

Nothing But Love

Romans 8:35-39

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I. Love in Suffering vs. 35-37

a. Who Will Separate - **to cause separation through use of space between, *divide, separate***

i. ***Love*** - the quality of warm regard for and interest in another, ***esteem, affection, regard, love***

1. God has the first word. He establishes the relationship. This is laid down once and for all in R. 8. His resolve, election and calling are decisive
2. He is also able to reach out and sustain his people still on earth. His love enfolds them as a power which hostile and untoward circumstances cannot disrupt or prevent.

b. ***Will?***

i. Tribulation - **trouble that inflicts distress, *oppression, affliction, tribulation***

ii. Distress - **a set of stressful circumstances, *distress, difficulty, anguish, trouble***

iii. Persecution- **a program or process designed to harass and oppress someone, *persecution***

iv. Famine – hunger

v. Nakedness- **being without adequate clothing, with connotation of *destitution, lack of sufficient clothing, destitution***

1. Paul was no stranger, nor the cruelly recurring phases known to every community when food supplies and personal resources fail completely, nor the daily risks which lurked round every corner even under the Pax Roman

vi. Peril - ***danger, risk***

vii. Sword- violent death

1. The parallel with 2 Cor 11:23–27 also makes clear that such a list is not a mere literary form but is a firsthand expression of Paul's own experience. Since he regarded his own experience as the outworking of the eschatological tension between the ages (of Adam and of Christ), he naturally saw his experience as typical for all his fellow believers
2. Persecution drives the true believer to the arms of the one who knows from experience the full range of suffering. Famine and nakedness (perhaps a metaphor for destitution) are powerless to affect the love of Christ. Danger and the sword (possibly that of

the executioner) lose their terror in view of the presence of the one in whom we find ultimate safety

c. It is Expected

- i. Sheep to the Slaughter - The quotation is verbatim from Ps 44:22 but there may already be an echo in Zech 11:4, 7 (πρόβατα τῆς σφαγῆς); cf. also Isa 53:7
 1. The main effect of the quotation of Ps 44:22 [LXX: 43:23] is to show that the tribulations which face Christians are nothing new or unexpected, but have all along been characteristic of the life of God's people. The Rabbis applied this verse of the psalm to the death of martyrs
 2. Paul underscores the thought of the suffering of this age by citing a passage (Ps 44:22) that quite probably had already been used of martyrs and of the persecuted righteous. In times of great natural or humanly contrived disasters, the affliction can become so sustained and all-oppressive that there seems no end to it ("all the day") and death an everyday commonplace ("as sheep for slaughter").
 3. **Same idea of continuous martyrdom in 1 Cor. 15:31. As sheep for the slaughter**
 4. The apostle suggested seven things a believer might experience (Paul experienced all of them; 2 Cor. 11:23–28) that some might think could come between a believer and Christ's love—**trouble** (*thilpsis*, "pressure or distress";
 5. Paul reflected upon the words of the psalmist (in Ps 44:22), which he found so appropriate to his situation. The troubles to be faced by the Christian are nothing new but have always been the experience of God's people. At every moment of the day we face death. We are considered no better than sheep that are marked for slaughter

d. We are Conquerors

- i. Overwhelmingly Conquer - Overwhelmingly - as a heightened form of νικάω **prevail completely** ὑπερνικῶμεν *we are winning a most glorious victory*
- ii. ὑπερνικάω is a heightened form of νικάω, hence something like "win a glorious victory, win more than a victory"; "we are more than conquerors"; "overwhelming victory is ours."
- iii. The use of the heightened form of the verb marks the swelling note of a supreme confidence that in the last analysis God's love outweighs and is more than a match for the worst that can happen.
- iv. indicates that it is not through any courage, endurance or determination of our own, but through Christ, and not even by our hold on Him but by His hold on us, that we are more than conquerors. The use of the aorist participle indicates that the reference is to a particular historic act,

namely, that act by which He proved His love to us (cf. 5:6–8; also Gal 2:20).

II. Powerful Love vs. 37-39

a. I am Convinced

i. Convinced *persuade, appeal*

1. “I stand convinced.” The items mentioned are those that people dread (life, death, supernatural powers, above, below, any creature to cover any omissions).

b. Nothing

i. Death - **the termination of physical life, death** natural death

1. Θάνατος appropriately heads the list, not simply because of v 36, but primarily because death has loomed throughout chaps. 5–8 as the great hostile power (see chaps. 6–8 *Introduction*), the fullest measure of sin’s power over this age (cf. 1 Cor 15:26; see on 5:12, 21).
2. Death, the dreaded separator of loved ones, had for most of the OT period been thought even by the people of God to separate men from God’s fellowship (cf., e.g., Ps 6:5; 30:9; 88:5, 10–12; 115:17; Isa 38:18); but for Paul to die was to ‘be with Christ’, and therefore could even be spoken of as ‘gain’ and something ‘very far better’ than life in this present world (Phil 1:21–23; cf. 2 Cor 5:8).
3. real sense ‘absent from the Lord’ (2 Cor 5:6). Whether dying or living, we are equally ‘the Lord’s’ (14:8), since He is Lord of the living and dead alike (14:9).

ii. Life- the death/life pairing is simply a way of embracing every conceivable condition of humankind (cf. 14:7–9; 1 Cor 3:22; Phil 1:20).

1. Nor life” —not now the tribulations of this life (v 35), but life itself, somewhat surprisingly now posed as a possible threat (instead of the usual contrast between life and death), but presumably because life in this age constitutes something of a threat so long as sin rules in the flesh.

iii. Angels-intermediate beings as serving spirit-powers

1. Paul probably has in mind particularly the idea of angels as inhabiting the lower reaches of heaven (or lower heavens; cf. 2 Cor 12:2; Eph 6:12), and therefore as a potential barrier between God and his people on earth; but also perhaps the idea of angels as rulers of the nations
2. Paul from time to time makes use of similar Jewish designations for the hierarchy of angels: so in 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:2

3. In the NT epistles they seem to be applied both to angelic beings which are thought of as obediently fulfilling their divinely-appointed roles in the ordering of the universe and in the affairs of men and also to spiritual forces of evil which have to be resisted by Christians (cf., e.g., Eph 6:12). What Paul is here concerned to say is simply that there is no spiritual cosmic power, whether benevolent or malevolent, which will be able to separate us from God's love in Christ.
 4. He held that there was a world of spirits brought into being like the rest of creation by Christ (Col. 1:16). These spirits are ranged in a certain hierarchy to which the current names are given. They seem to be neither wholly good nor wholly bad, for to them too the Atonement of the Cross extends (Col. 1:20 ἀποκαταλλάξει τὰ πάντα εἰς αὐτόν ... εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς). There is a sense in which the Death on the Cross is a triumph over them (Col. 2:15). They too must acknowledge the universal sovereignty of Christ (1 Cor. 15:24; cf. Eph. 1:10); and they form part of that kingdom which He hands over to the Father, that 'God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28).
- iv. Principalities - **an authority figure who initiates activity or process, ruler, authority** Also of angelic or transcendent powers, since they were thought of as having a political organization
1. The lack of specification is probably intentional—the whole range of heavenly beings, however conceived. ἀρχαί is the most frequently used name for angelic and demonic powers in the different listings of the Pauline corpus (see *Form and Structure*); "demons" is too limiting a translation. The fact that it also denotes civil or political officials implies that the heavenly community was conceived as similarly structured. See further on 13:1.
 2. Paul uses terms which would embrace the complete range of spiritual forces, however conceived—good or evil, every possibility and eventuality is included
- v. Present or to Come
1. The third pair consists of ἐνεστώτα and μέλλοντα, which are most naturally understood as signifying present and future (including eschatological) events and circumstances. The same pair figures in the list in 1 Cor 3:22.
- vi. **Powers - an entity or being, whether human or transcendent, that functions in a remarkable manner, power**
1. And this he can say with confidence, because he knows that Christ has once and for all won the decisive battle against the rebellious powers (cf. Col 2:15; also Eph 1:21, 22a; 1 Pet 3:22), so that their

effectiveness has been drastically curtailed and their final complete subjection assured

- vii. Height -as an astronomical term **the space above the horizon, *the world above*** (which would be the domain of many transcendent forces)
 - 1. Neither height nor depth” —Paul deliberately draws on current astronomical terms to denote the full sweep of the heavens visible and invisible to the human eye, and thus all astrological powers known and unknown which could be thought to determine and control the fate and destiny of human beings.
 - 2. it is surely more probable that the reference here is to places than that it is to spirit-powers associated with them, and that the meaning is simply that neither the highest height nor the deepest depth (or should we say ‘neither heaven nor hell’?) will be able to separate us from God’s love. We might perhaps compare Ps 139:8 (where the context is concerned with the impossibility of getting beyond the reach of God):
- viii. Depth - **the space or distance beneath a surface, *depth*** since they are said to be creatures and the context speaks apparently only of transcendent forces
 - 1. neither height nor depth.” The contrast most likely uses astronomical terms: ὕψωμα as the apogee of the planets, the highest point in the heavens reached by the heavenly body At the very least his thought and assurance embrace all that is or can be imagined as belonging to the full sweep of space as well as of time
- ix. Created Thing - individual things or beings created, *creature*
 - 1. nor any other creature.” Since God alone is creator, *nothing* else is omitted in κτίσις. The status of the preceding members of the list is likewise relativized: powers etc. they may be, but only creatures
- c. Love of God – Which is in Christ Jesus
 - i. As Jesus did not distinguish His activity from that of God, but did what only God can do, forgiving sins, so Paul regards the love of God as basically one with that of His Christ (R. 8:37; 2 Th. 2:16). The loving action of God is revealed and executed in that of Christ: