

Who Can Separate Us from the Love of God?  
Pastor Larry Kroon  
Wasilla Bible Church  
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Our text today is one of the grandest affirmations in all of scripture. It was written decades after Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead. It was written long enough after that that the church had been able to sort out all the wonder of that and what it meant; and not only that—they had begun to experience the reality of the risen Lord, unseen but in their midst. And the Apostle Paul writes from that growing perspective, in that ever-enlarging experience of the reality of the risen Lord. The Apostle Paul writes and he says this; he says

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

'I'm convinced,' he says. 'I'm convinced that when we enter into a faith relationship with Jesus, this risen Lord, there is an unbreakable bond created between us and God; that from that point on, God is for us forever—not just simply in a sentiment of affections, but a commitment for our good; that the love that was mocked, that was tortured, that the love that was rejected in Jerusalem that day and put on the cross, and was raised on the Sunday and has been with us ever since...that love,' the Apostle Paul says, 'I'm convinced it is with us now. It has been, it is now, and it will be there tomorrow. And this unbreakable bond of our heart and God's heart...when we enter into a faith relationship with this One named Jesus—'cause when we enter into a relationship with Him, we're entering with the One who's alive forever with the love of God toward us. I'm convinced,' Paul says.

The word he uses, and the tense that he uses when he says this, in the Greek, has the sense that 'I once wasn't.' 'There was a time,' in essence, Paul says, 'I didn't believe this. I wasn't sure of it. I thought it was unimportant, it was a dream. But,' he says, 'now I'm convinced. I'm absolutely sure this is the way it is.' And we wonder as he says that—how can you be sure, Paul? How can you be so convinced that this love of God will be there tomorrow, today, the same love that was at the cross two thousand years ago? How can you be sure of that, Paul? I mean, look at the suffering of God's people! How can you see what happens to Christians as they suffer, and say that God's love is there with them? I mean, Christians suffer!

This past year we have had more cancer in our church than any other time I can remember in our church history. I had vividly in my mind this morning an individual who last Easter was here among us, singing with us, healthy, confident; months later is diagnosed and has been out of state ever since in special hospitals, being treated. You say, 'Larry, nothing can separate us from the love of God? How can you say that when we suffer?'

The Apostle Paul answers that question in this text. And he deals with it in the verses that lead into it. He affirms...he says...he raises the question himself, and he says

*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, hunger, or nakedness, poverty, or peril, or sword?*

And then he gives the early church testimony. He says,

*Just as it is written,*

*"For Your sake..."*

...for God's sake...

*"...we are being put to death all day long;"*

The early church was persecuted. They were thrown in prison, they were put to death. As Paul says,

*"We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

But he goes on; he says

*But in all these things...*

...in 'em! Not around 'em, not through 'em, not above them, in them, *in the midst of them*, he says...

*...we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*

That early church was discovering something amazing in those early days, something that throughout the centuries we've experienced and we can affirm with them—that it's in the midst of those things that God does something special in our lives; that those things don't destroy us; those things don't destroy our faith; they don't disperse our hope. They don't embitter our hearts. Something amazing happens with Jesus as we go through those things!

Earlier Paul...in Romans Paul will say how, in the midst of that, there is perseverance that develops, and there's character. And Christians find themselves emerging from those things as people of hope. Those things don't destroy us. Instead, God works in them with us to transform us. And we emerge people of faith, people of hope, and people with hearts engaged.

There's something more that early church experienced, and Paul speaks of it. He says, 'You know, we come out of these things with hope,' in Romans chapter 5. 'But,' he says, 'You know what? That hope is enough. We can die, and life can fall apart around us, but we have the hope of eternity with Jesus, and you know what? That hope is enough in the present. Because,' he says, 'the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.' He says we experience that. In the middle of the worst of circumstances and conditions God will move within our souls and we will know we are loved. It's amazing! That's the wonder of our risen Lord.

You say, 'Ok, I could see maybe how in suffering God is with us; we know he was there, and that sustains us and we emerge from it as people being transformed. But Larry, what about sin? What about the fact that we do sin? Maybe suffering won't drive a wedge between us and God. But maybe my pride, maybe my greed, maybe my lust, maybe my bad temper...maybe that will drive a wedge between me and God's love. I mean, Larry, you need to understand what I've done! And how can God still love me if I've done that?'

Paul deals with that question in this text, as he says to us as Christians...he says 'Who's the one who condemns you? You've done wrong. Now who's gonna come up and condemn you for that? Who's gonna send you to hell because of that? You belong to Jesus, He belongs to you. Now who is gonna condemn you for your sin?' It's a rhetorical question. He answers it by just simply making another statement. He says 'Listen...it's Christ Jesus who died. I mean, He's the one who paid the price for that. He's the one who's covered that. His one act of obedience has done everything needed to make up for all the wrongs you have ever committed, have committed, and ever could commit. He's paid for it. So who could condemn you?'

'Yes,' he goes on, 'rather, not only did He die for you, He was raised! He's at the right hand of God right now! He's there at the right hand of God. He also intercedes for us. In other words, right now in heaven, Jesus is there taking your part, taking your side, arguing for you. Who is there in the universe that can condemn you when Jesus has paid the price, is at the right hand of the Father, and is defending you?'

Christian, hear me well. Your sin has not, can not, and will not separate you from the love of God that is in your relationship with Jesus.

Interesting thing about this eighth chapter of the book of Romans...it finishes with such a strong affirmation. You know, it was written very specifically to encourage Christians who sin. It was written to those who are spoken of at the end of chapter seven—those who want to do right, but find that they do wrong and realize, 'You know what? Inside me there is sin. Even though I acknowledge Jesus, even though I am a believer, even though I have faith, I still fail.' And this passage of scripture was written to you to remind you that your sin cannot separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus.

There's other questions that come up when you wrestle with this question of God's love being there, Him for us forever. All those questions come back to a basic foundational logic that Paul introduces at the very beginning of this passage, in Romans 8:32. He makes this statement. He says

*He...*

...speaking of God,

*...who did not spare His own Son...*

...God, who did not spare His own Son...

*...but delivered Him over for us all...*

...gave Him up, put Him on that cross, for us. Paul goes on...

*...how is it He will not also with Him freely give us all things?*

If God would not hold back His Son for us, how can we imagine He would not freely give us all things? It's a logic argument from greater to lesser. The greatest thing—He gave us His Son. The lesser thing—He will give us every other good thing. And of course, we wonder immediately what are all those things? Eternity, grace unlimited, mercy...we could go through those sorts of things...His security, His provision, His protection...we could go through all those things. But the key thing we're given, the most important thing that we are given *with Jesus* is that love of God that is in Him, that love that never dies. That's a logic argument.

The problem with logic arguments is our heads can get 'em, but our hearts don't necessarily hold 'em. And I find that that's the way it is whenever we talk about the love of God. We can go back and we can review the story, the crucifixion, the resurrection. We can review the logic as it develops, and the questions are answered and responded to; and we keep goin' back to the cross and saying 'If He did that, we can count on having risen Jesus from the grave, that that love will be with us today.' And we can see it in logic. But how do our hearts grip it? How does it become the pulse and the light beat of our lives?

And the answer there is hinted at in our text. See, the love of God that He pours out in our hearts, that exists with us today and forever, that love comes with Jesus. With Him you get that love. Without Him you don't. That love, that unbreakable bond, is found in Him, in relationship with Him. And so if we say "I wanna go beyond logic, and I want my heart to hold this reality. I want it to become the light-beat of my life." Then there is only one way to do it, and that is to lift our hearts to Jesus in faith, to affirm all that He is, to actually go heart-to-heart with God. That's the only way to know this love beyond a logical construct. You have to go heart-to-heart with God over Jesus.

We're gonna do that right now. I'm gonna ask the choir to come up and take their place, and Joel along with them. It's something really simple, but if the love of God is ever to become something more for you than a logical construct, if it's gonna become the heartbeat of your life, then you need to go heart-to-heart with Him. And we're gonna do that right now.

For some of you, as we do this, it's not going to be anything new. Your Christian life began this way. So it's nothing new, but it is something needed. Because for all of us, Christianity—the wonder and the glory of everything we've talked about and sung about this morning—can be simply an idea that we're playing with, a discussion that we have, an issue that we debate with others, a truth we try to teach to our kids. At the same time, our hearts can grow cold with respect to it. And periodically we need to renew and we need to go heart-to-heart with Jesus on it.

For some of you this is something totally new. You've never gone heart-to-heart with Jesus. You've never affirmed Him for all that He is. You've discussed it, you've debated it, you've even thought, 'Yeah, that's true.' But you've never opened up your heart and affirmed it. And because of that you've never known the love of God. You've never had it poured out in your soul. You've yet to taste that love that isn't driven away by suffering, that isn't stopped by sin. You've never tasted that love. I want to invite you today to join us. Make this a defining moment in your Christian life, your personal life. Make this the moment that you actually affirm Jesus and all that He is, you acknowledge Him as the risen Lord, you call out in faith who Jesus is, turning your heart from every other thing,—you, in a moment of faith and sincerity, honor Jesus as Jesus.

We're gonna do that with two simple songs, and then I'm gonna close us with a word of blessing, and I'll ask you to stand with me for this prayer.

*Our Father,*

*You have heard our heart. We acknowledge Jesus as our Lord. Meet us, Father, as we go from here with His love, fresh, new, each day. Answer our hearts with Yours in the reality of Jesus, our risen Lord.*

*Amen.*