

Sermon 94: Romans 8:35-39: InseparableUbercertainSuperconquerors

OUTLINE

Inseparable through all
Conquerors over all
Certain about all

INTRODUCTION

As we have travelled with Paul mounting ever higher and higher with him as he seeks to show us the certainty of our salvation, we have been increasing our momentum exponentially. Using the unbreakable chain of redemption he has launched us into deep space. Then using the mighty unanswerable questions he has engaged the jet fuel which has set our trajectory with the sun, and now in these final verses as that fuel comes to an end we are brought within the gravitational pull of the sun from which nothing can pull us out and we are irresistibly, inevitably, certainly, definitely, unquestionably, indubitably, assuredly destined to spend eternity with God as His child. As we have moved higher and higher with Paul I have sought to maintain that exponential increase in intensity and as we come to the climax I find that it is impossible to maintain the emotional pitch, or to adequately describe the certainty of the realities he is describing. So I have resorted to making up a word to try and fathom the climactic note we are striving for as we do justice to this most precious text. The word is: inseparableubercertainsuperconquerors. As we bite off these last five verses in one mouthful we need this mouthful of a word to describe what we are looking at. This is the word that Paul hopes will describe you once you understand the verses he places before us.

Paul has been asking questions to work the truths he has been teaching into our understanding. He covers four main areas in his questions. He covers the question of God's power, that there is no one stronger than God and if He is for us no one can be against us. He covers the unchangeable nature of God's love the major proof being in God giving His most treasured possession to save us. He covers the legal questions pointing us to the death, resurrection, the seating of Christ at the right hand of the Father, and the intercession of Christ. The final area of challenge to our salvation that Paul asks about is the trials we experience. He asks and answers, v35-39, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 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.'

These final verses are different from the ones that have come before because Paul is also speaking for himself and his own experience of assurance. You will notice in v38 he begins with the words 'for I am sure...', this indicates that Paul is speaking from his personal convictions and persuasion. Another clue to this is found in the listing of v35, of the tribulations, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword. Each of these things are found in Paul's descriptions of his own suffering as an apostle in 2 Cor. 11:26-27 and 2 Cor. 12:10. Paul is not giving us a cold, intellectual, abstract lecture on assurance through trials. No, but as many a mother in the wild does, he is vomiting up food that he has already partially digested, truths that have been tested by his own experience and laying our table with these. Remember now, Paul was resisted by the Jewish authorities and had assassins after him, he was resisted by the Roman authorities and was often the subject of injustice, he was resisted by various town and city authorities, was hated by various guilds and was the victim of mob violence, he was resisted by the devil and his demons and was harassed by a thorn in the flesh which God in His wisdom saw fit not to remove, Paul even experienced rejection by some parties of Christians and slander and rejection. Yet in spite of all these things nothing could separate him from Christ's love, nothing could ultimately conquer him, and he was certain that there was nothing that could separate him from Christ.

We see the three parts of our new word in v35-36 highlighting that we cannot be separated from the love of Christ by persecutions and trials. V37 tells us that we are in fact more than conquerors over these things. And in v38-39 he tells us of his supreme certainty that there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of Christ. Putting all of this together we are inseparableubercertainssuperconquerors. We have been removing all the barnacles of doubt, this final section should act like that permanent anti-barnacle wax which prevents barnacles of doubt reattaching themselves.

Inseparable through all

The next question Paul brings to us is the two connected questions of verse 35, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? This question brings into view the permanent union we have with Christ and the basis upon which that love depends, the love of Christ, His overpowering love for us. When Paul speaks about the love of Christ he is not speaking the love we have for Christ but the love that He has for us. To place our security upon our love for Christ would be a very rotten place indeed.

We also need to highlight that Paul does not say the love of God/Father but the love of Christ. In all the instances of speaking of God's love so far it has been the love of God/Father that has been mentioned (Rom. 1:7, 5:5, 5:8, 8:28). In truth Paul only makes rare mentions of Christ love specifically. However in the four verses that the love of Christ is mentioned each one emphasizes the fact that Jesus loved us in sacrificing Himself for us. In 2 Cor. 5:14 Paul speaks about Christ's love for His church compelling him as an evangelist to preach the gospel. Paul says in Gal. 2:20, 'I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.' Paul prays that we would come to

know the dimensions of this love in Eph. 3:18-19, that we 'may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.' And of course we have, Eph. 5:25, 'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' Here then, in Christ's giving of Himself we have a measurement of His love. If we can comprehend the chasm that lies between the timeless Son becoming a time-bound man, the one who deserves the infinite neverdying praise of all creatures being tortured, mocked and murdered by his creatures, if we can measure the horror Christ faced in choosing to weather the Father's perfect infinite hatred of sin by taking it upon Himself, the perhaps we can measure Christ's love, the height, breadth, length and width. We measure the Father's love by the value of the Son that He gave, but we measure the Son's love by what He gave up and endured, and still continues to do for us. I suggest that the reason why Christ is singled out here is not because He loves us more effectively or more passionately, but that His present interest in us is also serving us in His ongoing intercession for us in the midst of our persecutions and trials. We spoke last week about Christ standing to intercede for Stephen and the persecuted church, this is a demonstration of Christ's love for His church. Hebrews 7:25, 'Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.' Notice that Paul has covered the Trinity. The Spirit intercedes for us, the Father loves us proven in the giving of His Son, and now we see that Christ too loves us in giving Himself to us in His death and ongoing intercession.

Let us cast our eye over the list of things that Christ's love will see us through. The list of v35 divides into 3 rough sections, the first section deals with the general difficulties of persecution, tribulation, distress and persecution. The second deals with basic needs of food and clothing, famine and nakedness. The third deals with death threatening situations or death itself, danger and sword. We must realise that Paul is attempting to be exhaustive and is not expecting that we should think that things not mentioned could separate us from Christ's love. The list seems to stretch from the smallest things even until death. His point is that there is nothing that can separate us from Christ and His love. We may experience being separated from society, ostracized and rejected. Our parents, family, friends and business partners may forsake us. We may experience the separation of ourselves from all of our earthly goods for the sake of His name. We may experience the separation of our heads from our shoulders and our souls from our bodies and die a martyr's death, but we will never be separated from Christ and His love. The bond of husband and wife can be broken by sin and the things this world throws at it; the bond between parent and child can be broken by sin; the bond between a man and his country can be severed but not the bond between Christ and the believer.

Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 at this point, v36, 'As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." Why would Paul interrupt his flow with this verse? Firstly, Paul is quoting the Bible to give authority to the fact that the children of God do indeed suffer and that it is no strange and alien thing. The psalmist crying out that it is for God's sake that the righteous suffer. Persecution is no new thing that indicates that God is weak and that the church is soon to be overrun and

destroyed and all believers ripped away from Christ. No the war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent has raged from the beginning and since Cain killing Abel unbelievers have persecuted God's people. Secondly, the psalmist considers how God's people are perceived, 'they are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' Sheep are defenceless and weak creatures who are destined to be eaten not to reign. The church in all ages has the appearance of defeat and humility, just as its Saviour did when He was born in a stable and died on a cross. The appearance of the church and the opinion of the world about her strength is irrelevant. V37 tells us why.

Conquerors over all

V37, 'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.' Paul is at his highest pitch here as he tries to outdo the notion of being a conqueror. He tells us that we do not simply conquer sufferings and death we more than conquer it. In the Greek the five English words, 'we are more than conquerors' are one word in the Greek 'hypernikomen'. 'hyper' is the word from which we get the word super. 'Nik' means conqueror or champion and is used in the work Nike or the name Nick, or Nicholas. So Paul is calling Christians 'superniks'/superconquerors.

Let us scan the ways in which we absolutely overcome these obstacles. Think about our suffering. Paul is telling us that we do not simply endure suffering and not succumb to suicide or defeat, we overcome it. Persecution which is a tool in the hands of satan to try and destroy the church becomes a means by which God grows our character and produces the fruit of the Spirit and the character of Christ in us. That attempt to try and wipe out the image of God has resulted in it being shined up even more in our sanctification. Death is supposed to be the great tragedy that wipes out our light, the triumph of sin over God's creation. However, death does not send us to hell, but to die is gain, we leave our bodies and end up in the presence of God in heaven. Rev. 12:11, 'And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.' A martyr's death is the seed of the church and even a plain old Christian death is a stealing and overcoming of satan.

Here is a way to think about how we are more than conquerors over satan, sin and death. Think about our relationship to satan, sin and death in the three stages, firstly, in this life as an unbeliever then as a believer; secondly, in the intermediate state; thirdly, consummation of this age in the judgement and in the new heavens and the new earth.

Firstly, satan. As an unbeliever he was winning, we were under his jurisdiction, under his sway and being worked over by him. However, when we were saved we were stolen from him and brought into the kingdom of God's Son. We were freed from the condemnation of the law so that he could no longer accuse us. We were given liberty from sin's hold over us through which he controlled us. We were given the Spirit to indwell us to empower and to teach us. And now if we resist him he is the one that has to flee. Now we can go out and preach the gospel and the strongman has been bound and he ultimately cannot stop the gospel from spreading all over the world. The worst thing that he can do to us is the best

thing, he can kill us. So then, in the intermediate state we will be totally out of his reach, we will be ruling with Christ in the Millennial reign, and we will have glorified spirits. Then upon Christ's return the devil will be overcome and we will judge him with Christ as we judge the angels with Him, and we will live in the new heavens and the new earth forever blessed while he is in eternal torment. We are more than conquerors over Satan.

Secondly, sin. We are born into this world in original sin, we are overcome by it, dead in trespasses and sin. However, Christ redeems us and overcomes the guilt of sin by paying our sin debt to the law. He also answers the law's requirements for righteousness by imputing His perfect record to our account. He then enables us to overcome the power that sin had over us by giving us His Spirit, and the Spirit helps us put sin to death and grow in the barren ground of a sinner's heart the fruit of the Spirit and the image of God in conformity to Christ. When we die we will be free from sin and temptation in the intermediate state and one day when Jesus comes again we will receive glorified bodies never to be tempted or sin again. The defeat was decisive in Christ its applications in our lives begin in our salvation are progressed in our death and irreversibly sealed at Christ's second coming.

Thirdly, death. We begin this life subject to the power of death but through Christ we overcome it. Jesus overcame death in His resurrection. When we are born again that same resurrection life becomes ours and we taste eternal life. We pass from death into this life so that even though our bodies die at death we go to be with God in a perfect soul. Death has no claim upon us there and when Jesus comes again death as the last enemy will be finally vanquished and we will never ever die, mourn or have to attend funerals again. We who were conquered have tasted victory in Christ, are beginning to experience the ongoing effect of that victory and will see the day when the situation is fully reversed. We are more than conquerors.

How is any of this possible? 'Through Him who loved us.' We can do nothing of ourselves, flesh gives birth to flesh, but because of Him we live, we are sanctified, our trials produce holiness, we can preach the gospel and rob Satan, we resist him and he has to flee, death is gain and certain final irreversible victory is coming. We did not have to win it He did it all, it is all of Christ and all of grace. We do not have to buy it with good behaviour or a good performance it is ours by grace not by law, won and paid for by Him and freely given by Him to us.

Certainty about all

We come now then to the grand ending to this unimaginable picture of certainty. Paul has paraded God the Father, Son and Spirit, in their love, action and intercession on our behalf. He has highlighted God's unconquerable power, God's unchangeable plan, God's proven love, God's sufficient provision in the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the seating of Christ at the right hand of God and the intercession of Christ. Finally he has capped all that off with the love of Christ that no human experience can sever. He comes now to make a last summarizing, concluding statement by which he will try and encompass everything he

can think of, a statement that draws his stream of thought to a final conclusion, we are saved to the uttermost and no one and nothing can change that. V38-39, 'For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 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.'

Paul's final swipe at putting aside any competition who can steal us from God has given rise to some memorable phrases. You can feel Paul digging deep and using polarised contrasts to make his point. He uses opposites as a means of covering the whole spectrum. Firstly, he considers death and life. Nothing in death will separate us from Christ and nothing in this life. Next he covers the good and bad angels. The good angels will be on our side and Christ has overcome the principalities and powers, Col. 2:15, 'He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.' Paul then covers the present and the future, 'nor things present nor things to come.' He is probably referring to this life and the next, things like the second coming, judgement, the intermediate state, any future wars, persecutions of martyrdom. 'nor powers' this one stands alone and may be Paul trying to cover any superstitious fears that result from magic, witchcraft, witchdoctors, curses, charms, tarot cards, fortunetellers, false prophecies, etc. 'Nor height nor depth,' this may refer to anything from above or from below, perhaps an attempt to sweep up any mythical creatures that the 1st century imagination could plunder from the various religions. And for good measure in case you wanted to include things like yourself, or the Pope, or church authorities, he adds, 'nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Let me end this section that way that many others have done. The apostle Paul, the one who saw himself as the chief of sinners, who personally waged war against Christ and his people, this Paul who saw himself as the wretched man of Romans 7. This is the one who in light of these grand and glorious truths is persuaded, he is certain, he is sure that there is nothing that will separate him from Christ. Do you have this certainty? If you don't then you are not thinking correctly. You will feel uncertain if you are thinking in terms of law and not grace, merit and not gift. If you feel that you have to buy it, earn it, deserve it, and can lose it by bad performance you have failed to see what God has done in Christ. It is time to take your eyes off of your works and put them on Christ's works, off of your strength and on to His strength, off of your love for God and on to Christ's love for you. Only then will you see that it is not your holding of Him but His holding of you that will save you.

And so ends a magnificent section. Paul started his letter talking about the power of God to save, and here he has demonstrated that we will indeed be saved. It is also the end of this chapter that began with no condemnation and ends with no separation. Let me end with an appropriate response to these truths. Rom. 11:36-12:2, 'For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.'

