

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we pray in grateful thanks, for You have placed faith in our hearts, You have touched our lives, and You have chosen us to do Your will. We pray for those who continue to reject Your touch of grace, that they may they come to know You, the One whose love never ceases! We also pray for all those who have never had the chance to hear about You, that they may they have 'Good News' preached to them! Answer our prayers we pray, Lord Jesus: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Listen for what the Lord is saying to you today through all that transpires. Praise Him for His blessings

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who suffer disasters.** *Pray for people who live in regions prone to floods, such as Bangladesh, parts of India, China and the Far East*
- *Praise God for His healing power*
- *Pray that the World Cup will be celebrated peacefully in South Africa, by all countries involved*

Meditation

With God's help, we turn from self-centred life,
and strive in every way to be godly, and to have

a heart that always seeks to empathise with others,
and ears that listen carefully to what is said.

a mind that persistently searches for the truth,
and good judgment to know what is right and wrong.

a physical frame that is reliable and sound,
and hands that are ready to work hard for others.

a will that discerns things in true proportion,
and feelings that are always generous, not selfish.

a spirit that delights to accomplish God's will,
and eyes that see the detail and the broad picture.

It is not impossible to live this way for the Lord;
Submit to His Spirit, who will do these things in You.

Bible passage – Romans 8:31-39

³¹ After all this, what shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² God, who did not hold back His own Son, but handed Him over for all of us; will He not also give us everything else, along with Him?

³³ Who will bring any accusation against God's chosen? It is God who sets us free! ³⁴ Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the One who died, who was also raised and is seated at the right hand of God, and it is He who pleads for us!

³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, 'Because of you we face death all day long; we are reckoned to be sheep for slaughter.'

³⁷ But despite everything, we are completely victorious through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demonic powers, neither things

present nor to come, neither supernatural powers³⁹ 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.

Bible Study

Review

These powerful and remarkable words are the very summit of Paul's letter to the Romans. Here, he says nothing new, but speaks eloquently of the love of God in Salvation. God's eternal plan of redemption is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, and neither God Himself, nor Jesus or anything on earth stands in the way of its completion. Sin has been overcome, death defeated, and the world has received the conclusive evidence of God's love. Our passage today asks whether God is indeed intent on our salvation, and answers with a resounding yes! Nothing can '*separate us from the love of Christ*' (8:35,39).

The whole passage is a spiritual masterpiece and a magnificent piece of literature, and it starts with a courtroom drama. Paul paints a picture of the End times, when the Judge of All is present. As each soul comes before God Almighty, who will speak up for the individual, who is on the side of the sinner (8:31)? The first answer is that the Judge Himself does not condemn (8:31,32); Yes, He is on the side of each soul. This is remarkable, for surely God seeks justice! But Paul insists, God is the One who has sent His own Son be '*handed over*' (8:32) to death for the sins of all. If God has done all this, then He will not condemn!

Then the cry goes up to ask whether anyone brings an 'accusation' (8:33). Now this is intriguing, for the Hebrew word for 'accuser' is 'Satan', as Paul's readers knew well. However, he has no part in this divine drama, for he has no right to stand before God because he has been defeated by Christ. He is impotent, and his power has been destroyed. Only Christ has the power to condemn, but He chooses not to do so. Instead of accusing, He pleads for our defence (8:34), and brings no charge!

Lastly, Paul asks whether there is anything left to stand in the way of this love of Christ. He questions whether earthly suffering and various trials can do this, but with superb insight he quotes passages of Scripture that speak of the death of God's Servant, who has Himself suffered; '*we face death all day long, we are reckoned to be sheep for the slaughter*' (8:36). The implication is clear. Jesus suffered as God's servant on earth, so why would He wish to make accusations against other people who suffer as He did? It is unthinkable. No one is left to bring an accusation before God (8:35).

There is now nothing now left for the court to do. No accusation has been brought against those who call on Christ Jesus, and He pleads '*for us*' (8:34)! Paul declares that He is convinced. God will only judge in favour of those who depend on Christ Jesus (8:35-39, see Isaiah 53). Humanity is restored to God through Christ Jesus alone, and nothing in this temporary earthly life, however difficult life may be, can separate people from the love of God. Of course, anyone can choose to walk away from it, but there is no obstacle to those who confess faith. Paul says in victory; '*we are completely victorious through Him who loved us.*' (8:37).

The closing verses of this passage form a wonderfully worded sequence of praise and thanks to Almighty God; '*for I am persuaded that neither life nor death ... (nothing) will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*' (8:38,39). In the midst of this passage, Paul lists things that some might perceive as a barrier to reconciliation with God. But subtly, he casts aside all the common religious beliefs of the day as irrelevant to the conclusive work of God through Jesus Christ; all religion is failure besides the truth. The barrier between humanity and God has been completely destroyed by Jesus Christ. He is the focus of all history, the unique centrepiece of all human experience of God, and the evidence of God's true loving heart. Paul's words here have stood the test of time as a pure statement of faith. Christ, Christ alone, has won for us our eternal salvation!

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The divine courtroom drama
- Old Testament texts illustrating the work of the Messiah
- Absolute vindication!
- Nothing can separate us ...!

Going Deeper

We will now look firstly at the courtroom drama and secondly at the consequences of God's final judgement, to see how the Spirit has used Paul together with his knowledge of the Old Testament, to create this exciting

and memorable passage. It is not one that is purposefully memorised by many people, but there are few who do not hold some part of this passage close to the heart. It is, after all, a pure vision of faith.

The divine courtroom drama

Paul's sweeping explanation of the Gospel, which began in the first chapter of his letter (1:18) came to an end with his introduction of the Holy Spirit in the previous verses of this chapter (8:1-30). The Holy Spirit is God at work in the temporary world in which we find ourselves as Christians, suspended in time between the life and death of Jesus and His return in glory. From Paul's day to this, people have lived in this same troubled world, always blighted by war, and it is becoming increasingly clear that we may have finally reached a time when humanity has so abused the world, that we can reasonably talk about its coming demise. This, in turn, means that Christians can be more openly optimistic about the Lord's imminent return in glory. Therefore, in whatever way we evaluate history in our own times, the analysis of this passage of Scripture remains fixed and certain; past, present and future are connected in this dramatic vision of the judgement of God (8:31-34).

The Bible often uses the dramatic image of a courtroom; the story of Job is one example (Job 1,2), and another clear Old Testament comparison for our text comes from Isaiah; 'he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?' (Is. 50:8,9). These words are spoken by the Lord's servant in one of the famous 'servant songs' of Isaiah's prophecies, as he stands against the evils of his own day and appeals to God for the vindication of truth and justice. Paul uses this famous Scripture to demonstrate with superb drama that Jesus (God's servant, as revealed in Isaiah 53) has stood in the courtroom Himself to call for justice, just as we do. At His death, He stood where we will one day stand, asking the Lord for justice and vindication. Now, just as God vindicated His Son and raised Him to life and glory, we who stand in the same courtroom and claim Jesus as our Saviour, receive the same justice as He did! The reason is simple, the only accuser who can bring a charge against us is Jesus (8:34), but having stood where we stand, He will not accuse us, rather, He pleads for us!

Old Testament texts illustrating the work of the Messiah

This passage also has strong connections with other famous Old Testament texts. Verse 32 is reminiscent of Genesis 22, in which Isaac is prepared for ritual sacrifice by his father Abraham, but at the last moment, God called Abraham to hold back from killing his son, and proceeded to confirm His blessing on Abraham with these words; 'you have not withheld your son, your only son' (Gen 22:12). Then, in a passage far better known in Jesus' day than in ours, Zechariah has a vision of a court in which Joshua the High Priest, stands before the Lord in penitence, representing God's people: 'Then He showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?' With these words, God vindicates His people as represented by one man (in this case, Joshua, the High Priest), and Satan is rebuked. As in our passage, no charge is ever brought by Satan; he is silenced by God.

Finally, in the greatest of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (in Isaiah 53), Isaiah sees God's servant interceding for sinners, having died for them and borne their sins, in just the same way that Paul describes Jesus 'pleading' for us at the right hand of God. He says; '*He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and then made intercession for the transgressors ...*' (Is. 53:12 – see 8:34). The great vision of Paul that lies behind our passage is deeply connected to the whole history of God's work to bring salvation and restoration to His people.

Absolute vindication!

This resounding vision of absolute vindication in the heavenly court of divine justice is not just a vision of the past or the future; it is a vision of an eternal truth, past, present and future. According to Scripture, the work of Christ has been done, and yet it is still to be completed. We may claim the victory of Christ now, and live the life of faith by the Spirit, but we will also face God Almighty when the Lord comes again, when all things come to an end. In Christ, the past, the present and the future are all connected; and it is because of this that we can have the supreme hope for the future described by Paul in the remaining verses of this text.

Paul's question in verse 35 begins 'Who will separate us from the love of Christ?' and there follows a list of earthly difficulties and distress, all of which are things that can give people reason to doubt the love of God or abandon faith. But if we look closely, Paul's question is 'Who?', not 'What?' In truth, it is not the events themselves that cause doubt and spiritual distress to someone, but the interpretation of them by others. For example, the voice within, used by Satan to tempt the believer to doubt that God is in control when disaster strikes, or the anguish of others which we inappropriately take to ourselves and find that instead of standing firm in our faith, we let slip the hand of the Saviour. To help us, Paul reminds us that no hardship we can suffer compares to that of Christ, and he quotes from Psalm 44:22, (which has strong resonance with Isaiah

53); 'Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' (see 8:36). His message is clear, Jesus has been there before and knows all the troubles of the world. We follow where He has been, but because these things did not separate Jesus from His Father, then in the same way, neither can we be ever separated from the Father if we maintain our faith in Him.

Nothing can separate us ...

In famous words that have strengthened Christians in thousands of circumstances of trouble and distress that few can truly understand, Paul declares that nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God ...'. He lists things that people commonly think of as doing just this, but he lists them to mock them rather than give them any credit. Certainly death is one of them, but in his own day, people commonly believed in angels and demonic powers that stood between earth and the heavenly reality of God, and they are all reflected in his description of 'angels, demonic powers ... supernatural powers ... height ... depth.' (8:38,39). Today, people have their own popular culture of evils, and whether we like it or not, many do have beliefs and fears about spirits and demons, for example, or astrology or the practice of other false religious beliefs. Whatever people may say or believe, however, the Christian message remains the same throughout the ages. It is consistent and unchanging and is the rock upon which the lives of thousands of godly people have been built for two thousand years. Because of what Jesus has done for us, nothing 'will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

This supreme statement of truth is unsurpassed. It is not 'religion', it is truth; and no further explanation of it is required; for it is the glorious privilege of God's chosen people.

Application

At this point in Paul's letter to the Romans, it is as if he draws a line and says, 'that's it'. There is more to come, because everything Paul has said has omitted to mention one important issue, which is the place of God's people Israel in this new age of Christ; and this is where Paul heads next in his chapter. However, eight chapters of explanation and detailed argument have come down to this great visionary statement of faith (8:38,39) that has inspired Christian ever since it was written. In the same way that we can be helped to understand and appreciate the plot of a film and its storyline by watching the film again, it is worth considering doing the same with Paul's letter! Reading it again will enable us to see afresh how Paul's explanation of the Gospel works! But in the life of the church, most of us have only heard parts of Romans read in services of worship, sectioned out for the purpose of preaching. We may be familiar with a great deal of what he says, but we would struggle to hold it all together in our minds. It can help us a great deal if we read it all through, so that we will then appreciate the full wonder and power of what Paul has written, and the absolute truth of God's love.

The full power of this passage of Scripture is surely found in the fact that not only is it firmly and obviously rooted in the Gospel truth of God's love in Christ Jesus, it also offers those who love Jesus the unqualified assurance that God will not condemn. This is extraordinarily precious. We are talking about God, here, and we are talking about our eternal destiny. Some people dismiss all this as fanciful belief about things that are impossible to know. However, the power of this assurance is impressed on the life of the whole church by those who have been inspired by such words to serve God and others, over the centuries. They have suffered and been judged by others, but they have received their rewards, and we long to stand with them.

This passage is our inspiration, but it also challenges us, because of the way that it explains the Faith. Everyone of us who has responded to the call of God, felt His touch and declared our faith in Christ Jesus, faces the challenge to speak about our faith and give an account of it. We must also do this in a way that will be understandable to others who need to hear the Gospel for themselves today. The wonderful words can form the basis of good evangelism, and we do need to be able to explain it and understand it. This text provides us with some of the best and most wonderful words to present to the world about the love of God in whom we believe. Nothing is more important and more significant than this.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have you ever felt condemned by a preacher, or some teaching from the Bible? Does this passage of Scripture help you feel less condemned?
2. What do people believe about what separates them from God today? How can we help to overcome these fears?

3. Are you able to say verse 38 and 39 to yourself and mean it? If not, why do you find this hard? Discuss this, if possible, in your group.

Personal comments by author

I find this passage deeply moving, because I know how easy it is to be lead down the pathway of feeling that life is too difficult, and the cost too much for what God requires of you. The only route, each time, is to refocus on the presence of Christ in the courtroom of life! He is the barrister I think might condemn me and He defends me! Yes, I have to think of it all as personally as this! There are many places of Scripture where we can go to read a passage and be inspired to get our faith into the right perspective, and this is surely one of the best.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *I am serious in suggesting that it might be a good thing to read through the first eight chapters of Romans in one sitting. Give yourself an hour, and you should be able to do it in this time. If you are able to do this, try highlighting the occasional text which in your opinion, is essential to the argument that Paul makes about the faith.*
- *Alternatively, after you have read each chapter, write down your own summary in one paragraph of what has been said. The exercise will help you sharpen up much of your understanding of Christian faith.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, Your constant love has surrounded me all the days of my life, and I am grateful for all that it has meant. I praise You for making Yourself real to me, and I offer You everything; all my thoughts, my work, my time and my energy. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your blessing! AMEN!
