

Who Can Separate Us?

📖 Romans 8:35-39

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Good news: Senate Bill 2065, the Pastor Protection Act was passed and signed into Texas Law by Greg Abbott. This means that pastors cannot be forced by the State to perform same-sex marriages. However, now we need to focus prayer on the Supreme Court's hearing of Same-Sex Marriage so that they will either not rule, which I prefer because it is outside the bounds of the constitution, and if they do rule it signals a re-writing of the constitution, or if they do rule to rule against it.

We're coming to the conclusion of Romans 1-8 and so it behooves us to clarify what we have in these chapters before we come to the explanation in Romans 9-11. First, in Romans 1:18-3:20 we have condemnation. All men are condemned and under the just penalty of sin because of the sin nature and personal sin. Second, in Romans 3:21-5:21 we have justification. All who have faith have been justified by God so that we are freed from the penalty of sin and clothed with the righteousness of Christ such that He looks upon us and treats us as righteous in heaven even though in our experience on earth we still sin. Third, in Romans 6:1-8:17 we have sanctification. All who are justified are being delivered from the power of sin as we live by faith such that gradually we are more and more set apart unto service to God. Fourth, in Romans 8:18-30 we have glorification. All who have been justified and are in the process of being sanctified will be rescued from the presence of sin in the resurrection so that we can dwell with God eternally without interruption. Salvation from beginning to end is a work of God's grace appropriated by faith which brings us to the concept of eternal security. Eternal security is the resounding note in Romans 8:31-39 and it prepares the way for the fifth section in Romans 9-11 where we have an explanation regarding Israel. If eternal security is true then what about Israel? Hasn't Israel, the covenant people of God been cast away because of their rejection of the Messiah? Paul answers in the negative by explaining the purpose and plan of God for Israel. Contrary to what many people think about Romans 9-11, that it is out of place and even a later addition, it follows very naturally from the doctrine of eternal security. In other words, it is inconsistent to hold to eternal security and not hold to a future covenant destiny for Israel in the land and it is equally inconsistent to hold to loss of salvation and a future covenant destiny for Israel in the land. The only consistent view is to hold to eternal security and a future covenant destiny for Israel in the land.

What does the doctrine of eternal security state? It states that all who believe the gospel are saved by God and will be kept saved by God. Put in overly simplistic terms, once saved always saved. We mentioned several passages that are popularly used to teach eternal security as well as many doctrines that are used to support eternal security. Romans 8:31-39 is the single most important passage teaching this doctrine. The doctrine is important because it gives us stability, it gives us a standing with God such that we know we are a part of His family and therefore of great concern to Him. Arminians reject eternal security and so at the conclusion of today's lesson I will address the five most common texts they use to arrive at their rejection, not to mention the philosophical bias they have against eternal security and the theological error which undergirds and biases their interpretation of the text.

In Romans 8:28-30 Paul argued that God foreknew us, predestined us, called us, justified us and glorified us. Logically then in Romans 8:31 Paul concludes with the forensic analysis that "God is for us." Therefore "who can be against us?" Since the God whose purpose for us is the Creator of the universe and no one is on par with Him then no one of any substance can be against us. In 8:32 what God did for us is not spare His most precious possession but delivered Him over for us settling our legal requirements. If He gave us this great gift how much more will He freely give us all things? In 8:33, who in God's court of law will bring a valid charge against us, His precious, choice ones? God is the one who declares us righteous in His court of law. There is no one who can undeclare what God has declared. In 8:34, who then is the one who condemns? All judgment has been given into the hands of Christ Jesus and He will not condemn us because first, He has died for us and our guilt is removed, He has been raised and we are declared righteous, He has ascended to the right hand of God and is the highest authority and He intercedes for us dismissing all charges against us. Therefore we have eternal security; God is for us and there is no one or no thing that is of any substance that compares to Him. The focus in these verses is legal.

Today in 8:35ff Paul focuses more on the personal and relational. Douglas Moo says, "Left behind is the forensic image of "God for us"; begun is the more personal and relational emphasis on the love of God in Christ for us."¹ If God is for us legally such that we have eternal security then what could intervene in our personal relationship with Him that is founded on this legal basis? To make perfectly clear that no-one and no-thing can intervene Paul adds these words. **Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** The Greek word **separate** is *χωριζει* and means "to cause separation through use of space between, *divide, separate*"² and is used in marriage texts when it says, "What God has joined together, let no man separate." To separate a man and woman is to interject space between the two who are one flesh. This can be done but it is not supposed to be done. The question in our text is who will interject space between us and **the love of Christ?** This is something that cannot be done. The **love of Christ** is to be understood as the objective genitive and therefore refers to His love for us and not our love for Him or our sense of His love for us. His love for us is mentioned twice in these final verses, in verse 35 and 37. The **love of God, which is in Christ** is mentioned once in verse 39. All three references view **love** as the securing power of God through Christ that keeps us eternally secure. The reason this love has securing power is because it

is the love of God accomplished for us at Golgotha. In 8:32 he just spoke of the pre-eminent display of love where He said that God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him over for us all. Golgotha is the greatest manifestation of God's love for us. If we are partakers of this love how now will He retract this love? The Greek word translated **love** also reinforces the idea of eternal security. There are three words for love in the Greek; *φιλε* which refers to a brotherly love, *ερος* which refers to lust and *αγαπ* which refers to unconditional love. The word used here is *αγαπ*. Since *αγαπ* is unconditional love it means that it is not conditioned on anything outside of the one who loves. In this context Christ's love for us was not conditioned on anything within us. In other words, Christ did not exercise His love for us on the cross because of who we are but because of who He is. This means that no matter what we do He still died for us and nothing can change the effects of His death for us, we are eternally secure.

He then asks questions about certain things in creation that one might think could cause a separation. **Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?** The seven things are all difficulties Christians around the world face. Right now in NE Syria Daesh, which some call ISIS, but I don't recognize as a State, and so I use Daesh which is an acronym for the Arabic name of the terrorist group and also a play on words that means "bigot," is enslaving, murdering and raping Christians, and from this text's perspective, can any of that separate these Christians from the love of Christ? No. As Jesus Himself said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Men can kill the body but they do not have access to the soul and so there is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ.

Now many of these things Paul states he experienced for Christ's sake in 2 Cor 12:10 and 11:23-28. He even says that it was when he was weakened by these things it was then that he was strong. And so these things, far from separating Paul from the love of Christ, drew him into a greater realization of it. What exactly are these seven things? The first word, **tribulation** is *θλιψις*. Its basic meaning is "pressure" and refers to pressure in life "that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction..."³ And many Christians face these pressures. The second word, **distress** is *στενοχωρια* and has the basic sense of "narrowness." It refers to a narrow "set of stressful circumstances, distress, difficulty, anguish, trouble."⁴ The third word, **persecution**, is *διωγμος*, and refers to "a program or process designed to harass and oppress someone..."⁵ The fourth word, **famine**, is *λιμος* and means "to hunger, to starve." Something many Christians around the world face due to poor climate change policy based on pseudo-science. The fifth word, **nakedness**, is *γυμνοτης* and doesn't necessarily refer to a lack of all clothing but rather "being without adequate clothing..."⁶ The sixth word, **peril**, is *κινδυνος* and refers to "risky situations." Paul often put himself in risky situations despite the objections of his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The seventh word, **sword**, is *μαχαιρα*. The *μαχαιρα* was a double-edged sword used in executions and war. Here it stands for "death by violence." In context all seven of these things refer to troubles that come upon Christians because of their beliefs. In other words, they are not just general sufferings due to the Fall but sufferings directly inflicted

because of anti-Christian sentiments or beliefs. Constable says, "The sufferings in view are the consequence of our identification with Christ."⁷

Now the reason we interpret these as troubles that come upon us because we are Christians is because Paul quotes a Psalm in 8:36 to support it. The Psalm was written by one or more of the sons of Korah who wrote several Psalms. The song quoted here is from Psalm 44. **Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."** In the Psalm the sons of Korah wrote how God often permitted His righteous ones to be continually harassed and distressed by enemies. Paul makes application of this by saying that as they were harassed so we are harassed. So we should not expect that because we become a Christian we are going to have an easy time of it. God never promised we wouldn't have difficulties. In fact, He promised us the opposite. In John 16:33 He said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." So tribulation is to be expected. It is the lot of all Christians to suffer in this life. Ryrie says, "Difficulties are not necessarily obstacles for God's children, but His appointed way."⁸ Paul stated in 1 Cor 15:31 that he faced continual martyrdom. The basic reason is because the world hates Christ. But since the world cannot get to Christ because He is sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven then the world tries to get at us because of our identification with Him. And yet despite the hostility against us we are to bear these sufferings because of the compelling love of Christ and the knowledge that though they may kill the body they cannot kill the soul, and therefore they cannot separate us from the love of Christ. So Paul's quote from the OT shows that God's people have always been hated by the world and have therefore faced continual martyrdom, whether in OT Israel or the NT Church.

In 8:37, the strong contrastive *αλλα*, translated **But**, radically offsets the results from those intended by our enemies. **But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.** The powerful verb **overwhelmingly conquer** is from *υπερνικαω*, a double-compound word used only here in the NT. *Υπερ* meaning "over, above" and *νικαω* meaning "victory, conquer." Together the words mean "to have conquest over and beyond" or "to prevail completely." One author says, "we are winning a most glorious victory," and another, "I am more than conqueror" Denney says, "Perhaps it is a mistake to define in what the 'more' consists; but if we do, the answer must be sought on the line indicated in the note on 'for thy sake we were killed all the day long'; these trials not only do not cut us off from Christ's love, they actually give us more intimate and thrilling experience of it."⁹ In other words, as we prevail through the daily trials we have an experience of the love of Christ for us. Of course, the victory comes not because of our strength but **through Him who loved us**, another reference to the love of Christ displayed so mightily for us at Golgotha. In other words, the love at the cross continues to give us the victory over our enemies as it is freshly applied to us day by day.

Paul explains further in 10:38-39, as indicated by the explanatory *γαρ* translated **For. For I am convinced...** The Greek convinced is *πειθω*, it is in the perfect tense and means "to have come to a particular view." Paul did not always have this view but he came to this view. It is used of the work of convincing men of the gospel (Acts 18:4;

28:23; 2 Cor 5:11; et al). Men do not always believe the gospel but some become convinced of it. That is the word used here. Here Paul presents a series of contrasting things that he had become convinced could not separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.

They are set in pairs. The first pair continues with the death theme. **That neither death, nor life. Death and life** are the two possible states of existence. Paul is saying that whatever the Christian's state of existence, whether in **death** or in **life**, neither can separate us from the love of Christ. The second pair is **nor angels, nor principalities**. Angels and principalities are the two kinds of spirit beings. Angels typically refer to the good angels who did not fall with Satan and principalities typically refer to the evil angels who did fall with Satan. Paul is saying that the two kinds of spirit beings, though greatly powerful, cannot separate us from the love of Christ. The third pair is **nor things present, nor things to come**. Things present and things to come refer to things in time. Things present refer to things in the present time and things to come refer to things in the future time. Paul is saying that no present circumstances or events or future circumstances or events can separate us from the love of Christ. The fourth pair is not a pair, it is a word that stands alone, **powers**. This is the Greek word *δυναμις* which has a wide range of usage. It most likely refers to human powers or authorities but may extend beyond them and may be a summary of everything already mentioned in the verse. In 8:39 the fifth pair is **nor height, nor depth**. **Height** and **depth** are spatial dimensions. Paul seems to be saying that nothing in the spatial dimensions can separate us from the love of Christ. The final expression is simply stated, **nor any other created thing**. Most likely this is a catch all, lest anyone think that Paul may have left something out (though he didn't). He covered the two states of existence; death and life; the two kinds of spirit beings; angels and principalities; the two temporal periods; present and future; powers in general and the two spatial dimensions; height and depth. But lest someone think that perhaps Paul left something out he adds **nor any other created thing**. Scholars that think you can lose your salvation argue that this expression does not include a human's free and responsible choices. However, the context of verse 32, that God is for us and the question in verse 35, "Who can separate us" and the universal negative of verse 39 "nor any other created thing" argue strongly against excluding a human's choices. Human choices come out of the human will and God created the human will. It is therefore a creation and is not capable of undoing what the Creator has done. The use of the word **separate** brings us back to the question of verse 35, **Who will separate us?** The conclusion is firm, nothing **will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**. We have eternal security. Eternal security is saying that God's purpose for us can't be interfered with. When someone says that we can lose our salvation they are saying that God's purpose can be interfered with, that somehow our feebleness as creatures can contravene in the Creator's business. This is theological puke. Fundamentally, Arminianism is a misrepresentation of God and what He has secured for us through Christ.

Now, there are several passages that are often used to say that one can lose his salvation so I want to just address five or six of those. First, turn to Matthew 12:30-32. This is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Some argue that if we blaspheme the Holy Spirit then we will lose our salvation because we are committing a sin that Jesus

said would not be forgiven. In 12:31 He says, "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be given. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come." Can one blaspheme the Holy Spirit and thereby lose his salvation? The short answer is no. The context shows that the blasphemy of the Spirit is the sin of denigrating the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus in order to authenticate to that generation of Israel that He was the Messiah. The Holy Spirit is no longer doing this miraculous work through Jesus. Jesus is not even on earth any more. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, this is a sin that could be committed only by those who were present in the 1st century when the Holy Spirit was doing miracles through Jesus in order to authenticate that He was the Messiah. It has nothing to do with Christians losing their salvation. The people who were blaspheming the Spirit were not even believers anyway. Second, turn to 1 Cor 9:27. This is the possibility of being disqualified. Some argue that if we do not continue in good works then we will lose our salvation because we are required to persevere in good works until the end. In 9:27 Paul says, "but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." Can one be disqualified from salvation if he does not discipline his body to do good works and abstain from sin? No. Verse 24 shows that the context is rewards, not salvation. "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win." Paul is talking about how to run the Christian race. We run it in such a way to win an imperishable crown. As verse 25 says, "Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we are imperishable." In other words, he's talking about the necessity of disciplining ourselves if we are to win. The reason Paul disciplined his body and made it his slave is so that he would not be disqualified from winning rewards. It had nothing to do with him possibly being disqualified from salvation. Salvation cannot be lost, rewards can be lost, yet this is one of the most common passages used by those who believe in loss of salvation. Third, turn to 2 Cor 13:5. This is the possibility of failing the test. Some argue that it is possible that we might fail the test and this would prove that we lost our salvation. In 13:5 Paul says, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" Does this teach that some had lost their salvation? No. The test is not to see if they are in Christ, the test is to see if Christ is in them! Actually, the preposition "in" should be translated "with" or "among." The point is that if they were following Paul's opponents Christ was not with them in their pursuit, that is, He did not approve of them. They needed to test themselves to see who they were following. To follow false apostles, prophets and teachers was to fail the test. To follow true apostles, prophets and teachers was to pass the test. Paul followed true apostles, prophets and teachers and was himself one. They needed to follow him and thereby have Christ with them in their pursuit of truth. Fourth, turn to Galatians 5:4. This is the possibility of being severed from Christ. In 5:4 Paul says, "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Does this mean that some had lost their salvation? Not at all. Actually, the Greek word "severed" is very different from the word "separate" in Romans 8. This word is *καταργεω* and means "to render inoperative" or "make devoid of

power." In the context of verse 2, if they took circumcision as a means of their seeking to be justified before God then Christ's work in their life would be rendered inoperative because they were not living by grace but works. This is why Paul says in verse 4 that by receiving circumcision in an attempt to justify themselves before God they had fallen from grace. The point is they had fallen from a grace way of living the Christian life. These were Christians who 3:1-3 clearly states had received the Spirit of God but were now trying to live the Christian life by works. They had stepped away from grace. Whenever we try to live by works and not by grace Christ's power toward us is rendered inoperative, we have fallen from grace. These are descriptions of genuine Christians not living by grace. Fifth, turn to Heb 6:6. This is the possibility of falling away. In 6:6 the author says, "and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." Is it possible to fall away from salvation? Is this teaching the loss of salvation? No. Again, the context is believers. In 5:12 they "by this time...ought to be teachers." In other words, they had regressed in the spiritual life. In 6:1 they were to leave "the elementary teaching about the Messiah..." and "press on to maturity." 6:3 says, "And this we will do, if God permits." This is the key to the whole controversial section that follows. There are some that God will permit to go on to maturity and those He will not but that decision is up to Him. Notice in verse 4 we have an explanation, "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good work of God and the powers of the age to come," in other words, those who have come to Christ and received the Spirit of God and seen mighty miracles and then, verse 6, "have fallen away," after all of this, then he says, "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." Those who had fallen away were those Jewish believers who went back to the earthly Temple and priestly system of worship in Jerusalem. That system was dead. The true Temple was in heaven and the true priest, Jesus Christ was in heaven. To return to the old Temple and the old priestly system was to deny the heavenly Temple and the true priest, Jesus Christ. There was no way if they became enveloped in that old system that they could repent because that system was under divine judgment, a judgment which fell in AD70. This too would be a sin like the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit that could only be committed in the first century while the old temple and priesthood were still operating on earth. The passage has nothing to do with loss of salvation but instead the impossibility of spiritual advance and bearing fruit as long as they were attached to that old system. They clearly needed to press on to maturity. Verses 7 and 8 show clearly that what the author had in mind for them was fruit bearing, like a field that receives rain, but a field that does not receive rain doesn't produce fruit and is close to worthless...The bottom line is all these passages talk about truths but they are not talking about the loss of salvation. That is a false doctrine. How can loss of salvation harmonize with Romans 8:35-39? This is a hermeneutical question. Passages can't contradict because our God does not contradict Himself. So how do we go about harmonizing these texts? Romans 8:35 asks, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." ³⁷But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am

convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ 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." How does this passage harmonize with claims that one can lose salvation? How do we resolve the supposed tension? The rule in hermeneutics is that clear passages always take precedence over less clear passages. Romans 8:35-39 is the clearest passage. All the others must be interpreted in a way that is in harmony with Romans 8:35-39, not in contradiction to it. When looked at in their respective contexts they all have much better interpretations than loss of salvation.

The application is to rest. Since you are eternally secure in the personal love and affection of Christ, unconditionally for you, then who or what can separate you from Christ? No one and no thing. What this means is that you can find rest in Him. He is not waiting on your performance. He already saw the preeminent performance; Jesus Christ. And for us to live is Christ! It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Amen.

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 543.

² BDAG, 1095.

³ BDAG, 457.

⁴ BDAG, 943.

⁵ BDAG, 253.

⁶ BDAG, 208.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 8:36.

⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1803.

⁹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 8:35.