

Sam Storms

Enjoying God Ministries

Romans #37

October 17, 2021

## **The Incalculable, Insurmountable, Sin-Killing, Soul-Preserving Love of God**

### **Romans 8:31-39**

I have a guaranteed answer to one of the most pressing questions you will ever ask. I have a remedy for what may well be the greatest fear in your heart. The question and the fear are the same: Will God's love for me one day dissipate and disappear? Is there a limit to his love? Is it even remotely possible that one day he will simply grow tired of me and give up? The answer is a resounding, No!

The fear that cripples and paralyzes and haunts many hearts is that no matter how good it may be now to reflect on God's love for us, it won't last. No matter how heart-warming it may be to think of God's affection and delight for me, hell-deserving sinner that I am, there's likely coming a day when it will all end. No matter how often I remind myself that God is good, and he always keeps his promises, I'm stuck with the inescapable reality of my own sinful soul and the countless times I treat God's grace and love with contempt. Surely, or so I say to myself, God will one day get fed up with me and pull the plug on my salvation. And honestly, I couldn't blame him if he did.

When I ask people why they struggle with this fear, among the many answers given, three often stand out above the rest. It's common for people to say, **(1) my enemies are too many and too powerful**. The deck is stacked against me, so they say. There are powerful people and even spiritual forces that threaten to expose me as the fraud that I am. They may step in between me and God and threaten to tell him how pathetic I am when it comes to loving him and obeying him. It may be people who pass themselves off as my friends. It may be a family member. It may be someone who really hates me. And Satan is surely there all the time seeking to undo what God's grace has done. If that weren't bad enough, there's yet another fear.

This second fear is that **(2) my needs are just too many; they are, quite simply, overwhelming**. To stay the course, to persevere in faith, to find the strength not to quit, requires so much that I seriously doubt if God is either able or willing to keep on supplying me with what I need. Surely at some point, the well is going to run dry. Surely at some point, God is going to put a plug on the fountain of mercy and grace that has flowed so freely for so long.

Third, and finally, even if something can be done about my enemies, and even if I can be convinced that God can meet my needs, **(3) my sins are simply too numerous**. I keep doing the same stupid, selfish things over and over again. When I think of how ungrateful I am, how prone I am to repeat past failures, how prideful and lustful and weak and addicted I am, I find it almost impossible to believe that a God worth his salt would bother to put up with me any longer and continue to invest his energy in my life.

So, how long will God's love last? A lot of Christians, when asked that question, sort of shrug their shoulders in ignorance or cringe in fear that it won't last much longer. These concerns, these anxieties, these reasons why we doubt the durability of God's love aren't theological abstractions concocted by some pointy-headed apostle who got bored sitting in his first-century ivory tower. They are all too real, and we each face them in our own way almost daily.

Each one of these three fears that leads to doubt and anxiety and, in some people, to despair, are raised by Paul here in Romans 8 and then carefully and thoroughly refuted by him. So, let's follow the apostle as he takes up, one by one, each of our fears and finally and forever puts it to rest by telling us what God has done and will do for us in Jesus Christ.

I have to tell you that when I read Romans 8:31-39, I get the feeling that Paul is actually issuing to each of us a stern **challenge**. It's almost as if he says: "Go ahead. Come on, Christian, take your best shot. Voice your concerns. Tell God why you can't trust his love. Throw at him your most powerful and persuasive objections. Lay it out why you fear that his love may soon fade into little more than a distant echo. Bring it on! I'm ready for you!" OK, Paul, here goes . . .

*"My enemies are too numerous and powerful"*

First of all, my enemies are too numerous and powerful and so committed to undoing everything God has done, I don't think I stand much of a chance in the long run. Satan is too clever, my enemies are too abundant, and others hate me so deeply that I'm not sure I can hold up much longer. I'm surrounded by people who would love nothing more than to see me fail miserably.

Paul's response to this is simple and straight to the point. He asks each of us a question. Look at v. 31 – ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"***

In asking this question, Paul is not suggesting that we have no adversaries. Paul had dozens, perhaps hundreds, of them. They beat him and whipped him, they slandered him and stoned him and threw him in prison and did everything they could to undermine his work and ministry. In fact, Paul lists our adversaries and the opposition we face in vv. 35-36. You will never reach a level of maturity in the Christian life in which you no longer have enemies or face opposition. In fact, with spiritual increase and success, our enemies multiply!

Paul's point is simply that ***no adversary or enemy is of any account since God is for us***. Since God is for us, to use the words of Romans 8:28, all things work together for our ultimate spiritual good, even those things which our enemies intend for our harm! No enemy can ever achieve what they arrogantly claim when they attack us.

Notice also that Paul doesn't simply ask the question, "Who is against us?" His question is, ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** That is to say, if the God who, according to vv. 29-30, foreknew and predestined and called and justified and glorified us, if ***THAT*** God is for us, who can be against us? So, who precisely ***is*** that God? What kind of God are we talking about?

“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases” (Ps. 115:3).

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose’” (Isa. 46:9b-10).

“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” (Dan. 4:34b-35).

No wonder the psalmist would cry out: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1; cf. 46:1-3).

So let’s think again about why Paul asked this rhetorical question. He was confronting our fear of the collective power of the many forces and enemies amassed against us. Paul knew that there will always be a person or people out there whose ridicule and hostility and rejection you feel unable to face. Paul knows how inhibiting and paralyzing such fear can be. So he calls upon us to think: Think about all your enemies and all their disdain for you; put it on one side of the scales of balance. Now put “this” God on the other side. Who is weightier? Who is mightier? Who is more powerful? “Greater is he who is in you,” said the apostle John, “than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

OK, Paul, you’ve made your point. I’ll give you this one. Maybe my enemies are no match for God, but what about my needs? And man do I have needs!

*“My needs are just too many; they are, quite simply, overwhelming”*

Here we confront the second of these three seemingly overwhelming fears. In this case, my needs are so many and so deep and so diverse that I live in constant fear that I’m going to come up short. I need faith that God is going to do what he promised he’d do. I need strength to resist temptation. I need wisdom to navigate through some really tough decisions that are ahead of me. I need joy in Jesus to keep me from seeking satisfaction in what the world offers. Boy, do I have needs!

Yes, I know, says Paul. But just as your fear of your enemies and adversaries led me to ask you a question, so too does your fear that your needs are too many. You’re afraid that God either can’t or won’t provide you with what you need every day to stay true to him. Well, here’s my question for you.

*“How will he not also with him graciously give us all things” (v. 32)?*

Now again, if Paul had merely asked, “Will God give us all things?” we might have wondered. We might have said in response: “Well, you know, I need so many things, big things, important things; how can I be certain God will provide them? I’m not saying he lacks the power to do so, but what if he lacks the will?”

But look at how Paul phrased the question. The God who Paul says will graciously give us all things is *the God who “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all!”* In other words, the God about whom we ask if he will give us all things we need is the very God who has already given us his very own beloved Son, Jesus Christ! We encountered this same argument from Paul back in Romans 5.

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:9-10).

Since God has done the unspeakably and indescribably great and costly thing, namely, sacrifice for us his only begotten Son, we may be fully confident that he will do what is by comparison immeasurably less. Why was God’s gift to us of Jesus Christ the greatest imaginable thing for God to do? Because he loves his Son infinitely; his own Son, his dear Son. It wasn’t an angel that he sent into this world clothed in flesh to suffer at the hands of evil men and be nailed to a cross. It wasn’t one of the four living creatures from the book of Revelation. It wasn’t you or your next-door neighbor. It was his precious, only-begotten, eternal Son! It was also because his Son did not deserve to die. His Son deserved worship and honor and praise, not spitting and beating and scorn and crucifixion.

The point is this: If God would do the greatest thing for you, he will certainly do all lesser things. You live in fear that God won’t do all lesser things and meet all these many needs you have to stay faithful to him. No! In comparison with giving Christ Jesus, it’s a breeze! It’s a cake walk! Giving you all things is easy. This is the unbreakable, unshakeable logic of heaven!

Let’s stay with v. 32 and Paul’s argument a bit longer. Look at what he says. He speaks of something God didn’t do and something God did do.

**Negatively**, God did not “spare” his own Son. Again, let’s be clear about who it is that God did not spare. It was his own “Son”! There is only one Son of God and he is infinitely precious to the Father. Parents, we “spare” our children when we refrain from inflicting on them all the discipline that their disobedience calls for. Judges “spare” criminals when they reduce or suspend a sentence. But this is precisely what God did *not* do with Jesus! He did not withhold one stroke of his holy wrath in punishing Jesus for what we have done! No mitigation, no lessening of the penalty, no suspension of the sentence, no leniency.

**Positively**, he “gave him up” for us all, or better still, he “delivered” him up. Who delivered up Jesus, and why? Was it Judas Iscariot, and did he do it for 30 pieces of silver? No. Was it the Jewish religious leaders and did they do it out of jealousy? No. Was it Pontius Pilate and did he do it out of fear of the crowds? No. It was God the Father, and he did it because of love for you and me!

*“The wisdom of God has ordained a way for the love of God to deliver us from the wrath of God without compromising the justice of God”* (John Piper, *Desiring God*, 61-62).

Therefore, God will do what is by comparison infinitely easier. He will give us all things we need for spiritual success. ***Whatever is necessary for you to make it to the end of life still faithful and still trusting Christ, God will give you.*** Whatever is necessary for you to be conformed to the image of his Son and to resist temptation, he will give you.

One more thing needs to be said about v. 32. What exactly does Paul mean by “*all things*”? There are things we may not receive that we mistakenly think God ought to give us: better health, a better job, a better husband, a better wife, a longer life, more respect from peers, more fame, etc. ***Surely, by “all things” Paul means everything essential to knowing him more and loving him more and adoring him more and enjoying him more. Everything you need to find complete satisfaction for your soul in God, and joy for your heart in God, he will most assuredly supply.***

Simply put, God will not withhold anything from you that is essential for your enjoyment of him! Think about what kind of person you would be and the kind of life you would live if you really believed v. 32. You know that Jesus calls on us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him daily. You know that he calls on us to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven and not upon earth. You know that he warns us that if we follow him, we will suffer persecution, whether slander or gossip or injustice or mockery or imprisonment or death. You know that we are called by our Lord to embrace humility and meekness and gentleness and to pursue purity of life.

So why don't we do it? Biggest reason: fear! We are afraid of being stranded and left to ourselves and being trampled upon and exploited and taken advantage of and left with nothing. The bottom line is that we are not persuaded that God really will provide us with all that we need to live the life that he's called us to live. Our fear is fueled by unbelief.

*“My sins are simply too numerous”*

We've come now to the third and final reason why we fear that God's love just won't last, that somehow, someday, in some way or other God will pack up and leave us to ourselves, forever: my sins are too numerous, too many, too great, too severe, too regular. And the guilt and shame and the feeling of being disqualified are so overwhelming that it doesn't make sense to pretend any longer. Here is Paul's answer. Listen closely to what he says in vv. 33-34.

Paul isn't saying that people won't charge us with wrongdoing. They do it all the time! He's not suggesting that Satan won't make every effort to condemn us by bringing up to God and to our own consciences the many ways we have failed.

But all such charges fall short. All such accusations are to no avail. Why? Is it because we are innocent of what they accuse us of? No. In fact, we are probably guilty of a lot more than they can think of or find time to mention! They are to no avail because ***“Christ Jesus is the one who died” for us*** (v. 34a)! The penalty which those sins call for, whether they be past, present, or yet future, has already been paid in full! How can anyone condemn you when Christ has already been condemned in your place? What is left for you to suffer? What guilt or penalty remains that might damage your relationship with God?

It doesn't stop there. He not only died but was raised from the dead to testify to the sufficiency and perfection of what he accomplished for you on the cross. And he not only was raised from the dead but was exalted to the right hand of God the Father, the place of supremacy and power and honor.

But he was exalted not only to demonstrate his power and authority but also so that he might "*intercede*" on your behalf (v. 34b). Each time an accusation is brought against you, Jesus turns to the Father and says: "I was reckoned guilty for that sin. I died for it. Your justice has been satisfied." Over and over and over and over again . . .

This is the basis or ground on which Paul declares in v. 33b, "*It is God who justifies!*" God is the one who declares that you are righteous in his sight, no matter how loudly your enemies may say that you are guilty, no matter how viciously Satan may attack you, no matter how painfully your own conscience may scream in protest. It is God who justifies you! Who, then, could possibly bring a charge against you that might stick?

It's one thing for a county court judge to acquit you of some crime. It's one thing if it is the governor of your state or the U.S. President who pardons you. It is something altogether different and greater when the Judge of the Universe declares you forgiven, free, and not guilty! And there is no one, not even you or your sin, that can overturn or reverse his verdict.

And when, exactly, did God do this? According to Romans 4:5 God justifies the "*ungodly*"! God passed a favorable sentence on your behalf *in full view of your moral failures*, in full view of your shortcomings. God justified you *with his eyes wide open!* He knew the very worst about you at the time he accepted you for Jesus' sake. God didn't wait until you were "godly" and then justify you on the basis of what you've achieved. He looked at you in full and exhaustive awareness of every sin you would ever commit and because of what Jesus achieved he declared you righteous in his sight.

J. I. Packer once pointed out that there are two kinds of sick consciences. There is first the conscience that is not sufficiently aware of sin, the conscience that is hardened and virtually oblivious to failure and fault. These are the people who persist in spiritual rebellion and immorality and never think twice about it. But then there is the conscience that is not sufficiently aware of forgiveness. It is to this second sort that Paul is speaking in Romans 8. He knows how easily the conscience of some Christians can become sensitive and self-condemning and insecure. So, says Packer, Paul here 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!" (*Knowing God*, 248).

Those are the three primary reasons so many Christians live in anxiety and fear about their future with God. Too many enemies, too many needs, too many sins. But Paul has silenced all three!

*The Incalculable, Insurmountable, Sin-Killing, Soul-Preserving Love of God*

For some of you, I suspect that may still not be enough. You still live in fear that God's love won't last. You are still terrified that something somewhere at some time will wrench you from God's loving embrace. That's why Paul writes what he does in vv. 35-39.

Here again Paul addresses that gnawing fear in your soul that some day, in some way, Jesus will stop loving you: "I've had enough! I'm fed up! I've given you every opportunity, every chance, every benefit of the doubt! It's over! Get out of my sight!" Perhaps you think this way because others who've said they would never cease loving you finally did, and what reason do I have to believe that God is any different from them? So here Paul goes to great lengths to drive home the point. He scans the scope of human adversity to try to find some experience that has the potential to undermine our faith and destroy God's love for us.

***Tribulation*** – Perhaps one day when I'm suffering some trial or persecution, I won't respond the way I should. I'll get angry at God or bitter or curse his name. Maybe tribulation will separate me from the love of God in Christ. No.

***Distress*** – What about the inner turmoil, the emotional anxiety, the doubts and fears and despair I so often feel? Will God some day look at my heart and say, "I've had enough"? No.

***Persecution*** – Will what others can do to me: words, rejection, loss of job and income, physical abuse, etc. separate me from the love of God in Christ? No.

***Famine, nakedness, danger, sword*** – If I should ever go hungry or without clothing or I'm exposed to untold dangers and threats or perhaps even killed, slaughtered as just so many sheep, does that mean God has abandoned me and cut me off from his love in Christ Jesus? Or what if I respond to those challenges with doubt and anger and resentment? Won't that drive God away? No.

Paul's citation in v. 36 of Psalm 44:22 is a much-needed reminder that martyrdom is normal Christianity. It is happening all over the world, especially in Nigeria, North Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Nepal, and the Sudan. One study suggested that approximately 175,000 Christians will die this year because of their faith in Jesus. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "Some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake" (Luke 21:16-17).

"In all these things," all of them, every one of them, "we are more than conquerors." It is "in" them, not by evading them or avoiding them or being spared the devastation they bring, but right smack dab in the middle of them, we conquer through Christ.

Note well: it is "through him who loved us" that the conquering comes. It isn't our courage or our resolve or our endurance or determination, but through the presence of Christ at all times and on the basis of what

he has accomplished that we conquer. It is not our hold on him, but his hold on us that enables us to stand securely through the very worst.

As if to hammer the final nail into the coffin of our doubts and fears, Paul lists every conceivable threat to the love of God for us:

***Neither death nor life*** – Death can't sever you from his love. In fact, it only serves to bring you into his glorious presence! Nor is there anything that life can throw your way that might cut you off from his affection. Paul has in mind not only death itself but the variety of ways in which it might come upon you as well. Thus, neither cancer nor a car wreck, not diabetes or drowning, no manner of life's end, whether swiftly by martyrdom or slowly in a nursing home, can put an end to the love God has for you in Jesus.

Nor is there anything that life can throw your way that might cut you off from his affection. Neither tragedy or triumph, no manner of success or failure, nothing that we encounter or experience during our earthly sojourn has the power to undermine God's commitment or overthrow his purpose in bringing you safely into his eternal kingdom.

***Not angels or rulers*** – Angels are good angels, rulers are demons. The point is that “there is no spiritual cosmic power, whether benevolent or malevolent, which will be able to separate us from God's love in Christ” (Cranfield, 442). Neither the holy angels who do God's bidding nor the demonic rulers who oppose his will have the power to threaten your security in Christ.

***Nor things present nor things to come*** – Nothing now, nothing in the future.

***Nor powers*** – No supernatural force, no miraculous event, nothing, no matter how strong it may seem, can separate you from Christ.

***Nor height nor depth*** – Nothing above, nothing below.

***Nor anything else in all creation*** – This final phrase is designed to shut off and close down any possible loopholes. No being, no thing, no event, nothing that is or ever will be, not even yourself (after all, you are a created thing) will be able to separate you from the love of Christ!

What about God himself? He's not created. He's the Creator. So maybe he'll separate me from the love of Christ. But the whole point of Paul's argument in Romans 8 is to reassure you that God is on your side and eternally for you.

*Conclusion*



Perhaps you grew up in a home where all you heard were shame-filled words of condemnation. You were constantly reminded of all your failures and sins. You rarely heard affirmations that encouraged and reminded you of God's love and forgiving grace. Well, if that's you, hear what God says to you through the words of Paul! God is for you! There is no one to condemn you! There is no sin of yours for which Christ hasn't already suffered its punishment. Jesus stands at God's right hand interceding and praying for you, every single day. Do you feel the force of this truth? Can you sense the clean air of God's loving power blowing through your heart, elevating you above the self-contempt and self-hatred that has kept you in bondage for so long?

That depth of freedom and joy and peace and healing can be yours right now.