

Nothing Can Separate Us

Romans 8:35-39

90-429

Now we come to message number 13 – I never intended that, but message number 13 in Romans 8 series on the Holy Spirit, and we certainly welcome you who are guests to our church to the end of our series. Regrettably, some of you haven't been with us in the previous messages, so you're a little bit behind the curve, but that's okay. Turn to Romans 8, and while you're doing that, I do want to make a comment about the worship book.

There's a note about it in the *Grace Today*. There have been some rather careful edits in that book that has come out in past years and some added material to it, to enrich it and update it. And perhaps the most notable thing is that the final chapter in the book is on music, what is appropriate music for worship, and there are things in that chapter that are unique to the book, and I just wanted to let you know that that and another brand new chapter sort of set it apart from the past editions of it.

And speaking of worship, the series that we're doing has one goal in mind and that is to help us worship the Holy Spirit as we should. When I gave the first message and I called for worship of the Holy Spirit, after the service was over, I didn't get very far until I was stopped in my tracks by someone who was outraged – outraged that I would even suggest that we ought to worship, offer praise, prayer to the Holy Spirit, which points out the problem. We need to worship the Holy Spirit in the same way that we worship the Son of God and God the Father Himself.

In Revelation 22:9, there's a very brief command and it says, "Worship God." Worship God. The last chapter of the Bible, "Worship God." That isn't anything new. If you go to the beginning of the Bible, the Pentateuch, the writings of Moses, you will find there are many calls to worship God. If you get into the books of history, the books of poetry, the prophets, all the sacred writings that make up the Old Testament, everywhere you go, you will be repeatedly commanded in one way or another to worship God. In fact, Jesus tells us in John 4 that the Father seeks true worshipers. We are described by Paul in Philippians 3 as those who worship God in the Spirit, the Spirit of God. We are worshipers of God, that's what we do, that's why we're here. God is the audience and we are offering Him worship as we should every day individually in our lives and do collectively when we gather like this.

When the Bible instructs us to worship God, the God we are to worship is the triune God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the true and living God, the only God, three in one. When we are commanded – as we are so frequently – to worship God, that must mean all three members of the Trinity. In no sense are we to offer any member of the Trinity any less worship than we offer any other member of the Trinity. We are not to assume that when Scripture says to worship God that somehow we are to worship certain persons of the Trinity and not others or certain persons more than others. Should we not assume that every command in Scripture to worship God is a command

to worship the Holy Spirit who is fully God? When we get a glimpse of heaven in the fourth chapter of Revelation, and we read in verses 10 and 11 that the 24 elders, along with the living creatures, fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, are we to assume that that is one member of the Trinity or two but not the third? When the worship is given to us, the very words of heavenly worship, “Worthy are You, our Lord, and our God to receive glory and honor and power for You created all things and because of Your Will they exist and were created,” that that is excluding the Holy Spirit? I think not.

We are to worship the God who is God, and God declares Himself to be “I am who I am” and who He is is three in one. And yet when we talk about worshipping the Holy Spirit, it sounds new and it sounds novel, and for some people it even sounds wrong. And the argument tends to be, “Well no, no, the Spirit points to Christ.” Well, of course the Spirit points to Christ, but in pointing to Christ, He does not diminish His own deity. He does not depreciate His own identity. He does not intend to diminish worship given to Him. He points us to Christ, but He is no less God, and God is to be worshiped.

The Holy Spirit is fully God, gloriously God, holy God, eternal God, worthy of worship. The Holy Spirit is equally the possessor of all divine attributes that belong to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit equally participates in every divine activity for the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit participates in everything from creation to consummation. All true worship, then, embraces the Holy Spirit, includes the Holy Spirit. He cannot be separated from the Trinity whom we worship and whom we praise.

Why has this not been clear to us? Because for many people, that point that I made about the Holy Spirit pointing to Christ, which Jesus disclosed in His last night with the disciples in the Upper Room, seems to some people – and it’s caught traction and become part of Christian thinking – that the Holy Spirit is therefore deflecting worship toward Christ. Not so. He shows us Christ for a very clear purpose, which we studied some weeks ago, that we might see the model of perfected humanity, and as we gaze at the glory of the perfected human, He changes us into His image. To show us Christ is not to defer worship. It is another way in which we should worship Him and honor Him.

But beyond that sort of strange quirk in traditional understanding, even worse the Holy Spirit is not considered today in the same way that the Son and the Father are considered because there has been for many, many years now, coming from the third force, the third column in the Christian world – first column, Protestantism; second, Roman Catholicism; the third, Pentecostal Charismaticism – there has been coming from that third wave terrible, tragic confusion about the Holy Spirit, misrepresentation of the Holy Spirit, blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, insults directed at the Holy Spirit, and they are relentless and they are severe and they are serious.

The evangelical church’s understanding of the Holy Spirit has been mangled. Biblical truth has been depreciated and in its place have come bizarre things attributed to the Holy Spirit by people who have, in many cases, absolutely no relationship to the Holy Spirit whatsoever. Endless assaults are waged on His person and His work coming out of that third column. This movement has kidnapped the Holy Spirit and held Him hostage, and all criticisms of their aberrations and blasphemies are denounced by them as being divisive, unloving, and intolerant.

Obviously, thinking through all of this over the last three months and preaching all of this has stirred my own heart and hearts of people around me who are saying, “We need to do a book on this, we need to bring this to light, it’s been a long time since *Charismatic Chaos* came out, this needs to be

addressed,” and so we’ve decided to do that. But one of the compelling reasons to do that was the fact that we had a discussion the other day and it was brought to our attention that in searching the literature on the Holy Spirit and the things that are being ascribed to the Spirit today that are not true about Him and about His works, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has gone, in a sense, unprotected. The truth of the Holy Spirit has gone unaffirmed, in this sense, that it was the – maybe the early or mid-1990s since there was any definitive book produced on the true person and work of the Holy Spirit. Evangelicals have gone silent on this issue under the intimidation of that third column. This is unacceptable. We cannot allow this to go on, the Holy Spirit to be grieved, quenched, insulted, and blasphemed.

It’s amazing to me that the evangelical world doesn’t tolerate attacks on God the Father. When there came an attack a few years ago called the Openness theology which denied that God knew the future, denied His omniscience, it not only denied that He knew the future, it denied that He could control the future. This is a massive attack on the nature of God, and evangelicals rose up *en masse* to denounce that attack of Openness theology and became prolific in providing material for that denunciation. Over the last 15 years or so, 20 years, there have been assaults on the person of Christ, assaults on His nature but more directly on His work on the cross, the doctrine of justification, the biblical doctrine of justification at the heart of the gospel, most notably in a movement called “The New Perspective on Paul,” which was a denial of the doctrine of imputation and justification. There is no end of literature that has been amassed, a huge library of literature defending the doctrine of justification, defending the Son of God against these attacks. But no one member of the Trinity in the same period of time has been attacked nearly to the degree that the Holy Spirit has been attacked, and I say for about ten years there has been virtually nothing to come to the defense of a biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit. And as a result, there is confusion if not indifference toward Him and a lack of ability to worship Him for who He is, and He should be worshiped.

We understand blasphemy of the Holy Spirit from non-Christians. We understand blasphemy of the Holy Spirit from false Christians and false teachers. But we, as Christians, while not blaspheming the Holy Spirit can be guilty of grieving the Holy Spirit. And it is a grief to the Holy Spirit, of course, for us to sin because we sin against Him who is in us, but it is a grief to the Holy Spirit to think wrongly about Him, to underestimate what He does, to be unappreciative or ungrateful, to fail to worship Him out of a grasp of the wondrous grace and the wondrous power of His continuing work on our behalf all the way to eternal glory.

So we have been looking at Romans 8 to refocus on the Holy Spirit, to fully embrace Him in our worship. We know that God the Father initiated the work of salvation, God the Son validated and demonstrated the work of salvation, and the Holy Spirit activates and completes the work of salvation in the believer. We have literally begun to catalogue the work of the Holy Spirit for us as believers. He regenerates us, He participates in our justification, He sanctifies us, He confirms our adoption as sons of God, He indwells us, He baptizes us, immerses us into the union with other believers that we call the body of Christ. He gives us spiritual gifts by which we minister to one another. He strengthens us in the inner man for all righteousness. He guides us. He produces right attitudes in us. He delivers us from sin. He illuminates the Scripture to our understanding. But His greatest work and that which brings us the greatest joy is that He guarantees our future glory, He guarantees our eternal glory. And, of course, at this point the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement renders against Him one of the greatest insults of all by denying the doctrine of eternal security, perseverance of the saints, and attacking His most wondrous work by claiming that He does not necessarily keep all believers secure and safe until eternal glory.

This week I was reading the writings of Charles Finney, whose ministry attacked a lot of things in the Scripture, not the least of which was this doctrine. Finney said, “You are sealed by the Spirit but you can shatter the seal.” The testimony of the Word of God is not consistent with that error.

Listen to the words of Ephesians 1:13-14. In Him – that is, in Christ – you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory. We are God’s possession; God will redeem us to the praise of His own glory. The Holy Spirit is given as a pledge of that future redemption, which is called our inheritance, and that is why He is identified as the Spirit of promise because He is the guarantee of God’s promise of heaven.

Peter similarly writes: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who, according to His great mercy, has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God, for a salvation to be revealed in the last time.” The Holy Spirit is the seal, the guarantee, the down payment, the first fruits, the earnest, the power, the protector of every true believer, who brings us to final glory.

That becomes the theme of Romans 8 starting in verse 17. Verse 17, you first read the word “glorified,” and from then on to verse 39, it is all focused on our future glory and the plans that God has to secure us to that end. We’ve gone through all of that in great detail. We’ve learned in verses 26 and 27 that the Holy Spirit constantly from within every true believer is interceding for us in a communion that is not in any language. It is too deep for words. It is inter-Trinitarian groaning in which the Spirit intercedes, praying for our eternal glory consistently with God who knows what His plans are and has purposed our glory. And the Spirit, as well, knows the plans of God, the heart of God. So God has a plan. Christ provided for the fulfillment of that plan. The Spirit prays for the completion of that plan in accord with the Will of God.

As a result, verse 28 says, “Everything works together for good.” Things, as we live life, God has a good purpose in them, that is true for His glory. But this is primarily talking about ultimate, final good. All things are working together for good because we have been loved by God and love Him in return according to His purpose.

So the Spirit then effects the good intention and ending and purpose of God on our behalf. The plan of God, He foreknew us, He predestined us, He called us, He justified us, and He will glorify us, and our glory will be conforming us to the image of His Son, verse 29 says. We’ve gone through all of that in detail. God has a plan to choose people that He will glorify. Christ provides the sacrifice that pays for their sin to make the plan possible. The Holy Spirit becomes the power of the plan. He regenerates us, sanctifies us, protects us, and one day will raise us to glory. We are caught up in that plan. We are as secure as the Father’s plan because what God purposes, He does. We are as secure as the Son’s provision. Christ actually paid in full for all our sins – not a potential payment, but an actual payment. And we are, thirdly, as secure as the power of the Holy Spirit who intercedes and who keeps us to glory.

Now, having said all of that great theology, come to verse 31, where we dropped off last time, and

Paul knows there will be some objections. So he assumes that there would be objections from some who would say, "Well, maybe there are some persons who can change this. Maybe there are some persons who can influence a dramatic alteration in the plan of God." Like Finney says, "You can shatter the seal." I read a couple of other writers who hold that view and they said the same thing, "The Holy Spirit seals you as long as you don't break the seal." Is that possible? So we could ask the question, "Are there some humans that can do that?" What shall we say to these things? Are there some humans that can do it? The answer, verse 31: "If God is for us, who's against us?" Are there humans stronger than God? If God is for us, does it really matter who might be against us? Does it matter who might want to destroy our faith? If God is for us, that settles it because there is no power greater than God. There is no human or human system or human religion or human influence or human society or human form of education or human pressure that is greater than God.

"Well," you say, "maybe God would do it. Maybe God would be weary of us." God? Verse 32 answers that. "He who didn't spare His own Son but delivered Him over for us all"? You mean God who when we were enemies gave us the best gift, His Son? He would turn against us? The end of verse 32: "How will He not also with Him, with His Son, freely give us all things?" That's an argument from the greater to the lesser. If when we were enemies He gave the best gift to save us, will He not now that we are children of His give us lesser gifts to keep us? That's just logical. That's the argument from the greater to the lesser. God, who did the most for us, gave the best gift when we were enemies of His, will do whatever lesser things He needs to do now that we're His sons to keep us.

Somebody might say, "Well, what about Satan? Maybe Satan can pull us out of the hands of God, he's very powerful." He tried it with Job, he tried it with Peter, he tried it with Paul and he tried it with the high priest in Zechariah chapter 3. You have four illustrations of it in Scripture. He is identified here in verse 33: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" Or verse 34: Who is the one who condemns? Who is the one who is that's always before God condemning us? Who's the accuser of the brethren? Revelation 12:10. Satan and his demons as well gather around the presence of God and bring endless accusations against believers night and day, it says in Scripture. Can he succeed, the accuser of the brethren? Could he break Job's faith? No. Could he break Peter's faith when he tried to sift Peter? Could he break Paul when messenger demons literally were tearing into the ministry of Paul? Was that enough to shatter Paul? Can he successfully bring a condemning accusation that'll cause God to turn?

Well, for one thing, saving faith can't be broken, the purpose of God can't be thwarted, but you also have the additional reality of Christ at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us against all accusations and saying again and again, "For that I paid in full in My death."

Well then, somebody might suggest, "Boy, we're in trouble if Christ turns against us. What if Christ were to turn against us?" Verse 34: What? Christ Jesus is He who died, yea rather, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God. In other words, He died for us, He was raised for us, His death and resurrection were the perfect satisfaction of God, and thus He was exalted at the right hand of God, having fully accomplished our redemption and who also intercedes for us. He is the great high priest who intercedes for us, our great heavenly advocate.

It won't be any humans because God is more powerful than they. Won't be God because He gave us the best when we were enemies. It won't be Satan because he can't successfully bring a condemnation against us – Christ has already paid in full for them. It won't be Christ – He ever lives

to make intercession for us. Only one possibility remains then. Us. You can break the seal. You can shatter the seal, as Finney put it. Can you? Why would you do that? Oh, circumstances in life. Well, life could get pretty tough. As long as everything is going good – that was the argument with Job, wasn't it? He's blessed, he's rich, he's got it all, family, crops, animals, wealth – no wonder he's faithful. Can we literally exercise power to sever our relationship to the Lord? Can our faith dissolve, break, crumble under certain circumstances?

So we go from persons in verses 32 to 34 – 31 to 34, to circumstances in verses 35 to 37, follow them, it's just pretty simple. This is worst-case scenario. The question is: Who will or what will, brought by who – who – behind all these whats, there's a who. If there's tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, somebody's responsible for that. These are the kind of circumstances that are extreme. Can extreme circumstances destroy our faith, cause us to abandon the Holy Spirit? Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Just a reminder that what holds us is the love of Christ for us. That's what's hold us, the love of Christ for us. It's mentioned in verse 39, by the way, as the love of God – the love of God. And I might add, it encompasses the love of the Holy Spirit. We are loved by the Trinity. Can something happen to cause that love to be broken?

Well, let's paint a picture of extremity. Seven hypothetical realities escalating, tribulation – tribulation, that's outside pressure. Things are going bad on the outside and this assumes attacks coming at us. The word *thlipsis* means – it's a squeezing, outward difficulty, rejection, trouble, harm. It's putting pressure on us on the outside. The next word, distress, is a word that refers to inside pressure. It's two words that mean to be crunched into a narrow space but it has to do with the inside. When outside pressure comes, it has an effect on the inside, right? You start to react to it, fear, anxiety, doubt, questions, dread, and you become victimized by a certain level of panic. You lose your sense of confidence because the pressure is so great.

Can pressure come on the outside that can cause you to be so compressed on the inside that you literally are led into fear and anxiety and it gets worse? And then persecution. This is abuse – abuse – and for the purpose of this argument by Paul, it would be abuse for the testimony of Jesus, physical suffering, mental suffering, things are really going badly for you now. This is the worst-case scenario. You got all kinds of issues on the outside crushing you in, they get on the inside and they begin to produce anxiety, fear, and dread and then it gets worse, outright persecution, *diōgmos* breaks out at the hands of Christ rejecters. It gets extreme because famine follows. You don't get food. You're deprived, maybe you're in jail, you're in prison. That is not the end of it, it gets even worse. You're in rags. There's no provision for you. You end up naked, you need clothes. It gets worse. You're in peril, you're on the dangerous edge, and finally they start rattling a sword. It's the end.

Can that do it? That's the worst-case scenario. You're about to be martyred. You're about to have your head hacked off. Well, by the way, that's Paul's personal testimony, and it happened more than once that he got to the brink of peril. And it finally happened that his head was cut off by a sword. Can that drive you to doubt? Can that drive you to reject Jesus Christ? Can that drive you to turn away from Christ? Turn away from God? Can that do it? And he quotes from Psalm 44 to say that this is kind of the experience that the people of God have had through history, not just us. He's quoting from Psalm 44. There's a plea from the people of God in the Old Testament for God to deliver them because they're in distress. "For Your sake we're being put to death all day long, we're considered sheep to be slaughtered." They were suffering in the past. As you know, Israel suffered at the hands of its enemies many times. Being connected to God can be a very dangerous situation. It

happened then, it happens now. And when it happens, is that enough to shatter us? Smash the seal?

One of the wonderful treasures that I have is a original set of the *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Three volumes. You stack them up, they're that thick and they're this big – huge things. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* contains the testimony of literally hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who went through that process that Paul just described here and ended up at the sword or the flame, burned at the stake, or myriad ways that they were executed. And the books are a testimony to the fact that their faith did not fail – could not fail – because they had a faith designed by God, a supernatural faith just like yours.

“In this you greatly rejoice,” Peter goes on to say, “for a little while if necessary you've been distressed” – there's that same word – “by various trials so that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” And then he says this: “Though you don't see Him, you love Him.” Even then you love Him. You don't turn on Him, you don't resent Him, you love Him. You love Him all the way to death.

Verse 37 sums it up: “In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” We love Him because what? He loved us first. No, there's no circumstance that's going to break this. There is no circumstance that'll separate us from the love of Christ. There's no circumstance that will separate us from the love of God. There is no person who will separate us from that love, the love of the Trinity. It is not possible. There is no power that can shatter our faith. There is no power that can break the seal of the Spirit. There is no accusation against us that Christ has not paid for in full. There is no higher court than God, and there's no greater power than the secure power of the Holy Spirit. We come out *hupernikōmen*, *hupernikaō*. You get the word Nike from the Greek verb to conquer, to be the victor, super-victor, huper-victor. We are more than conquerors; we overwhelmingly conquer, not in in our own strength, but through Him who loved us. Through Him who loved us.

Trial, no matter how severe, tests our faith and proves it true. Therefore, it's to our greater good and our greater joy, even in the most severe suffering. It does something else. It earns an eternal weight of glory in the life to come. This kind of extremity/severity makes a nobler Christian here and a stronger Christian, not a weaker one, and one whose faith is firm and whose assurance is settled. It's the proof of your faith when it stands that test. It proves you have the real thing, and that's a gift of God to rejoice over, and it also leads to a greater reward.

Paul wrote this while he was in Corinth in the winter, and he had no idea, nor did the church at Rome to whom he wrote, that a short time would elapse and then they would see him in this very situation. He would stand in need of the very comforting truths which he wrote in this chapter because all the things that are written in the list, he would experience. He would himself be this time killed by a sword. And the readers in Rome would be caught up in persecution, men and women whose blood would soak the sands of the great Roman arenas and amphitheaters. But the honor of Christ and the love of Christ was safe in their keeping because they were safe in His keeping. They didn't need to fear any of these things, including death. They were mauled by wild beasts, they were soaked in tar and lit as torches, they fought with men and beasts and hell's demons, but they were safe in the love of Christ, safe in the love of God, safe in the protecting love of the Holy Spirit. Safe until they entered into glory.

Paul ends by saying, “We’re super conquerors.” And then there’s a beautiful closing refrain, verses 38 and 39, that almost shouldn’t be explained, it should just be read or sung. For I am convinced – are you? Are you convinced of this great truth? I am persuaded, I am confident, I have come to a settled conclusion that neither death, the great enemy, or life with all its dangers and difficulties, its temptations and troubles, nor angels, holy angels, hypothetically, nor principalities, unholy angels, demons, nor things present, nor things to come, the here and now or the future, nor powers – that’s plural in the New Testament and when it’s used plural in the New Testament, the Greek form, it refers to miracles, mighty works, some supernatural power – nothing, so far, not death, not life, not holy angels, not fallen angels, not anything happening now or anything in the future, not any supernatural, mighty, transcendent power, nor height – that is a term that refers to a star at the apex of its orbit – nor depth, bathos – that’s the star at the lowest point of its orbit, nothing at the highest point of the universe or the lowest point of the universe – nothing, nor any other created thing, nothing in life, nothing in death, nothing in the world of angels, nothing in the world of demons, nothing in time, nothing in eternity, no miracle power, nothing on earth, nothing in heaven from the edges of space, nothing, no created thing in the entire created universe will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jeremiah 31:3: God says, “I’ve loved you with an everlasting love.” That, dear friends, is because we are kept by the Holy Spirit. We need to worship Him for that gracious work. Let’s pray.

Lord, we thank You that we have been able to look at the glory of our salvation in this wonderful way, through the ministry in particular of the Holy Spirit. We know that Christ even went to the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we come to remember His death for us, we want to be grateful from the bottom of our hearts for this massive work of salvation that began in eternity past with election, went through the cross, out the open tomb, and is produced in us by the ongoing ministry of the dear Holy Spirit. We worship You, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for this mighty work of amazing grace. We thank You for it. As we come now to remember the cross of Christ, cleanse our hearts, fill us with praise – praise as it should be offered to You, our great God.

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