

Who Shall Separate Us?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2021

Preacher: Tom Holland

[0 : 00] Well, we've been working through the five unanswerable questions of Romans chapter 8.

! And if you'll think about it, the fact that no human or demon can successfully answer these questions! is proof positive that we are secure in Christ.

! Final question of the five, Romans 8 verses 35-36, 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.

I'm a bottom line sort of person, so what is the bottom line concerning this passage that we just read? There is no separation from Christ's love.

[1 : 16] It doesn't exist. I've had vigorous discussions and debates with those who believe there are. We've come to the fifth unanswerable question in our discussion of the perseverance of the saints.

The first three unanswerable questions were based upon what God the Father has done. Who can be against us? Who can be against us? The answer to that question is no one.

Because no one is more powerful than God. And by the way, this isn't talking about opposition.

There are massive numbers of people who oppose Christians. But the question is, who can successfully be against us?

And the answer is no one. The next question is, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

The answer is that God the Father will give us lesser gifts described as all things because he's already given us the greatest gift of all, eternal life in his son.

[2 : 29] Again, doesn't get any better than that for us, does it? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? The answer is no one will or can because it is the God of the universe who has already justified his elect people.

He's done that in the past, before there was a universe. He even wrote our names down in the Lamb's Book of Life. The fourth question, which we looked at last week, is unanswerable because of what Christ Jesus has done for us.

Who is he that condemns? No one can successfully condemn us because Jesus died. He was raised from the dead.

He's ascended into heaven. And he's seated at the right hand of God the Father and is presently interceding for every believer, including all of us in this room.

Paul is finishing up this great section on eternal security or perseverance of the true believer. He's been asking these rhetorical questions. And now he comes to one that belongs on the mountaintop.

[3 : 48] We're going to have a mountaintop experience tonight. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? It's very interesting how the Apostle Paul, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, fashions this unanswerable question.

It's interesting because he gives us a whole list of imagined separators. He's going to go, well, what about this?

What about that? You know, he's going to give us a list of these. How do we answer this? Well, we do so by looking at the totality of Romans chapter 8. That great chapter begins with the two words, no condemnation.

And, you know, that's to me not hard to interpret. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So he begins with no condemnation and he ends with no separation.

There is no separation. There is no separation. Was that the OU hymn? What is he in that way?

[5 : 06] Well, the short answer is, nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But we're going to really look at that more fully next week. Now, we're not through for the night. Next week. I can see a glint in Mike Dursham's eyes, you know.

Paul, probably more so than most people that have ever lived, knew that the world was hostile to believers and that destructive forces surround them all the days of their earthly sojourn.

At the same time, he knows those forces will never be able to detach or separate us from the Lord Jesus Christ.

So what are the forces arrayed against us? Paul lists seven in this verse. Now, perhaps he had the number seven in mind because that's the number that suggests completeness.

[6 : 19] We can't be dogmatic about that, but it is a possibility. Possibility. The forces he lists are great and potentially destructive, but they will all fail.

Every one of them. And the first one he lists is tribulation. That's the first of the seven on the list, tribulation. Some versions say trouble, but the King James refers to it as tribulation.

So does the English Standard Version, ESV. I think tribulation does a better job of capturing the idea of hard circumstances that press down upon us.

The word used for tribulation here in Greek language is *silispos*, meaning afflicted, anguished, burdened, persecuted, or in tribulation.

And it really pictures one under extreme pressure. Pressure. Bearing down on that person.

[7 : 33] I've visited with people that were under that pressure, that were persecuted. We've got a book upstairs. This must be Persecution Week. We've got all the books upstairs on persecution.

One of them, Hearts of Fire, is a list of eight women that were severely persecuted. Some of those have been to my house. Some of them came up and ate with us.

One in particular from Russia. She got like 20 years in Siberia because she handed out four spiritual law tracts. And finally she got at it for 20 years and went home and handed out four spiritual law tracts.

I mean, that's just the way she was. The English language version of tribulation is directly related to a Latin word, *tribulium*.

I don't know if I pronounced it right. It means a threshing sledge. I didn't know what that was and I looked it up. During the grain harvest, the threshing sledge was this large instrument.

[8 : 33] It was made of wood. It was placed over the stalks to separate the head of grain from the stalks. Now, though it was made of wood, it had large pieces of metal attached to it.

And when that hit the grain, the heads of the grain, it was separated. You did that by applying pressure, sometimes great pressure, and the head separated from the stalks.

This is a picture that is applied to people under extreme pressures of life. It seemed to them that they were being forcefully threshed like stalks of grain.

We know that life can be hard. There is child abuse. There is the loss of a child or a spouse. Family members go through illness.

Paul says, no matter the tribulation we faced, it will not and it cannot separate us from the love of Christ Jesus that he has for his people.

[9 : 44] And then we come to the word *distress*. This too is taken from the Greek language. It is actually from two Greek words meaning narrow and space.

Kind of interesting. The idea here is not so much being pressed down by circumstances as it is being confined within a very narrow and oppressive space.

I'm a little claustrophobic. And not severely, but I don't like confined spaces. My worst thought of death is being in a culvert pipe and I'm stuck and the water's rising.

I don't like that thought. I don't like that thought. Yeah, well, Mike's like, think being in a culvert pipe or you pulled a kid out of one a long time ago.

Yeah, I remember that. I'm certain we all find ourselves in narrow straits from time to time. When we do, remember that we are heirs of heaven.

[10 : 54] One day we won't be able to measure the vastness of the horizon we gaze at or the stars of the new heavens and the new earth that will exist and that we exist on and around.

Be looking at a new heaven. We shall not be deprived of this future because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Nothing. Third one we're especially close to is the word persecution. Living here in the shadow of the voice of the martyrs, that is a word we hear frequently.

The word there in the Greek language means one being pursued by someone intending to harm or to cause them harm.

So they're being pursued. It is a picture of a harm that is at a level of relentlessness.

Relentlessness.

[12:02] I suppose we could call it relentless persecutions. We have not yet experienced that level of persecution in our day in this country although I believe the day is coming as we approach the return of Christ for His church.

I've been in places where the persecution is relentless and has deadly consequences. Even in our own country there are subtle persecutions perhaps due to your Christian witness you don't receive but deserve promotion you're the first to be laid off during a downsize any number of things can happen.

There are two truths that we can depend on as it pertains to persecution. Persecutions are a normal response to any forthright Christian witness or stand.

They follow someone who's a very forthright Christian like a ship coming into harbor. Secondly we will experience persecution to the extent that we confront the world with the claims of Christ.

Let me repeat that. We will experience persecution to the extent that we confront the world with the claims of Christ.

[13:28] I told you once I told a guy I didn't feel very persecuted he said be more godly it will come. A lot of truth in that. Persecution has been promised to the true believer.

It's promised us. Listen to the words of Christ. John chapter 16 verse 33. I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart I have overcome the world. What a promise. The Lord overcame the world.

Are we worried about the world? Jesus has overcome it. John 15 verses 18 and 19 if the world hates you know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you are of the world the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you.

[14:33] The world hates you because it hated Christ before we were even around. And then very famous Matthew 5 10 to 12 right out of the Beatitudes blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and other all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Great section of scripture. Closing out the Beatitudes. Let's hear the words of the apostle Paul that he wrote to his son in the faith Timothy.

2 Timothy 3.12 Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Paul says it's certain to happen.

And again I go back you be stronger for Christ it'll come. It'll come. persecution can separate us from worldly advancement.

[15:49] Persecutions contain our image before the world but persecutions will never separate us from the love of Christ.

It's an impossibility. The fourth thing that Paul mentions here is famine. I may have to describe what that is after a meal like we had tonight.

Maybe y'all have forgotten. Famine. If we have a famine I'm going to Johnny's house. I get dibs. Famine was quite common in the ancient world.

It's also prevalent in many parts of the world today. It's all over Africa. It's everywhere in Africa. I remember being in Algeria which is in North Africa and seeing little kids out in the city dump trying to find food scraps.

It's everywhere. It can be caused by varying circumstances and conditions. Lack of rain can cause famine. Floods can cause famine.

[16:58] Crop failure is a common cause of famine. Famine can result from natural disasters such as earthquakes, fires, floods, war, even plagues of locusts.

And we still have those in abundance. I saw a picture a few years ago of a locust plague in Africa. They were destroying and had destroyed massive amounts of cropland which the African people could ill afford to lose that.

And it was a very interesting photograph of the locusts. It looked like you were looking at a cloud. It was taken from an American satellite in orbit above the earth.

And it stretched over several countries. One horde of locusts. Pretty amazing. All of these factors and others not mentioned have caused suffering, hunger, and death in many places in the world. Hunger persists in many areas of earth in spite of improved agricultural technologies and humanitarian relief programs. Hunger is a horrible thing, but not even that can separate us from the love of Christ.

[18:23] Next one's kind of interesting. number five, nakedness. In Paul's day, there were people who lived in abject poverty, and they could not afford the simplest of clothing, just a covering.

Couldn't afford it. If you have but one choice, does one clothes himself or does he feed his children? Certainly in Paul's day, nakedness had to do with severe poverty.

It occurred often in natural disasters and war. Not even nakedness can separate us from the love that Christ has for us. And then Paul throws in danger.

Well, I thought we were talking about danger, but he throws in a specific category of danger. And danger comes in many forms. The use of the original language would indicate that the danger spoken of here are those to which Christians are especially exposed simply because they are Christians.

They're in danger because they're believers. They wake up in danger. There are all kinds of abuses directed toward believers.

[19:41] Again, in the foyer upstairs, we have on display books that deal with this topic in great detail. I want to give you a quote from the Scottish theologian, preacher, and author Robert Heldane, a neat guy.

His most famous book was an exposition of the epistle to the Romans from which this quote is taken. Dangers at some times and in some countries are exceedingly many and great, and at times and in all countries are more or less numerous and trying.

If God were not their protector, even in this land of freedom, the followers of the lamb would be cut off or injured. It is the Lord's providence that averts such injuries or overrules events for the protection of his people.

This too is little considered even by themselves and would be thought a most unfounded calamity and Diane fortunately put an asterisk and said that means a maliciously false statement, a defamatory report or slander.

I'm glad she put that in there. Or a fanciful idea by the world. But let the Christian habitually consider his safety.

[21:05] She didn't write this, she corrected it. Let the Christian habitually consider his safety and protection as secured by the Lord rather than by the liberality of the times.

It's not because people are just generally nice to us. The Lord does it. That time never yet was when the Lord's people could be safe. And he wrote this 200 or 300 years ago.

That time never yet existed when the Lord's people could be safe if the circumstances removed restraint from the wicked. Those who boast of their unbounded liberality would, if in situations calculated to develop their natural hatred of the truth, prove after all bitter persecutors.

By the way, he lived in Scotland where in the late 1600s 18,000 people were killed for their faith. 18,000.

They were called the coveners. They entered into a covenant with God that they would worship Jesus and not the king. They respected the king, but they wouldn't bow down and worship him.

[22:21] Diane descends from covenanters. And then the seventh thing Paul gives us is the sword. The last of these sevens pushes the possibility of violence alluded to in the first six to viewing circumstances in which Christians are executed or murdered for their faith.

And we know that happens. That happened in the early church. We all remember the example of Stephen. He's often listed as the first church martyr. James, not this James, in the Bible James was martyred.

Other martyrs would follow throughout history even down to our day. Go out to the Theo Emson. Look at the martyr's wall. And we only had one name a year.

One name a year. Look at that wall out there. And I've been in Scotland at the place where many were executed that are on that wall. On it. From the early days of the church, there is a thin red line which depicts the blood of the martyrs.

That is why the early Christian writer and apologist Tertullian said that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. He wrote in Latin and became known as the father of Latin Christianity.

[23 : 51] Interesting term. When the apostle Paul wrote the book of Romans, persecution directed at believers had become rampant.

he wrote that persecution was a prophesied biblical truth. In Romans 8.36, which is part of our study tonight, Paul quoted from the Psalms.

Here's the Psalm. 44.22. Yet for your sake we are killed all day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. That's right out of Paul.

He quoted the Psalm there. Christians have been killed for their faith, from the start of the church. I did a little study years ago in the book of Acts and Peter and John were in jail for their faith 12 hours after Pentecost.

Didn't take long. We do not know how many followers of Christ are put to death every year. We've tried to come up with a number.

[24 : 58] It's impossible. I mean, governments don't call up and say, hey, we killed a bunch of Christians today. They may get to that someday. I have seen estimates as high as one believer killed every three minutes in the world because he or she will not say the words, I deny Christ.

I deny Christ. I always remember visiting China twice within three weeks and I met both times with Pastor Alan Yuen, Chinese pastor in the underground church.

He's now in glory. He was 83 when I met with him. Pastor Yuen was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to 22 years at hard labor.

And he went up to a prison in extreme northern Mongolia and he talked to me one on one sitting in my hotel room about how cold it was, how bitterly cold it was.

And they didn't have blankets and all that. They just were in a cell. And he talked at some length about this and I was just in awe of this man. It was quite a memory for me.

[26 : 18] He got out of prison after 22 years and they put him under house arrest for 10 years. In China, if you're under house arrest, you can't go outside, you can't stick your head out of a window, and you can't just open the blinds and look out of a window.

It was really horrible. He did 10 years. When Ronald Reagan took office, he wrote a letter and he copied the president of China and said, Pastor Ewan, we're watching your treatment.

That will determine our relationship with China. And it got really good. After that, he was released.

The first week he's released, he baptized 300 people in a public swimming pool.

I had pictures I brought back to VOM and they made copies and I took them back my next trip to Allen. And it was funny, they're in the public swimming pool and the Chinese source says, what are you all doing?

They said, teaching these people how to swim. Oh, okay, well, have fun. You know, they were baptizing people. Alan Ewan told me himself when he was in Mongolia in that prison, they came in one day and they said, we got a new batch of prisoners coming in, we have to double sell.

[27 : 37] Those cells, one man could barely fit in them. They slip on a concrete floor. Now he's going to have a roommate. And so he went out to hard labor that morning before dawn, came in after dark, got a bowl of gruel soup, no beans, Marshall would have liked it, no beans, just kind of hot water, goes to his cell and there's his new roommate.

And the guy stands up, walks over, shook his hand, he said, my name is Watchman Nee. That's like going to prison for your faith and they bring you a roommate and he says, my name is Billy Graham.

That's the equivalent of Watchman Nee in China. And Alan told me, he said, I've been praying that somehow God would strengthen me. And that night, after I said that prayer, Watchman Nee was my new roommate.

Pretty amazing. None of that's in your notes. I'm way off track now. We know this, and the psalmist knew this.

To many cultures in this world, even today, we are sheep fit only for slaughter. And they're dying every day around the world.

[29 : 08] love. This leads to a question. In view of the dangers that Christians face globally, how can Paul say that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ?

And it really boils down to the nature of that love. What is that love? The Lord's love for His own is high.

It is deep. It is long. It is, in fact, eternal. The very basis of our security and Paul's confidence in our security is grounded in the love that Christ has for His people.

We learn three truths concerning the love of Christ. Christ's love for us is what draws us out of ourselves and to Him in the first place.

The love of Christ satisfies those that is drawn and won as disciples. And the love of Christ not only draws but completely satisfies.

[30 : 17] Completely. What can happen when we tell people that Christ loves them? Much if the Holy Spirit is working in those lives.

During my preparation, I came across a name. I'd never heard it before. I wonder if anyone here has ever heard it. And it's the name Harold Voekel, V-O-E-K-E-L, if I'm pronouncing that correctly. I didn't know that name before this lesson. He was a missionary living in China, but he ministered to Koreans that were escaping into China.

And it was a great help that this missionary, Harold Voekel, was fluent in the Korean language. General MacArthur heard about him and asked him to come to Korea, South Korea, and pay him a visit, which he did.

General MacArthur offered Brother Voekel a commission as a United States Army chaplain. Now get this down, you guys are in the military, starting at the rank of full colonel.

[31 : 38] Boy, that'd be a lot better than a second lieutenant. Full bird colonel. That's how he started. He immediately began organizing the other chaplains.

He ruled over them. He was the highest ranking chaplain, American chaplain in the country. They asked him what he wanted to do. MacArthur asked him. Colonel Vogel made it clear that he wanted to go into the prisoner of war camps and visit with the North Korean soldiers that had been captured and were being housed in those camps in the South.

There were some 130,000 of them. Now these guys, many of them were hardened communists. They had been indoctrinated into that horrible system of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong and it was an ordeal.

He gets in there and many of these guys were drawn to vocal. First of all, because he spoke their language. They'd never seen a Westerner, an American that could speak Korean, that wasn't of Korean descent, which he wasn't.

In the first camp and attendance, pretty good for a pastor, Willard and Mike, it was mandatory attendance. They had no choice. They had to go.

[33 : 10] The first camp he went to, in their language, he said, hey, I want to teach you guys a little song in your language. And I'm going to sing it to you a few times and I want you to sing it with me.

And I want you to learn this song. He sang this. I'm not going to sing it. Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.

little ones to him belong, they are weak, but he is strong. And then he finished, yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.

When he finished with the first POW camp, he went to the next, repeated it, went to one after that, repeated it.

He went and visited every POW camp in South Korea. When he finished, they said, well, what do you want to do now, Colonel?

[34 : 20] And he said, start back and go to every camp. And he got there and he asked the prisoners, do you remember the song? And many of them said they did, and they began to sing it for him.

he then said after they finished singing that very famous song that we all sang, didn't we, in Sunday school, as kids, me 65 years ago, Johnny about five, or Derek about two, Harold Volkl said this, and this was absolutely brilliant.

He said, okay, I want to tell you about the subject of that song, this person named Jesus. That's really the first time he witnessed him, he just taught them a song.

They'd never heard the name Jesus. And he began to teach them in those camps about the Jesus of the song.

And thousands came to the Lord. the Lord. Of those 130,000, not all of them, thousands came to the Lord.

[35 : 38] Those that clung to communism when the war was over returned to the north. Those that had been saved said, we want to stay here. And they were allowed to. When the war ended, most of the new converts stayed in South Korea and became very productive citizens.

one became a multimillionaire and built churches all over the country. And he even built a seminary to which a lot of these prisoners, former prisoners, went to seminary.

One of the prisoners became the pastor of a 7,000 member church. So the stories of success went all because they heard a children's song about someone they had never heard of named Jesus who loved them.

Can you imagine? And that's the love that will not separate us. It's a powerful love, guys. It can save a communist in Korea from an American that spoke their language.

[36 : 51] I want to close with this point. as Paul has been teaching us on the perseverance of the saints, someone might think, you know, that's easy for Paul to say.

He was an apostle. He met with Jesus on the road to Damascus. He had great privileges. So let me close with a passage taken from 2 Corinthians, which comments about those privileges.

This is Paul. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. That's 39 lashes, by the way. three times I was beaten with rods.

Once I was pelted with stones. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea.

[38 : 09] I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false believers.

That was probably number one on his list. I have labored and toiled. I've often gone without sleep. I have known hunger, and I've often gone without food. I've been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern.

Now, he's going to get his head cut off later, but he wasn't concerned about that. Listen to his concern. I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak.

Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn. There you have the real Apostle Paul, who could give us a writing on the love of Christ, and our security in him, that has no parallels in Scripture or in any literature on the face of the earth.

[39 : 44] That's Paul. And we'll pick it up there next time. to the to the to! to!!

! to to Thank you.