that many worship what they do not know ([John 4:22](#)).

But never in the history of the Christian church has so much theological knowledge been available to so many people as it is today. The American church enjoys perhaps the greatest amount of this abundance. We are awash in Bible translations, good books, insightful articles, recorded sermons,

interviews, movies, documentaries, music, and more. And much of it very good. It is right for us to be very thankful.

But America is not abounding in Enochs (or finding them frequently disappearing), saints who walk with God in a profoundly intimate way ([Genesis 5:24](#); [Hebrews 11:5](#)). Why? Because knowledge is not synonymous with trust. That's why Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, some who possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture,

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.” ([John 5:39–40](#))

Biblical knowledge is far better than gold when it fuels our trust in God, because it fuels our intimacy with God ([Psalm 19:10](#)). But when biblical knowledge replaces our trust in God, it only fuels our pride ([1 Corinthians 8:1](#)).

## Why Aesthetic Experiences Fail

Another common mistake is trying to achieve intimacy with God through subjective aesthetic experiences. We might call it a “Field of Dreams” approach: If we build the right environment, God will “come.”

Some pursue this in high liturgical environments designed to inspire an experience of transcendence and mystery. Others pursue it in contemporary worship events designed to inspire an experience of immanence. Others chase revivals, thinking that proximity to God's power will result in proximity to God. If we truly trust God, such environments can encourage our intimacy with God. But none of them inherently possesses the power to conjure God's nearness to us.

“God is impressed with our faith, not our feats.”

Think of it like this: A candlelit dinner with romantic music may encourage a sweet moment of relational intimacy between a husband and wife, but only to



the degree that the environment encourages and deepens their mutual trust and love. If there's relational distance between them due to a lack of trust, the aesthetics themselves have no power to bridge the distance. Only restoring the trust will do that.

## How We Draw Near to God

The secret to drawing near to God and having him draw near to us is revealed clearly in the Bible: we draw near to God through faith in Christ who alone gives us access to him (Hebrews 4:14–16; 7:25; Philippians 3:9), and we put our trust in all of “his precious and very great promises” which find their Yes to us in Christ (2 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

God is impressed with our faith, not our feats. Where faith is lacking, he is not pleased with the quantity of our knowledge or the quality of our aesthetic events.

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

When God sees someone whose heart fully trusts his promises and lives by them, God comes to strongly support that saint (2 Chronicles 16:9) and manifests himself to him:

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21)

## God's Invitation to Intimacy

“What you must trust God most for right now is where he means for you to draw closer to him.”

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God wants intimacy with you. Christ has done all the hard work in the cross to make it possible. All he requires is that you believe in him (John 14:1). He wants you to trust him with all your heart (Proverbs 3:5).

Which means his invitation to you to enjoy intimacy with him is the providences in your life that are testing your faith more than anything else. What you must trust God most for right now is where he means for you to draw closer to him.

It is likely an invitation that your flesh wants to decline. But as you read your Bible, do not the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1) all agree with James and Peter that the greatest testing of faith is the path to the greatest joy (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:8–9)? And do they not agree with Paul that it is not worth comparing to the joy of knowing Christ and the coming glory (Philippians 3:8; Romans 8:18)?

Intimacy with God often occurs in the places where we must trust him most. Heaven on earth is the inexpressible joy and the peace that surpasses understanding that comes from trusting God wholly (Philippians 4:6–7). For, as the old hymn writer said, “they who trust him wholly find him wholly true.”

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-have-intimacy-with-god>