

A Love That Will Not Let You Go

Romans 8:35-39

June 10, 2018

Introduction:

“You'd think that people would have had enough of silly love songs
I look around me and I see it isn't so
Some people want to fill the world with silly love songs
And what's wrong with that, I'd like to know...”

Some of you might recognize those lyrics from Paul McCartney from his hit single, “Silly Love Songs” way back in 1976. Of course by 1976 there had been countless love songs already written and there have been countless ones written since then. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the vast majority of songs on the radio are love songs. So no, Paul, people haven't had enough of silly love songs; go and listen to the radio and you'll plainly hear it isn't so.

Now one thing you'll notice about love songs is how often they proclaim undying love. If you listen to love songs, you're bound to hear words like “forever” and “always” thrown in. I could give you no shortage of songs that proclaim their love will last forever, until the end of time, or something to that effect. Why is that? Why do musicians write so many love songs and why do the majority of those songs proclaim an undying love?

I think the reason is that deep down, we all want to experience an unending love, a love that will always be there. We want an eternal love and we look for it in others: romantic love is the place where we think we'll find that perfect, unrelenting love. So we hold out that promise to others and hope that they will receive that from others because we long for a love that will not ever let us go or fail us or come to an end.

Of course, we know that as much as we promise it and hope for it, it never works out that way. Relationships break up. Those that lead to marriage occasionally end in divorce. And no matter who you are, death eventually brings an end to even the best of any romantic relationship. I love the stories of people who have been married for 70 or 80 years, yet there is always sadness because eventually the story of their love will come to an end. Their love cannot last forever because they will not last forever and no amount of promises or wishing can change that fact. No human love is eternal.

But there's an eternal love promised to us that can and will fulfill its promise. It's the love of God for us in Christ Jesus and it will never end because he will never end. And it's sure to be forever faithful because he is forever faithful. It's a love that will not let us go and will remain even through the dark waters of death. It's ultimately what we're all looking for, what every love song wishes to be true: a never ending love; a forever, eternal love that persists throughout our lifetimes and beyond. So let's read about that love by opening your Bibles to Romans 8. We'll be looking at the very last few verses of chapter 8 today; in particular, at v. 35-39 which can be found on pg. 945 of the pew Bibles if you need to use one of those this morning. Please follow along as I read, starting at v. 35 through the end of the chapter.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we’re being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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.”

The apostle Paul wants us to rest in the unshakable love we possess in Christ. Unlike romantic love which can and will end, there is a divine love that will never fail us, never come to an end, and will never be taken from us. As Paul considers God’s amazing love for us in Christ, he encourages us by laying out for us all the possibilities for how we could potentially be separated from God’s love and flatly denies that any of them could bring about a termination of God’s love towards us.

So let’s consider the first possibility Paul eliminates in v. 35, which will serve as our first point this morning, which is that...

1. We will not be separated from God’s love by hardships

Look at the first question Paul asks in v. 35. **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”** This is similar in a way to the question he asked in v. 31 when he said, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Both questions are dealing with the possibility that something or someone could disrupt the salvation we’ve received in Christ, but whereas previously the question was more about the legal aspect of God’s verdict of us being “not guilty” in Christ being potentially overturned (as we talked about last week Sunday), today’s question is not a legal concern but rather a relational concern. Can anything disrupt the love God has for us? Could the relationship we now have with God be terminated somehow? Is there something that could cause God to no longer love and accept us?

The entire passage we’ll be looking at today deals with answering that question and the first possibility Paul addresses are various hardships we might experience. Look at the second question he asks in v. 35. **“Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”** These are all things Paul himself personally experienced. He’s not speaking in the abstract here: he knows what it was to have gone through each of these hardships in his life.

Now I don’t need to break each of these down and explain them - I think they speak for themselves. But why Paul mentions them is because when someone is facing such a situation, one can feel like God has forsaken them. Hard times - whether they are on this list or something else entirely - can make us question whether God is truly still for us or if for some reason he’s turned against us.

Have you ever felt that way? I know I’ve had those moments of sorrow and self-pity when things weren’t going my way to wonder if perhaps God was through with me, that maybe I had been forsaken somehow. And the hardships that I’ve experienced in my

life have been pretty minor, relatively speaking. I can't imagine how tempting it would be to imagine that God has abandoned you if you were facing a serious illness or extreme persecution. Hardships have a way of making us question ourselves and even question God. I think of John the Baptist who languished in prison for his bold statements against King Herod. In a place of deep doubt and despair, John began to question whether he'd been pointing people to the right person. Remember how he sent out some of his followers to ask Jesus if he was indeed the Christ or if they should be looking for someone else? That's a pretty dark place for John the Baptist to be! He felt forsaken as he rotted away in Herod's dungeon awaiting execution and so he began to wonder: "Have I made a mistake? Maybe I've gotten this all wrong. Perhaps God's promises to release the prisoners isn't true. Maybe I did something wrong and now God in his displeasure has forsaken me."

I don't know what you've all experienced personally but I don't doubt that for many of you, life hasn't been all roses and rainbows. Some of you have gone through horrible things, difficult, painful events in your life. Whatever that might be, for whatever it is you could possibly add to Paul's list of hardships in v. 35, the answer to the question of whether any of these things you're experiencing can separate you from the love of Christ is still and always will be, "No." Paul experienced these things and they didn't change God's love for him one bit and neither will it happen to you.

We need this promise, don't we? We need to know that when life is serving us up extra helpings of trials and tribulations, God's love for us remains unchanged. If we're in Christ Jesus by faith, then we would be wrong to interpret the hardships of life as signs of God's rejection of us. God will never leave you or forsake you. It's easy to us in our weakness to think he has forsaken us in the midst of trials, but he is with you in the trials. His love is never going to be taken away from you.

Think of the example of Job. He lost his property, his health, and his children. You could hardly blame him for thinking he was forsaken by God. But he wasn't, was he? His trials served a greater purpose, one Job never did come to understand, but through it all, did God stop loving him? Did God reject him? No. Never. Not for a moment. So why should we think that in our sufferings God has abandoned us? Are any of those hardships a sign of God's rejection of us? No! Why? Because he has already chosen to love us in Christ. He gave his Son to redeem us. He placed all our sins on Christ's shoulders so there's nothing left for God to be angry about toward us. If there's indeed no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, then we are wrong to interpret any trial we face as God's rejection of us. God's love will never be taken from us, no matter how bleak and despairing the outward circumstances of our life may appear. No hardship we face can ever separate us from the love of Christ.

So think of what you are facing right now - whatever that hardship might be - and know that God's love for you is as present and steadfast in this moment as it is when life is going well. It doesn't vary or change or get weaker at any point. God loves you right now in the midst of whatever you are facing and will always love you: nothing you face in life, no matter how difficult or horrible the circumstances, can change it or diminish it in the slightest. God wants you to rest secure in his unchanging love for you in Christ.

So that's the first area that Paul wants us to be clear on: no amount of hardships or trails we face will ever separate us from his love. But the next potential situation Paul brings us is one that brings about the termination of love at least at the human level, and that is death. Spouses and family members are eventually separated by death; that separates them from each other's love. Could that also be true of us and God? So our second point this morning is this...

2. **We will not be separated from God's love by death**

Look back in your Bibles at just v. 36 for a moment, where Paul quotes from Psalm 44 and says this, **"As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'"** This Psalm Paul is quoting from is one where the writer laments that God has rejected his people, at least from his point of view. He's vexed because it seems God is punishing them even though they've been faithful to the covenant. People are being killed, slaughtered by foreign invaders.

That's a more serious concern, isn't it? From our perspective, death looks like the final farewell. If someone you love dies, that's the end. You don't get to say any more words to them. All the things you might have done together will not be done together any longer. Death ends the relationship. And so if God is allowing his people to be killed, then it's not hard to conclude that God is done with them. It can be viewed as God's final punishment, the last straw that is meant to bring down the hammer once and for all. From where we stand, death is the final termination of life, and therefore the end of love.

So is death the end of the road for us? If God gives us over to death, should we then conclude that he no longer loves us, that he's angry with us and is punishing us? To answer that, look back in your Bibles now at v. 37. **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."** In whatever we face, be it the difficult trials Paul listed in v. 35 or even if it is death in v. 36, not even that will be able to separate us from God's love. Romantic love may be terminated by death, but not God's love. It continues on because we will continue on after death, to be resurrected from the dead and given eternal life with him.

And consider also what Paul says about us in v. 37. He says, **"we are more than conquerors."** What does that mean? Well, think about a conqueror for a moment. A conqueror overcomes obstacles in his path. So think of a famous military leader like Alexander the Great who was a conqueror who defeated his enemies in battle and took over their territories. So we are like that in that our enemies have been defeated, although we fight not against flesh and blood. We wage war against sin and death and in Christ we have conquered them. Sin no longer has power over us. Death has been defeated because we will be resurrected to new life. So like a conqueror we've overcome our enemies and won the victory, not by our own power or might but because of what Christ has done for us.

But we are not merely conquerors, but we are **"more than conquerors"** because of what Paul said back in v. 28. There he told us that God works all things for our good.

We will not only defeat our enemies, but God's providential hand is at work in all we face to bring about good from it. All our trials, all our sufferings and hardships, even death itself, is used by God for our good. God does more than merely defeat all that opposes us: he turns it around to be used for good purposes in our lives.

A mere conqueror must deal with hardship and death as an unfortunate by-product of the process of conquering. So for example, Alexander the Great lost the lives of many men in his conquest of the ancient world, losses that weren't beneficial to him. Then to govern these newly conquered territories, he had to deal with riots and rebellions, as those who were subjected to him didn't exactly appreciate his rule. None of those things were good things for him. But we're more than conquerors because even the bad things we experience are turned around and used by God's sovereign, wise hand for our good. Thus, even death, which is arguably the single worse "bad thing" that could happen to us, isn't in the end the victor over us. Death only ushers us into eternal life. God isn't done with us at death: it's only the beginning. Death is swept away by eternal life.

Christians, you need to see yourself through the lens of God's steadfast, unwavering love for you. Nothing can ultimately defeat you because God's love for you is always present. You're not just a conquer over all that life can throw at you; you're more than conquerors because God in his love is at work to use all the hardships and trials we face - and even death itself! - to your benefit. We need not fear the loss of his love when facing trials even as great as death because his love for us holds us steady throughout and sees to it that we pass through the fires unscathed. We may face changing situations that are hard for us, but God's love for us will never change. God is unwavering in his love towards you that even death cannot tear it asunder.

You might think Paul could stop right here because he's made his point abundantly clear: no amount of hardship or difficulty, even death itself, can separate us from the love of Christ. But Paul wants to make sure that he hasn't left one stone unturned in regards to the rock-solid love God has for us. So let's give our attention to the final declaration Paul makes regarding God's love for us, which is...

3. We will not be separated from God's love by anything in all creation

Please look back in your Bibles at v. 38-39. **"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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."**

After having eliminated hardships and death as potential means by which we could be separated from God's love, now Paul considers whether there might be anything he's left out. Could there be something else lurking out there that could terminate God's love for us? Is there another way by which we could be separated from God's love that isn't necessarily death or difficulties? So in order to be exhaustive, Paul says in effect, nothing whatsoever will separate us from the love of God, be it life or death, angelic

beings, the past, present, or the future, any power or ruler either earthly or heavenly, nothing above the earth or nor below it, nor anything else that has been made by God will cause God's love for us to come to an end.

Listen - there are no loopholes here. Paul's not playing coy with us and is purposefully leaving out something that could separate us from God's love and wants to see if we can figure out what it is. We're not to read through this verse and say, "Ah-ha! Paul mentioned only height and depth *but not width*, so I bet you that can separate us from God's love." He's giving these pairs here in order to communicate to us as forcibly as he can that nothing whatsoever can ever separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus. Nothing, do you hear me? NOTHING.

And let me say this explicitly, Paul is including you in this list. You do not possess the power to bring about the termination of God's love. There are some believers who say a person can lose their salvation; that although God will keep them, provided they remain with him, God will nevertheless allow them to lose their salvation should they chose to return to sin and reject him. Now I get why someone would think that way on one level - if you are committed to the idea that God would never violate our free will, then in order to preserve that commitment, you'd have to say that God neither forces you to believe initially nor does he force you to continue to trust in him subsequently. So they would say, this passage is true as long as you do your part. But if you decide to walk away from God, then you will forfeit God's love and therefore your salvation.

Now if that were the case, then I would say this passage is absolutely worthless. Then there's no security to be found here whatsoever because I'm my greatest enemy. The future would indeed be something to fear because there would very well be something that could separate me from God's love because I could never be sure that at some point in the future I wouldn't reject God and thus fall back under condemnation for my sin. This is only an encouragement to us if it includes us as well.

My friends, you are absolutely included in Paul's words here. Nothing can separate you from God's love, including any future sin or any future decision you make. When God chose to save you in eternity past, he did so knowing all that you are, were, and will be, and called you to himself anyway. Nothing can alter that now. Nothing can foil's God's plan for you including you. Those whom God foreknew he predestined, those he predestined he called, those he called he justified, and those he justified he glorified. Nobody gets off the salvation train. At no point is the chain of salvation broken. Nothing and no one, no matter how powerful, can separate us from God's love including you.

Let me tell you, I need the assurance that God will not let me go even if I in a moment of weakness should try to let go of him. I'm a weak man. I suffer from doubt and discouragement. My moods change with the weather. If it's all up to me to stay true to God in order for him to stay true to me, what hope have I? But if I know God will never let me go no matter what, then what joy it is to my heart to know that regardless of what should come my way in the future, no matter what hardship I might face or what persecution may come, no matter what my sin, my doubt, my discouragement,

and no matter should I face, even death itself, I cannot lose the salvation that's been purchased for me by Christ. Nothing in all creation will separate me from God's love. It will not let me go and it will not let you go.

Conclusion

As I wrap this up, I can only encourage you to delight in the beautiful promise of God given to us in this passage. I don't know how God could tell us in any clearer, unambiguous manner that his love for us will never cease, never come to an end, never be taken from us. Nothing can stop God's love for us. The love he has chosen to give us in eternity past is certain to continue uninterrupted into eternity future. And as we walk along this road of life, marked by trials and tribulation, not one of those will hinder us from safely arriving at our heavenly destination. Thus we need not fear. Do you hear that brothers and sisters in Christ? You need not fear because there is nothing in all creation that will ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. You are eternally secure in his love, a love that will not let you go.

May we walk joyfully in the glorious hope of that wonderful promise today, tomorrow, and every day of our life until God calls us to our heavenly home. Our God loves us and that love will never, ever, for any reason, end. Let's pray.