



SESSION 5

VICTORY OVER FEAR

▶ ***The Point***

Believers have no reason to fear separation from God and His love.

▶ ***The Passage***

Romans 8:31-39

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

Just about every child has a primal fear of being abandoned—that their parents will put them down one day and never come back. Ever seen a child cry when his parent walks into another room? The child doesn't understand his dad is just around the corner. Or, you may recall a time as a child when you became separated from your mother in a store. Panic continued to rise until you spotted her.

In one sense, we never get over that fear. We don't want to be left alone in our lives. We'll put up with a lot of things—including bad friends and even difficult marriages—just to avoid the painful reality of being alone. Many even carry this fear as followers of Christ. We're not afraid of difficult or even painful experiences, but we are afraid God will lose track of us or that something will happen to make Him abandon us.

This is why Romans 8 is such a powerful chapter of the Bible. Paul wrote with such confidence to assure us that nothing—not even death itself—will keep Jesus from being with us. What made Paul so confident? Let's just say he had field tested this promise of grace.

▶ ***The Setting***

Paul ended the first half of his letter to the Romans on a climactic note designed to cause his readers to affirm all he had written to that point. Through seven rhetorical questions and his responses to them, Paul not only encouraged his readers but led them to affirm their triumph in Christ and His love for them. Paul identified with his readers by writing in the first person throughout this passage.

What does the Bible say?

Justifies (v. 33)—A legal term referring to being set right by God’s irrevocable verdict, which renders impotent any charge at the final judgment “against those whom God has chosen.”

More than conquerors (v. 37)—Refers to believers’ surpassing victory in Christ, not in their own power and strength but “through him who loved us.”

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered 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 convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

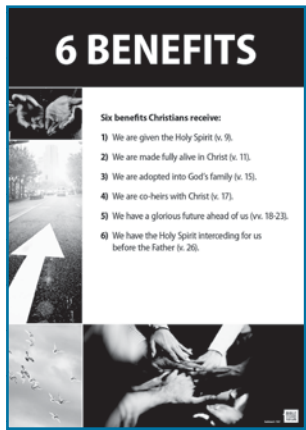
³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:
In what ways have you experienced the truth of these verses?

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Romans 8:31-34

³¹ *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* ³³ *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 5, “6 Benefits,” in order to give group members an organized look at the apostle Paul’s teaching in Romans 8 prior to verse 31.

Note: If you don’t have access to the Leader Pack, you can ask group members to read through the bullet list on page 47 of the PSG in order to see a similar breakdown of Paul’s teaching.

READ: Romans 8:31-34 on page 47 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

RECAP: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 47 of the PSG:

As Paul reached the climactic moment in verse 31, he simply asked: “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” We can’t look at the gospel—any aspect of the gospel—and not see that “God is for us.” And when we understand that God is for us, it doesn’t matter who’s against us.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 47 of the PSG: **“What helps you know that God is for you?”**

Note: Group members may opt for “safe” at the beginning of this discussion, such as the Bible or a feeling in their hearts. That’s okay, but encourage them to push below the surface and talk about specific factors that help them feel confident that God is for them. You may also encourage group members to share a story of a time when they felt such confidence.

Romans 8:31-34 Commentary

God is greater than anything that tries to come against us.

[Verse 31] The whole section of verses 31-35 is filled with questions and responses. The question **What, then, shall we say in response to these things?** was intended to move Paul's audience to accept what he had written to this point.

If God is for us, who can be against us? reminds us of an important truth: God is for us! The rest of the question, "who **can be** against us?," points to the obvious answer: "No one." Paul's initial words "If [since] God is for us" rendered all who could be **against us** irrelevant. God is greater than anything that tries to come against us.

This concept does not apply universally to all people. Rather, it applies only to believers who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ: those God "foreknew," "predestined," "called," "justified," and will glorify (see Rom. 8:28-30).

[Verse 32] Paul's next question focused on God's gift of His Son. The words **He who did not spare** call to mind Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac (see Gen. 22:10,16). **His own Son** points to the unique relationship of Jesus, the Son, to God the Father. **Gave him up** is a circuitous way of referring to the crucifixion and death of Jesus (see Rom. 4:25). The language of "offered him up" or "gave him up" is found in several places in the passion narratives. Most often it does not indicate sacrifice, but betrayal or being handed over. For example, Pilate's decision to give Jesus over to death (see Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:16), Jesus' predictions of His coming death (see Mark 9:31; 10:33; Luke 9:44), and Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:23).

What's amazing here in Romans 8:32 is that God handed Jesus over to death (see also Rom. 4:25). God offered Him up. God is the One in control. Jesus' death was not accidental nor out of God's control. No, God did not spare even His own Son, but offered Him up for us all.

For us emphasizes the substitutionary nature of the atonement. Christ died for us (see 5:8); He did not die because of His own sins—Jesus lived a perfect life free from sin. **All**, while stressing the universal nature of the atonement, does not imply universalism or a universal salvation of all people. Rather, **us all** refers to the "us" Paul had been writing about—Jews and Gentiles who believe in and love Jesus.

Paul's question moves from the greater to the lesser. Nothing is or could be greater than God giving us His Son. If God did that, then **how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** Does this mean that God will give us everything we want or could want? No, **with him** qualifies **all things**. That is, what we receive spiritually, and even materially, is because of our union with Christ. As Paul previously wrote, we are "co-heirs with Christ" (8:17). The question also reminds us that God's blessings do not stop with our initial salvation experience, but continue on in our lives as His children.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Romans 8:31-34 (Continued)

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY: You may have one or more logical thinkers in your group. Ask if a volunteer would be willing to draw out (or list) Paul’s argument from these verses as a step-by-step formula.

GUIDE: Encourage group members to read the first paragraph on page 48 of the PSG in order to better understand why Paul’s words were so important to the members of the early church in Rome.

RECAP: Read aloud the final paragraph on page 48 of the PSG:

Paul knew what he was talking about. Although he didn’t write this particular letter while in prison, Paul had his share of jail time. He knew difficulty. He knew opposition. But he also knew God was with him. Everything Paul wrote about in Romans 8, he had experienced first-hand. The joys that erupt from these verses are based on realities Paul had experienced himself. From his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-6) to an earth-shaking worship service in the Philippian jail (see Acts 16:25-26), Paul had found Christ to be faithful and present through it all.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 48 of the PSG: **“When have you felt criticized or condemned as a follower of Christ?”**

Note: It’s common for group members to answer these kinds of questions by referring to the distant past, which is safer than discussing recent events. However, you can give an opportunity for group members to share more recent experiences by asking a follow-up question, such as: “When have you felt criticized or condemned in the past year because of God or His Word?”

Romans 8:31-34 Commentary (Continued)

[Verse 33] Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? focused on accusations against God's people. **"Those whom God has chosen"** refers to believers in Christ. The Greek term for **any charge** is the language of the courtroom. God is the Judge. If the question stood on its own, one could respond with "many." Whether the accuser in Paul's mind was Satan (see Job 1:6–2:8; Zech. 3:1-2; Rev. 12:10) or any other being, it does not matter, for the anticipated answer is, "No matter who brings an accusation, it will not stand." Paul's reason was **it is God who justifies**. The word "justifies" is a legal term referring to being set right by God's irrevocable verdict, which renders impotent any charge at the final judgment "against those whom God has chosen." Paul's words recall Isaiah 50:8-9a. God's verdict cannot be overthrown!

[Verse 34] Who then is the one who condemns? again expects the answer "No one." God is greater than anyone or anything that tries to condemn us. Paul named three reasons—that really are one—as to why this is the case: Christ **died** for us; He was **raised** from the dead; and He presently is **interceding** for us in heaven.

Christ Jesus ... died is a summary statement encompassing all the death of Christ stood for and involved. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3)—the sins for which we otherwise would be condemned. As Paul just stated in Romans 8:3-4a, God did this "by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us."

Similarly, the words **was raised to life** mean more than just "He arose," as wonderful and important as that is. They refer to God the Father's action of raising Jesus from the dead (see Acts 2:24), which is proof of God's acceptance of His Son's atoning sacrifice. As Paul wrote in Romans 4:25, Jesus "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

Christ is also **interceding for us**. Previously, in Romans 8:26-27, Paul stated that the Holy Spirit "intercedes for us" and that He "intercedes for God's people." Verse 34 is the only place in Romans Paul stated that the risen and glorified Christ intercedes for His followers, but it is mentioned in Hebrews 7:25 and 1 John 2:1. Because of this, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

The **right hand** represents a place of strength, honor, and privilege. **At the right hand of God** recalls the opening words of the messianic Psalm 110: "The LORD says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" These words are applied to Christ in Matthew 22:44; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; and Hebrews 1:3,13. The words point to Christ's exaltation; they indicate the place of highest honor, stress His authority, remind us His work of redemption is finished, recall that Christ is advocating with God the Father on our behalf as our Mediator (see Isa. 53:12; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1), and call to mind that He will come again.

Romans 8:35-39 Commentary

God is greater than anything that tries to separate us from His love.

[Verses 35-36] Paul continued his use of rhetorical questions as a way to introduce truth: **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** The expected response is “No one.”

To prove his point, Paul raised seven possibilities. **Trouble** refers to strong external pressure. **Hardship** refers to internal pressure or stress. **Persecution** was a very real possibility in the early church. **Famine** refers to a lack of food, to hunger. **Nakedness** refers to destitution, to being in need of clothes. The word for **danger**, or “peril,” is a word only Paul used in the New Testament (9 times—8 of them in 2 Cor. 11:26). **Sword** could refer to a violent attack by a robber, to an invasion by an enemy army, or to execution. God does not promise us that we will never experience temptation, opposition, or suffering. He promises us that these things can never separate us from His love because God is greater than anything that tries to separate us from His love.

Paul quoted Psalm 44:22 from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to affirm that all such opposition was anticipated in Scripture. Christ’s love does not keep believers from trouble—indeed, it may increase their troubles. This suffering is not the result of God’s people having forgotten God or turned from Him; it is because of their faithfulness to Him!

[Verse 37] Paul asserted, **in all these things we are more than conquerors.** The word “conquerors” emphasizes the totality of the victory, possible only **through him who loved us.** The **him** could refer either to the Father, to the Son, or to both together. But since the reference in verse 35 is to Christ’s love, it probably is the same here in verse 37. Christ showed His love for us by His suffering; thus, our suffering cannot separate us from His love or be seen as evidence that He does not love us.

[Verses 38-39] Paul also listed ten powers that are not able to separate us from Christ’s love. **Death** is not the end. It is an enemy (see 1 Cor. 15:26), but elsewhere Paul taught that for the believer “to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). **The present or future** remind us that nothing time brings, whether problems or forebodings, can come between Christ’s love and us. **Powers** are spiritual forces (see Eph. 1:21; 1 Pet. 3:22). **Neither height nor depth** may refer to the immensity of the physical universe. Neither time nor space can separate us from Christ’s love. With the phrase **anything else in all creation,** Paul ended with a sweeping, inclusive, comprehensive generalization that included anything else that anyone could suggest or imagine.

Of all of this Paul, said he was **convinced** that none of them **will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.** He used the Greek perfect tense to indicate this was a permanent state of mind. Paul’s final words remind readers the only way we can experience the **love of God is in Christ Jesus.** Our assurance and confidence is not in ourselves, it is in God and His love for us. Separation from God and His love is something we need never fear!



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 52 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider taking one of the following steps in response to the reality of God’s continued love.



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Make a list.** Write out a list of obstacles you feel are working against you right now. Consider how God can work in you and strengthen you through this time.
- ▶ **Open up.** We often allow fear or shame to close our hearts when it comes to difficult circumstances. Instead, be intentional about sharing your experiences with someone this week. Confess your struggles and actively seek God’s love.
- ▶ **Be bold.** Our fears also have a way of preventing us from taking action for Christ. This week, take a bold step to show your faith in the fact that you cannot be separated from God’s love. Speak to someone about the gospel, make a commitment to a ministry, give up your resources, and so on.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 52 of the PSG:

You may have been abandoned or neglected as a child, but you will never be separated from your Father as a child of God. Let that truth give you confidence as you live for Him this week.

PRAY: Conclude by praying that God would give you and your group members a renewed sense of confidence in His love.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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