

# **ROMANS**

Part 19: “The Undefeatable Love of God”

Romans 8:31–39

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Sunday, June 19, 2022 (Ordinary Time; Father’s Day)

## **Scripture Reading**

*“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 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 are 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” (Rom 8:31–39).*

## **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your word, for the good news, and for the glorious truth of your unfailing love. We thank you for the gift of fathers on this Father’s Day. As it is also Juneteenth, we thank you that emancipation has been proclaimed and the evil institution of chattel slavery has been abolished in our nation. May we be a people who continue to seek to honor the image of God in all human life as we seek what is both righteous and just. And as we celebrate and honor civil freedom, may we long for the true and greater spiritual freedom of the gospel that liberates us from the powers of sin and death. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, and our Lord, AMEN.*

## **Introduction**

Because of the beautiful truth it contains and the massive influence it has had on history, the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome has been considered by many as the high point of all Scripture. Likewise, many have considered Romans chapter 8 to be the high point of the book of Romans, and Romans 8:31–39 to be the high point of chapter 8.

Said another way, if Romans is the soaring Himalayas mountain range of the Bible, then chapter 8 is Mount Everest. And if chapter 8 is Mount Everest, then verses 31 through 39 are the very summit of the mountaintop.

Romans has shown us the end of human righteousness and the triumph of the righteousness of God. We have seen how justification—our right standing with God—cannot come from human works of performance. Rather, we are justified by grace, through faith, because of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the announcement of a salvation rooted in God's gracious work, not man. This means that if you are in Christ, you can rest in the comfort of a certain and unwavering hope. It means you can find security and strength in the goodness and power of the God who has loved and redeemed you. It means you can be confident and assured of your salvation. As theologian John Stott once wrote, *"Our confidence is not in our love for [God], which is frail, fickle and faltering, but in [God's] love for us, which is steadfast, faithful and persevering."*<sup>1</sup>

If this is true, it is a truth worthy of glorious celebration and acclamation. And that is exactly what Paul does in this final passage of Romans 8. The Apostle ends chapter 8 with a crescendo of exaltation that brings together many of the themes and motifs he has been unfolding throughout this magnificent letter.

For this reason, Romans 8:31–39 is a passage worthy of your utmost attention. It is worthy of memorization. It is worth your while to carve these sacred truths on the tablet of your heart (Prov 3:3), so that you might be utterly convinced of the good news of *"The Undefeatable Love of God."*

This passage of nine verses is organized around five questions. So for the rest of our time today, we will explore this passage by examining those five questions in order as they appear in the text.

## **Exposition**

### **1.) "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31).**

There are moments in life when it feels like everyone and everything is against you. And if you are a Christian, this should not surprise you. Jesus even warned his disciples, *"If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you"* (cf. John 15:20).

In other words, Christians should expect to experience opposition. Those who follow Christ will experience opposition not because they failed Jesus but because of their faithfulness to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 259.

You might experience such opposition when you stand for integrity in the workplace when it would be profitable for your organization or industry to choose compromise. You might experience such opposition when you speak the truth when it would be far easier to speak what is convenient. And when you choose faithfulness to Christ over what is expedient, you may find yourself in a place where you feel the world is against you.

I think of the Christians of the early church who refused to worship Caesar as Lord and then lost their citizenship. Some were even arrested for treason and fed to lions as public entertainment. I think of William Wilberforce, who stood against the injustice of the slave trade in Great Britain at great cost to his political career. I think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who opposed the tyranny of Nazi Germany to the point of martyrdom. There have been moments in which the people have been called to stand against the seemingly insurmountable power of the forces of this world.

However, the forces of this world have a limit. But our God knows no limit. He is without finite limitations. He is *in-finite*.

It is a fact of mathematics that no finite number—no matter how large—can ever be larger than infinity. In fact, infinity will always be *infinitely* greater than any finite number. And that means, no matter how powerful the forces of this world may stand against you, they cannot withstand the might of an infinitely powerful God.

What would it look like for you to be convinced of this truth?

**2.) “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:32)**

I have three little boys whom I love with fierce abandon. Wisdom often prevents me from giving them everything they might *want*. But I would do everything in my power to give them anything they *need*, even when they don’t realize what they need.

So too, you will be gravely disappointed if you feel like your belief in Jesus entitles you to God granting you your wish-list of wants. God is not Aladdin’s genie. He is our Heavenly Father, who loves us with perfect wisdom, power, and grace. And he has met our greatest need.

Now left to our own reason, none of us probably would have ever articulated that the greatest need we could ever have is for a Jewish rabbi to endure suffering and death on a Roman cross two thousand years ago. But God’s love for us was so extraordinary that he graciously gave his Son’s life that we might be redeemed.

If God was willing to graciously give of himself in this way for us, is there anything that he would withhold from us? The answer is no. He will graciously give us all things.

Now, with that said, we must be careful in how we understand the phrase “all things” (τὰ πάντα) in verse 32. Again, we should understand “all things” the same way we

understand Christ. Our Father is not obligated to grant us what we want. But he is determined to give us what we need.

So what does the phrase “all things” mean? It means all the benefits of redemption Paul has discussed in this movement within Romans. It means his redeeming grace, his radical forgiveness, his justifying righteousness, and his sanctifying Spirit. It means membership into the family of God through adoption and the hope of eternal glory in the midst of our suffering.

Paul is saying that if God’s love for you was so great that he would give his only Son for your salvation, there is no way that he would ever withhold from you all the benefits of Christ’s redeeming work.

### **3.) “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” (Rom 8:33a).**

Many people are under the impression that the word “Christ” is Jesus’s last name, but it is not. The word “Christ” is a title. It is a descriptor *of who* he is as defined by *what* he does. “Christ” means Jesus is the messiah, the savior, the one who redeems and rules as the liberator king.

Interestingly, there is a similar dynamic at play with the word “Satan.” Satan is not the Devil’s first name. Satan is a title that refers to what he does. The Hebrew term “ha satan” (הַשָּׂטָן) means “the accuser.”

Scripture describes the Devil as doing many things. He tempts. He deceives. He seeks to enslave. And he also is an accuser. He accuses us to God. He accuses us to one another. And he accuses us to ourselves.

After tempting us to sin, Satan shames us. He wants us to wallow in our failure. He wants to convince us that sin is inevitable, doom is inescapable, and we are irredeemable. But the Devil is a liar.

For who are chosen by God and in Christ, the accusations and charges of all spiritual forces of darkness fall powerless before the triumphant truth of justification. The full verse reads, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Rom 8:33).

Satan can accuse you all he wants. But God is the Judge who stands at the end of time, before whom all will give an account. And for those who are in Christ, God has already pronounced your judgment. He has declared you righteous, imputed with the very righteousness of Christ. You have been *justified*.

The Judge has spoken, and the accuser's accusations no longer have any weight.

Though our sin is great, God’s justifying grace is greater! We have been forgiven; we have been clothed in the righteousness of God; we have been made new!

#### **4.) “Who is to condemn?” (Rom 8:34a).**

If you recall, the Apostle Paul began chapter 8 of this letter with a bold declarative statement: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom 8:1).

Now, at the conclusion of this chapter, he is returning to the same theme. All who trust the redeeming work of Jesus have been liberated from the expectation of dread and punishment.

You will still sin in this life. And the Spirit of God will convict you of sin. But, if you are a Christian, you cannot be condemned for your sin. Why? Because there is no condemnation left. Jesus took it all.

There is none to condemn because *“Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us”* (Rom 8:34b).

Jesus died for our sin in our place. More than dying in our place, he rose from the grave, declaring victory over the powers of sin and death. More than rising from the grave, he ascended into heaven, where he rules and reigns! And there in heaven, where he is enthroned in glory and authority, stands interceding and praying for us.

So, I have a question for you. Whose words should you trust more: the words of self-condemnation or the words of the risen, ascended Lord who is your Redeemer and Advocate?

Trust Jesus more than you trust your shame. Allow his love to change you and wash over you. Rest in the truth that when he said, “It is finished,” he meant it. Remember: there is a difference between what you may feel and what is real. And this is what is real: there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. None.

#### **5.) “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Rom 8:35).**

In Paul’s lifetime, words like tribulation, persecution, and the sword were not metaphorical, hypothetical, or exaggerated threats. Paul himself was the victim of violence and, ultimately, even martyrdom.

In fact, for the first three centuries of its existence, the church of Jesus Christ endured tremendous persecution. Every means the Roman empire used to defeat the church only strengthened it. Every threat that the empire made to prevent Christians from following Jesus only made them cling tighter to the hope they had in him. In fact, many ancient writers attest to the curious truth that one of the greatest sources of evangelism in the Roman world was the fearless, joyful eagerness that Christian martyrs were willing to give their lives for their unflinching conviction that Jesus is Lord.

But it is crucial to understand the Bible does not ignore, minimize, or patronize our suffering. Scripture acknowledges the apparent disconnect between the goodness of God and the unjust pain his people often endure.

In fact, Paul even quotes Psalm 44 in this passage. Psalm 44 is not a happy song. It is a song of anguish and lament, *“As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered’”* (Rom 8:36).

In quoting this Psalm, Paul is not avoiding the reality of suffering. He is facing suffering head-on. He is saying suffering is real. Suffering painful. Suffering can be tragic, heartbreaking, and overwhelming.

But even so, Paul is also proclaims that suffering will not have the last word. Suffering will not ultimately prevail. Suffering will not conquer us. For despite all the brokenness suffering can wreak upon our lives, it cannot and will not separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!

In one of the most hopeful sentences ever written in human literature, Paul declares: *“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”* (Rom 8:37–39).

How is it possible that those who Paul once described as dead in sin and by nature children of wrath can now be worthy of such extravagant love? The truth is we are not worthy—but Jesus is gloriously worthy.

The key is in the last phrase of the verse. The “love of God” made possible for those who are “in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

When we were dead in sin, nothing could have granted us access to the love of God. But when we are in Christ, nothing can separate us from the love of God. We have been forever united with Christ. You could no more separate us from the love of God than you could separate Christ from the Trinity.

Death nor life can separate you from the love of God, for to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21).

Neither angels or demonic powers can separate you from the love of God, for Christ has been seated in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (Eph 1:21)

Nothing you are sure about today and nothing you are unsure about tomorrow can separate you from the love of God, for Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

No height nor depth can separate you to the love of God, for Christ humbled himself into the depths of death and now has been exalted and given the name above all names (Phil 2:5–11).

No spiritual power nor anything that is a part the material world—nothing visible or invisible in all creation—can ever separate you from the love of God, for Christ has defeated the powers of sin and death and to him has been given all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18).

Paul has described every barrier that could possibly attempt to separate the people of God from the love of God. He left no stone unturned. And yet there is no power that is able to contend with or withstand the sovereign power of God’s love.

For those who have placed their hope and trust in Jesus, as the Father has so loved his Son, now he loves you. Now you can sing hearts full of assurance:

*“No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand”*

## **Conclusion**

The book of Kings recounts a story of the Old Testament prophet Elisha, who had become a source of frustration to the king of Syria. One morning, the servant of the prophet arose to find the prophet's home surrounded by Syrian soldiers, with horses and chariots ready for war. The servant frantically tells his master that doom has come upon them. But Elisha, the prophet, tells his servant, *“Don’t worry about it. We have more on our side.”*

Then, he prays that the Lord would unveil the spiritual reality that lies behind the physical. And, all at once, the servant is able to behold the entire mountainside filled with the radiant fire of angelic armies.

We don't need to look to a mountain filled with angels to be convinced of God's love for us. We need to look no further than the hill of Calvary, where Christ bled for us and died for us. His cross is the indisputable display of the radical abundance and extravagance of Gods self-giving love.

I pray when we are tempted to fear the powers of this world that the Lord would give us unveiled eyes to glimpse the far greater power of the God who is for us, the God who loves us, the God who redeems us!

So, Redeemer Christian Church, may we know the infinite might of our Redeemer. May we rest in the truth of Christ's justifying grace. And may rejoice in the undefeatable love of God.

AMEN.

### **Discussion Starters for Gospel Communities**

- 1) Read Romans 8:31–39. As you review this passage, can you detect some of the themes that Paul has been teaching throughout this New Testament letter?
- 2) Notice the questions that Paul asks in this passage. In your own words, discuss how we should answer these questions with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- 3) What are you most tempted to believe can separate you from the love of God?
- 4) How should this passage give you comfort, hope, and confidence in the love of God?