

**“At the Summit”**  
**Romans 8:31-39**  
**March 12, 2023**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

Many have likened the last part of Romans 8 to a summit atop a high mountain. We have been climbing this mountain of God’s grace, and now Paul wants us to pause and take in the stunning view. Several years ago, my son and I had the opportunity to ride our bikes on the 490 miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway. There were many long climbs involved, but at the end of every long climb was a summit with stunning views. The highest point east of the Mississippi River lies along the parkway, Mt. Mitchell, rising to a height of 6,684 feet. We did the ride in early July, and the weather was clear on most days, allowing us full enjoyment of these vistas.

Today we want to pause and enjoy the view from Romans 8. The apostle Paul is our guide, and he does so by asking seven rhetorical questions, beginning with “What then shall we say to these things?” The “things” he has in mind go all the way back to the beginning of Romans. In other words, Paul wants us to consider everything we have as a result of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. These questions can be reduced to four.

**I. Who Can Be Against Us?**

Paul doesn’t mean to suggest by this that no one is against us, because Christians have enemies all around and within. We battle our own sinful nature with its sinful desires. We battle spiritual enemies. We fight, like everyone else, against the normal challenges of life in a fallen and broken world. Christians have formidable enemies against us. How about that first clause, “If God is for us”? The little conjunction “if” can mean several things in Greek, but here it means “since.” So what Paul is saying is, “Since God is for us, who can be against us and prevail?”

When the God of the Bible is on your side, victory is assured. Think of the numerous Old Testament stories portraying Israel prevailing in battle against much stronger enemies. One of my favorite stories of this nature is the story of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. One day he received the ominous news that a coalition of armies was marching on Jerusalem and was only about twenty miles away from the city (2 Chron. 20). The king’s assessment was evident in his prayer to God: **“We are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you”** (2 Chron. 20:12). As God often does, he spoke to his people through a prophet, saying, **“Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed. Tomorrow go out**

**against them, and the Lord will be with you”** (20:17). So they mustered the army and marched south toward the invaders. But they did something armies don't do: they put the choir in front of the army, and the choir sang, **“Give thanks to the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever”** (20:21). God brought a great victory to Israel that day as the invading army turned against one another. By the time Israel's army arrived, their enemies were lying dead before them. If God is for us, who can stand against us and prevail?

The church throughout all ages has faced opposition, and we are no different. We too face a vast horde called secularism, and it will not rest until the church bows to its worldview and ethics. And it seems to be winning victories, as much of western civilization becomes post-Christian. Further, there are many Christian leaders who are fanning the flames of fear at this great enemy. But we stand against that enemy armed with one thing only, and it will be enough. **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

## **II. Will Not God Give Us All Things?**

If the first question dealt with our adversaries, the second addresses the matter of God's provision. **“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?”** (v. 32). It's really simple math. If you required help totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars and someone made the sacrifice to help you that much, then if you needed help totaling only a few hundred dollars, that same benefactor would surely be willing to help with this lesser need. And what if the initial help required the benefactor to sell his house and liquidate many of his assets to come up with the hundreds of thousands of dollars you needed? He kept nothing off limits but gave whatever was needed to help you.

God has put nothing off limits to help us in our desperate need as rebellious sinners. He never said, “I'm sorry, the price for your deliverance is too high. It will require the life of my Son, and I'm not willing to pay such a high price.” Instead, he said, “I will not even spare my own Son in order to gain back these who were lost.” Do you hear the passion in that? Do you hear the extravagant love? Gospel logic then says, “If God has done this much for me, then he is for me in everything.”

The verb “gave him up” is the same one used of the actions of Jesus' enemies. The Greek dictionaries define it as “to hand over, betray.” Matthew 27 describes three different people handing Jesus over. First, Judas handed him over for greed (27:4). The Jewish leaders did so out of envy of his popularity (27:18), and Pilate out of fear of the people (27:26). In some oft-quoted words, Octavius Winslow wrote, “Who delivered up Jesus to die: Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews for envy;--but the Father for love!”

It is important to note here that God's provision for us is determined by our needs rather than our wants. There are, of course, Christians who suffer deprivation at times. The provision God promises is determined by his wisdom, which is infinitely greater than our own. He keeps the big picture in mind, while we are limited by what is right before us. We can see this in the model for God's provision that Paul uses here. The model is God's extreme and gracious provision of his Son, a provision that happened before we knew we needed it. But God knew, and he graciously provided what we now recognize is his most extravagant and gracious provision.

### **III. Who Shall Bring Any Charge Against God's Elect?**

As was the case with the first question, Paul doesn't mean to suggest here that there are no voices of condemnation raised against us. One of the names given to Satan is "accuser of the brothers" (Rev. 12:10). And our own consciences accuse us as well. I have been pastoring long enough to recognize that most church members regard themselves as being more sinful than all these other fine people in this room. And then there are the voices of the critics, which can be loud in our ears. I would guess we can all identify with what the singer Mariah Carey said in a television interview she did several years ago. She reported that if she hears a thousand words of praise and one word of criticism, that one criticism will eliminate the thousand praises.

Words of condemnation are an inescapable part of life in this fallen world. Paul gives us other words that need to sound more loudly in our ears. **"It is God who justifies... 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"** (v. 33-34). The trial has already occurred, and the verdict of not guilty has been pronounced. We don't need to defend ourselves against the condemning voices, whether their source is satanic, internal or from other people. The reason is that we have a defender in heaven: Jesus, the one who died for us, was raised for us and ascended into heaven. He is there now interceding for us, pleading the merits of his own blood for our forgiveness.

This is why the nineteenth century Scottish preacher Robert Murray M'Cheyne said that for every one look we take at ourselves, we should take ten looks at Christ. The voices of condemnation are drowned out by the thundering voice of Christ saying, "It is finished."

### **IV. Who Shall Separate Us from the Love of Christ?**

As we are on our mountaintop beholding the beautiful vistas of our salvation, our guide, Paul, has saved the best one for last. **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"** Of course, the answer he's going to give at the

end is that nothing “in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” But this is a truth of such beauty and comfort that the mere statement of it is inadequate. We need to do more than merely acknowledge the truth of this; we need to feel its truth and impact.

Let’s think first about what is at stake here. It is separation. We’ve all experienced the pain and discomfort from relational separation. A husband and wife have a conflict that goes unresolved, and the resulting disruption is both painful and all-consuming. Or consider the kind of separation where someone just gives up on someone else, leading to emotional and sometimes physical distance. Or it could be something as unwelcome as the separation brought about by a death. In any case, these separations are among the most painful trials to be endured. And if it is a separation from the God who does all the things Paul has just insisted that he does—a God who is for us, who provides all things for us, and who defends and insists on our acquittal—then the separation is about the worst thing imaginable. But it will never happen.

In much of the rest of this passage, Paul proposes some potential threats to the promise of no separation, followed by an assurance that none of them will be able to separate us. He begins with a list of items that could be characterized as extreme suffering. Tribulation and distress both involve a feeling of pressure and of being constrained by circumstances outside our control. Persecution is next, the suffering that comes from those who hate you because of what you believe and have enough power to make you suffer for those beliefs. Famine and nakedness both refer to extreme poverty, to the point that one’s basic needs of food and clothing go unmet. Finally, there’s “danger and sword,” likely referring to martyrdom. No matter how great the suffering might be, it cannot separate us from God’s love.

Paul realizes that God’s people do indeed suffer, a truth supported by Psalm 44:22. **“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”** What chance do sheep have against those determined to slaughter them? They have no power, no defense whatsoever. Yet Paul says not to be discouraged, because **“in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”** In all the things he has mentioned, the tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword, we are more than conquerors. What does it mean to be more than a conqueror? In his excellent commentary on Romans, Frank Thielman says that “this rare expression refers not merely to overcoming an opponent nor to winning something in addition to victory but to winning by a long distance” (p. 426). Victory was never in doubt. Even in death we win by a long distance, because death only serves to usher us into the very presence of the Jesus who has loved us so.

Paul is not done yet. He names even more things that are unable to separate us from the love of God, beginning with “neither death nor life.” I don’t

know of any mode of existence outside of these two possibilities. Everyone is either dead or alive. But neither shall be able to separate us from the love of Christ. A second pairing is neither “angels nor rulers.” Angels are the spiritual beings, both good and bad. Rulers are likely earthly rulers. Both angels and rulers are far more powerful than us, but neither have sufficient power to separate us from Christ. Things present or things to come will also not be able to do so. None of us knows what the future holds. There could be some great calamity ahead. What we can know is that there is nothing either in the present or the future that can loosen God’s grip upon us. There is no power able to do that. Neither height nor depth, which speak of places beyond our reach, places where mysteries happen over which we have no control. He finally concludes by saying that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. There only two things in this world: a Creator and his creation. The Creator assures us here that nothing in his creation will ever separate us from him.

We will all need this promise when this present life comes to an end. When that happens for you, and it will happen for all of us, I want you to know that you don’t need to be afraid. We have God’s own promise that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. I do need to point out, however, that this language assumes that at some point you are joined to the love of Christ. You can’t be separated from something of which you were never a part. How do you become a part of the love of Christ? One of the hymns we sing says it like this: “All the fitness he requireth is to feel your need of him.” Tim Keller says it simply: “all we need is nothing; all we need is need.” The hymn writer Augustus Toplady said, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace; foul, I to the Fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.”

## **CONCLUSION:**

If you ever visit my office, you may see one of my favorite pictures, positioned on my desk so I see it all the time. It’s a photograph of my oldest grandson nestled in the crook of my right arm while I’m seated in a chair. He was just over a year old when the photograph was taken, and his left hand is holding onto my index finger, his fingers not even long enough at the time to reach around my whole finger. My right hand, which is prominent in the photo, is holding onto his leg. So while he’s holding on to me with his weak, little baby hand, my much stronger hand is holding on to him. It’s not just the hands that interest me in this photo; it’s also the eyes. I’m looking down at him while he’s looking out at the camera. This photo speaks to me about this verse. I may be holding on to God, but it’s with my weak hand, while his much stronger hand is holding on to me. Further, God’s eyes are always on me, which allows me to look out at the world with confidence and without fear.

**Discussion Questions**  
**Romans 8:31-39**

1. What's your favorite mountain experience?
2. Paul begins by asking a question the answer of which is so obvious that he doesn't even feel the need to answer it. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" What is the most extreme situation you can imagine for yourself in which you would need the assurance of this promise?
3. Verse 32 assures us of God's provision for us. How do we understand this promise in light of the reality of Christians who experience poverty?
4. Verse 32 urges us to find our evidence of God's love not in our circumstances but in the extravagant gift of God's Son for our salvation. What practical applications come to mind as you think about that?
5. Have you ever been falsely accused? How might verses 33-34 help you in such a situation? How might these verses help you if the accusation was true?
6. The closing verses assure us that nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of Christ. What is involved in relational separation in general? In separation from God in particular?
7. Go through the list of things that can't separate us from God's love. Which one(s) stand out to you?