

EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 8:31-39

Introduction

Romans 8:31-39 is a passage that bears the very lifeblood of the gospel. It is about the reality of God's love for us, which He has been able to show through the giving of His only Son. It is an intimate articulation of election and an emotional exposition of the astounding truth of the believer's position in Christ. This passage is an excellent text to assure the believer of his security in Christ. It leaves no room for antinomianism, yet the passage is clear that God is the one who has made us righteous, and He is the one who will keep us righteous.

Lexical Study

Textual Variants

There are only a few variants in the selected text, the first being in verse 34, where *Χριστο ζ* has *ΗΙΦΣΟΥΖ* either following it or absent from it. Metzger points out that the evidence for either reading is so balanced that the "Committee considered it preferable to retain the word but to enclose it within square brackets."¹ In light of Paul's clear reference to Christ being Jesus in verse 39, either reading is equally sufficient.

The second variant is found in verse 35, where *αγαπηζ του Χριστου*, the strongest supported reading, and *αγαπηζ του Θεου* are found. Metzger says that the weaker reading is likely a "scribal harmonization with ver. 39,"² which seems to be a good suggestion. As with the

¹ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary to the Greek New Testament*. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 2002), 458

² *Ibid.*, 458

variant in verse 34, either choice makes little difference, since Paul is very clear that the love for the elect is made possible through the work of Jesus Christ.

The final variant is found in verse 38. Here some of the most miniscule manuscripts place *ουτε δυναμειζ* before *ουτε ενεστωτα*, apparently in attempt to make the sequence seem more logical.³ The reading would then have “rulers” and “powers” together, putting together a logically connecting pair. However, the best texts do not support this reading, and the text remains precisely effective regardless of the order.

Grammatical and Syntactical Analysis

Verse 31 of chapter 8 is, for the most part, clear in its meaning. The question *τι ουω ερουμεν προσ ταυτα* is a rhetorical question used to introduce a new topic or conclusion.⁴ Young says that the question is “basically equivalent to ‘therefore,’ although more provocative.”⁵ The phrase is connecting the previous material with the material to come after it. Wallace suggests that *ταυτα* may refer both to an antecedent and a postcedent.⁶ The preposition *υπερ*, which is usually translated to mean “in behalf of,” is important to consider in verse 31. The prepositional phrase *υπερ φμων* is used adjectivally, modifying *θεοζ*, which ascribes to God the type of love that He has for His people. Robertson says that *υπερ* tends to mean “‘over’ in the sense of protection or defense.”⁷ This would explain the common interpretation of “in behalf

³ Ibid., 458

⁴ Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 223.

⁵ Ibid., 223.

⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 333-334

⁷ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1971), 630.

of” or even “for one’s benefit,” since in protecting something one is also for its benefit.⁸

Τις καθ' ἑμῶν is a relative clause conditional⁹ to the statement *εἰ ὁ θεὸς ὑπερ*– “If God is for the benefit of us [*then*] who is against us?”

Verse 32 opens with another relative clause, *ὅς γε τοῦ ἰδίου υἱοῦ οὐκ ἐφείσατο*, functioning with the nuance of grounds–conclusion.¹⁰ Moo thinks that the lack of a connecting conjunction (asyndeton) between verse 32 and verse 31 give it a “solemn and elevated style.”¹¹ The verb *ἐφείσατο*, should be viewed as a culminative aorist, since in context Paul is referring to the completed act of Christ which has brought His people to reconciliation with God, whereas before that act God was *καθ' ἑμῶν* (v. 31). The independent clause *πῶς καὶ σὺν αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα φμὶν χαρίζεται* is the conclusion to the previously stated grounds. Paul completes his reasoning with a rhetorical question (i.e., “If God has done this, will He not do these things as well?”), adding emphasis to the point Paul is trying to make about God’s love for His people. This emphasis is further clarified by Paul’s usage of *γε*, which is an emphatic conjunction.¹²

Paul continues reasoning with rhetorical questions in verse 33. Robertson says that *κατὰ* used here with the genitive should be translated as “down upon,” as in the putting upon of a burden or weight.¹³ In this case, that weight is the condemnation due to one’s sin. Another

⁸ Richard Young uses the word “benefaction” to describe this usage of *ὑπερ*. Young, *Intermediate*. 101.

⁹ Young, *Intermediate*. 231

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹¹ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 539.

¹² Wallace, *Greek Grammar*. 673

¹³ *Ibid.*, 607.

important consideration to make is with *εκλεκτων θεου*, which some may translate “chosen of God.” However, Wallace points out that this is a genitive of agency, which indicates the “*personal agent by whom the action in view is accomplished.*” When an adjective is followed by a personal noun in the genitive, “of” must be replaced with “by.”¹⁴ The translation then would read “chosen *by* God.” This is significant, because one can be “of” something but not necessarily “by” it. There can be eight ounces *of* water but not necessarily eight ounces *by* water (water being the *reason* for the eight ounces). This distinction elevates the sovereignty of God in the salvation of man—this is crucial. God is *ο δικαιων*. Also note that the repetition of *θεος* may be an epizeuxis.

For the fourth time in three verses, Paul uses a rhetorical question to delineate his reasoning. The most important grammatical issue for verse 34 seems to be with the statement *τις ο κατακρινων* (most commonly translated “Who is to condemn?”). Robertson suggests that since there is no interrogative particle, it is doubtful whether the statement is interrogative or declarative.¹⁵ However, there are a few reasons why this statement is most likely a question. First, the previous statements by Paul where he also did not use an interrogative particle do not make sense unless they are translated as questions. This fact establishes the tendency that Paul asks questions without using a particle. Second, if the statement is not a question, then it is declaring Christ as the one condemning, and it would not make sense for Christ to be the one condemning while at the same time being the very one who was given “up for us all” and who is “indeed interceding for us.” The whole context of the passage is about why we are *not* condemned. Therefore, it seems only logical for the statement to be interrogative. Paul answers

¹⁴ Ibid., 126.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the question by explaining that Christ’s continuing work is the very reason why He *cannot* condemn His people. The phrase *μαλλον δε εγερθεισ* may be an anacolouthon. The verse might read “Who is to condemn? Christ is the one who died—but more than that, was raised!—and also is . . .”

Verse 35 is fairly straightforward, though the syntax of the phrase *την αγαπην του Χριστου* needs significant attention. The phrase is correctly translated “the love of Christ,” but it is crucial to understand that this refers to Christ’s love for His people, not His people’s love for Him. The reason for this distinction is due to the genitive *του Χριστου* being a subjective genitive. Young says that a subjective genitive is where “the genitive represents a deep structure subject, and the verbal noun represents a deep structure verb.”¹⁶ This means that the genitive *Χριστου* is the subject of the verbal noun *την αγαπην*. Thus, the literal translation might be “Christ loves” or more appropriately “the Christ’s love for us.”¹⁷ This translation is determined by context. Wallace explains that the context makes clear that “The stress is not on what we do to maintain the ties to heaven, but on what God has done in Christ to bring our election to glory.”¹⁸ The ending of verse 35 is an itemized listing part of Paul’s rhetorical question. These items do not seem to be in any significant order.

The next verse could very well be an anacolouthon. According to Douglas Moo, verse 36 is “something of an interruption in the flow of thought, and one that is typical for Paul.”¹⁹ In this apparent spontaneous quotation of Psalm 44:22 (from the LXX), Paul seems to attempt to

¹⁶ Young, *Intermediate*. 30.

¹⁷ The latter translation has been suggested by Wallace. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*. 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁹ Douglas Moo, *Epistle to Romans*. 543.

emphasize further the type of suffering that Christians will undergo. Not only will they suffer, but they will suffer “all day.” Another important issue involves the phrase *προβατα σφαγης*. It is important to understand that this phrase is an objective genitive, which is where the genitive “indicates where the head noun is going.”²⁰ This means that the translation might read “destined for slaughter.” Theologically, then, this means that there is not only a chance that we *might* be for the slaughter, but we are *destined* inevitably for the slaughter in some form. Moo says that his verse is appropriate since “the rabbis applied the verse to the death of martyrs.”²¹

Moo suggests that the conjunction *αλλα* in verse 37 is the answer to the question in verse 35.²² The word *υπερνικωμεν* is important to consider. It is the combination of the preposition *υπερ* and a participle form of the verb *νικαω* meaning literally “the one who over-conquers.” The believer is not only a conqueror of such doom, but he is *over* conquering. He is past conquering. It’s not even a question of whether he will conquer. And this over-conquering is contingent upon *του αγαποσαντος φμας* (“the one loving us”). Moo suggests that the aorist form of this participle “focuses our attention on the love manifested on the cross.”²³

The last two verses of chapter 8 are grammatically regular, with the exception of a few issues. The word *πεπεισμαι*, though it is in the perfect tense, is not to be translated “I was persuaded,” but rather “I *am* persuaded.” Wallace explains that this translation is due to the word being a perfect with a “present force.”²⁴ Perfect tense verbs of this nature are “resultative perfects

²⁰ Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 101.

²¹ Moo, *Epistle to Romans*, 544.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 579.

to the point that the act itself has virtually died; the results have become the act.”²⁵ The perfect tense verb *οἶδα* (“I know”) is the best example of this phenomenon, but it happens with other verbs as well. Syntactically, this is significant, since the event of Paul’s being persuaded was not only an event of the past, but also an event of the present and future. Another grammatical issue in these verses is the use of the conjunction *οὐτε*. Here we have a polysyndeton which is used with the effect of pairs.²⁶ Paul may be using this literary form for emphasis.

Whether he is mindful of this specifically, he does in effect eloquently place emphasis on the fact that absolutely nothing can separate the believer from the love of Christ. Notice also that at the end of verse 39 there is the same issue of the objective genitive as discussed from verse 35.

Lexical Study

This section of the paper will discuss the etymology of the words *παρέδωκεν* (v. 32), *ἐγκαλέσει* (v. 33), *δικαιῶν* (v. 33), *ἐντυγχάνει* (v. 34), *χωρίσει* (v. 35), and *ὑπερνικῶμεν* (v. 37).

παρέδωκεν. This word is the aorist active indicative 3rd person singular verb form of *παραδίδωμι*, which means “I entrust” or “I hand over.” The word is obviously related to *δίδωμι*, which is seen in various forms throughout ancient literature. The related word *δῶρων* means “gift,” and is found in the writings of Philo. The form *δωρεάν* means “freely” or “for nothing” in the LXX and NT (including the post-apostolic fathers). It is also significant that *παρέδωκεν* is found often in the passion story (i.e., Mark 14:10; 15:1; Luke 23:25) with the connotation of “handing over” or “delivering up.” This form can also be seen in Plato’s *Euthydemus* in the sense of self-sacrifice.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 580.

²⁶ Robertson, *Grammar*, 427.

ἐγκαλέσει. This future active indicative 3rd person singular form of the derived verb *καλέω* means “He will bring a charge.” Throughout the history of the word, even into secular Greek, *ἐγκαλέω* has meant “to demand as one’s due (to “call for” or “call in”), and then to make a claim or bring an accusation against someone, usually in a context of actual or threatened legal proceedings.”²⁸ The LXX uses *ἐγκαλέω* three times, each time for a different Hebrew word. The word is usually used in the legal sense of the word (i.e., Acts 19:38, 40; 23:28-29; 26:2, 7). The usage of *ἐγκαλέω* in Romans 8:33 is the only theological use of the word in the New Testament.²⁹

δικαιῶν. This word can either be the present active masculine participle or the masculine plural genitive of the form *δίκαιος* which means “one who conforms, who is civilized, who observes customs.” In Biblical Greek *δίκαιος* is used in the theological sense of “righteous one.” Based on the context of the passage, it is clear that *δικαιῶν* is in the participle form (“God is the one who justifies.”). The derived stem of *δικαιῶν* has a rich history of usage. In the Hellenistic world, Plato, Philo, and Xenophon all used the word in the sense of fulfilling religious duties.³⁰ Josephus used the word to include both the fear of God and goodwill to men.³¹ Both Plato and Philo commonly used the word in lists of virtues (i.e., “faithful to the law”).³² In the LXX, *δίκαιος* is used in the distinct sense of a “man who fulfils his duties towards God and the theocratic society, meeting God’s claim in this relationship.”³³ In the New Testament, *δίκαιος*

²⁷ Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 170.

²⁸ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary*, 84.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 182.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 183.

is drastically separated from the Greek ideal of virtue. With the exception of *δίκαιος* from the Roman standpoint in the Gospels (i.e., Matt 27:19; 27:24), the word is commonly understood in the context of God's judgement (i.e., Rev 16:5; 16:7; 19:2). A newer usage of *δίκαιος* not explicitly present in the OT is its "connection with the atoning death of Christ in which God shows Himself to be *δίκαιος*."³⁴ The NT also uses the word in reference to men who do God's will (i.e., Matt 23:25; Heb 1:14; John 3:12) and also in reference to the Christian who truly fulfils the Law (i.e., Matt 10:41; 13:49; 25:37, 46. "The point newly emphasized by Paul is that [the Christian] cannot have life except by faith. The *δίκαιος*, then, is that one who is justified by faith."³⁵

έντυγχάνει. This word is the present active indicative 3rd person singular form of the verb *έντυγχάνω* which typically means "I plead" or "I appeal." Outside of biblical texts *έντυγχάνω* has numerous meanings during the first four centuries. Herodotus and Sophocles used it to mean "to run up against something or someone [in a bad sense]."³⁶ Plato and Sophocles have used the word to refer to visits that may concern a complaint. Aristophanes and Demosthenes have used it to mean "to find oneself somewhere."³⁷ In the LXX, *έντυγχάνω* is used with or without *κατά* to mean "I complain" (i.e., Dan 6:13; 1 Macc 8:32; 10:61).³⁸ In Hellenistic writings the word is used with genitive objects to mean "to kill those who encounter

³³ Ibid., 185.

³⁴ Ibid., 188.

³⁵ Ibid., 191.

³⁶ Ibid., 242.

³⁷ Ibid., 243.

³⁸ Ibid.

one.”³⁹ Philo has used it to mean “to turn” to God in prayer. Josephus sometimes used it to mean “to raise” a complaint.⁴⁰ In the NT, the word is used in the sense of approaching someone with a complain (i.e., Rom 11:2; Acts 15:24). It is also used in the sense of interceding (Romans 8:26, 34). These three uses in Romans chapter 8 are the only times Paul uses the verb, and his usage of the verb is dependent upon an underlying theological idea understood from the context.⁴¹

χωρίσει. This word is the future active indicative 3rd person singular form of the verb *χωρίζω* which means “I separate” or “I leave.” In secular Greek, the word was used in a literal sense to denote separation between the soul and the body at death or the division of opposing military forces. The word can also be used metaphorically to indicate a separation in thought.⁴² In the LXX, the term can mean the spatial separation of persons (Lev 13:46; Judg 4:11). It can refer to the separation from evil (Ezra 9:1; Neh 9:2). It was also found in the papyri to be used in connection with divorce.⁴³ In the NT, *χωρίζω* can refer to spatial separation (Acts 1:3; 18:1, 2), divorce (Matt 19:3-9; Mark 1:2-9; Luke 16:18). The usages of the word in Romans 8:35, 39 are figurative.

ὑπερνικῶμεν. This word is the present active indicative 1st person plural form of the verb *ὑπερνικάω* which means “I over-conquer.” The word is clearly a derivative from the stem *νικάω* which means “I conquer.” Non-biblical sources generally use this word to denote victory (i.e., Sophocles, Oedipus, etc.). The most interesting secular use of the word is from the Greeks

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Brown, *New International Dictionary*, 534.

⁴³ Ibid.

who worshiped the goddess *Νίκη*, otherwise known as the goddess of victory. In the LXX, the word was used in the context of military victory (2 Sam 2:26; 2 Esdr 4:5; Wis 16:10), victory of God (Ezek 3:8; 2 Macc 13:15; 1 Chr 29:11). In the NT we see the victory of the strong man (Luke 11:22), the victory of the beast (Rev 11:7), the victory of the horseman (Rev 6:2), the victory of the white horse (Rev 13:7), and the victory of the new heaven and earth (Rev 21:7). The word *ὑπερνικάω* is used only the one time in Romans 8:37.⁴⁴

Exegetical Study

The book of Romans is one of the most beloved books of the Bible, largely because of its powerful systematic explanation of justification through grace alone, which is by the imputation of Christ's righteousness (cf. Rom 4:5, 24; 5:18, etc.). Paul begins by expounding the depravity of man (ch. 1 and 2), then the futility of salvation by works (ch. 3), then the doctrine of faith (ch. 4), then the power by which faith operates (ch. 5), then the importance of works (ch. 6), then the impossibility to maintain perfect works (chapter 7), and then what appears to be the summation of all of the previous chapters in the giant explosion of chapter 8, with the finale in verses 31 through 39.

Verse 31. In the previous 30 verses, Paul has spent thorough articulation on the condition of one who is in Christ. The Christian is to be condemned by no one, yet he is to be mindful of the fruit of being set free in Christ, that he is to be "led by the Spirit of God" (v. 14) and not of the flesh. Paul then elaborates further on this theme, explaining that being led by the Spirit is to wait for the complete fulfillment of our salvation, just as the whole creation awaits for that completion. Then Paul assures believers that God is with us, that the Holy Spirit is groaning and interceding for us before God. And to seal the reality of these truths, Paul gives a strong

⁴⁴ Ibid., 945.

testimony of God's electing love. The Christian's faith is secure because of Christ's irreversible love, not our love for Christ. Then in verse 31 Paul asks the inevitable question, "What else is there to say? If God is on our side defending us, then who can possibly stand against us?" And the chapter could have been ended here, but Paul wants to preach!

Verse 32. This verse seems to be an extension of the question in the previous verse. "If God did not even spare His own Son, will He not also generously give us all things?" It seems that in context this verse is speaking specifically of election and the continual process of salvation. In other words, if God has paid the ultimate price of His Son, then is it not only reasonable that God will finish the work that He has begun by His Son's atonement? Will He not freely give all things that are necessary to remain secure in Him until the end? This interpretation is supported in the next verse by the emphasis on God's elect. The free giving of God is in terms of our election, not in terms of worldly gifts, although those are certainly included.

Verse 33. In this verse, Paul probably is influenced by his knowledge of legal terms of the court. Keener reports that "Jewish texts express confidence that God would ultimately vindicate Israel, as he did each year on the Day of Atonement; Paul bases his confidence of believers' vindication on the advocacy of Christ."⁴⁵ Paul may have had some form of this idea in his mind, especially since in the very next chapter he explains why the natural Jewish descendants will not be vindicated unless they are in the promise based on faith. God is the vindicator, the *δικαιῶν*. The momentum continues to build!

Verse 34. Paul expounds on the theme of justification of God's elect by pointing to the source of that justification. "Who is the one condemning?" is another way of asking the question in verse 33. No one can condemn, since Christ, the one who died, and, moreover, who was

⁴⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 431.

raised, and is in the right hand of God, and is also interceding on our behalf. This verse is the linchpin of the entire passage. It is because of Christ that no one can stand against believers, that they will be freely given all things, that they are justified in protection from any charges, and that they are safe from being condemned.

Verses 35-36. These verses seem to be the beginning of a gushing emotional outpour for the next five verses. In other words, if what has been previously said in verses 31-34, then it is only correct to say that absolutely nothing in existence can change the security of the Christian's justified state by God through Christ's redeeming act. Paul's previous experiences as a Christian are important here. With the exception of the "sword,"⁴⁶ Paul has experienced at least once all of the things that he listed. He had been through trouble, suffering, and danger. He knew what it meant undergo physical abuse, hunger, and nakedness.⁴⁷ This is powerful, then, because Paul still could all the more say, "After all these hardships Christ has still not separated Himself from me. He has not left me!" Verse 37 seems to be a continuation of "sword," since it probably refers to martyrdom.⁴⁸ Paul says, "And by the way, do you remember that this has already been foretold? We are like sheep destined to be slaughtered! But even this isn't enough to separate us from the love Christ has for us!"

Verse 37. Keener says that verses 37-39 form a chiasm, with verse 37 being the centerpiece.⁴⁹ Whether Paul intentionally wrote a chiasm, this verse is still the climax of verses 35-39. Even after all such suffering, the believer is ultimately a conqueror—no, more than a

⁴⁶ Keener reports that "'Sword'" was the standard mode of citizen execution in this period." Keener, *Bible Background*, 432.

⁴⁷ "'Nakedness'" was applied to insufficient dress not only to complete exposure." *Ibid.*, 432.

⁴⁸ see footnote number 20.

⁴⁹ Keener, *Bible Background*, 432.

conqueror—of all things, through the One loving us. As with verse 32, context is especially important here. The verse is talking about the over-conquering of those things that might normally be agents of separation, and in the case of Christ’s love for us, nothing can separate us from that. So then, one cannot take this verse to mean that he will over-succeed in the face of every obstacle, since many believers have, in a worldly sense, been conquered by various afflictions. Many things may overcome the Christian, and he may even lose his life, but nothing can defeat his position in Christ. This is what is meant by “over-conquer.”

Verses 38-39. These verses are further exposition of the theme on justification, and the conclusion of Paul’s outburst of excited elaboration of the believer’s security in Christ. Here Paul definitely seems to have been emotionally charged. He has expounded a theme which he had succinctly stated in verse 31, but he continued to delineate the amazing message of the believer’s security for eight more verses. And to make sure that there is no room for doubt, Paul says that nothing else in all creation will be able to separate the believer from the love that God in Christ Jesus our Lord has for him. The true believer will not fall away. He will persevere until the end, because he is an over-conqueror of all things through Christ who loves him!

Theological-Historical Study

Origen

Origen believed that Romans 8:31-39 articulated the doctrine of God’s elect. He believed that Christians are elect because “the Spirit of God dwells in us . . . because we have received the Spirit of adoption, because we are children of God.”⁵⁰ Origen also believed that the Son was given up “not only for the holy and the great but also for all everywhere who are

⁵⁰ Mark J. Edwards, *Romans* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 237.

members of the church.”⁵¹ It’s hard to understand how Origen made a distinction between “holy Christians” and “other Christians,” when the NT is clear that we are *all* made holy. He believed that unless, after sinning again, we “wash the sin away by tears of repentance,”⁵² Christ’s intercession for our behalf will be of no effect. This teaching is contrary to the very thing Paul said in the first verse of the chapter. There is *no* condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; and believers are free from the condemnation of their sins in the past, present, and future. I agree with Origen when he said in reference to Romans 8:36, “It is not enough for me to die or be crucified with Christ at one time only but *all the day long*, i.e., throughout my entire life. Christ taught that we must take up our cross daily. Interestingly, Origen believed that if a believer relied on God’s love, he will “suffer no feeling of pain.”⁵³ Though he was speaking with respect to martyrdom, his notion is absent from biblical teaching. This teaching is not the message of Romans 8:37, as I have previously argued.

John Calvin

Calvin believed that in Romans 8:31-39 Paul “[broke out] into exclamations, by which he sets forth the magnanimity with which the faithful ought to be furnished when adversities urge them to despond.”⁵⁴ Paul taught that God’s “paternal favour”⁵⁵ is connected with the over-conquering courage of the believer. Though the surroundings of the believer may easily lead him

⁵¹ Ibid., 239

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans*. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), 321.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

to despair, Paul teaches that the believer is not to “confine themselves to the sad spectacle of our present warfare.”⁵⁶ Instead, the “consecrated in Christ”⁵⁷ are “to lay hold, above all things, on the paternal love of God, that relying on this shield they may boldly triumph over all evils.”⁵⁸ Calvin says that “while God is propitious to us we shall be safe against all dangers. He does not, however, mean, that nothing shall oppose us; but he promises a victory over all kinds of enemies.”⁵⁹ Calvin speaks after my own heart. His words are what I have spent the last thirteen pages trying to defend. The context of the passage is about victory in Christ our Savior. He is our Shield and Defender. I am not sure what Calvin meant by “victory over all kinds of enemies.” If he means some earthly victories over some enemies, then I think he missed the point of the passage. I have already argued that the passage refers to being victorious in the face of any opposition that might try to separate believers from the love of Christ.

Douglas Moo

Douglas Moo calls Romans 8:31-39 a “beautiful and familiar celebration of the believer’s security in Christ.”⁶⁰ It is “Paul’s rehearsal of the blessings that have been granted to the believer through the gospel.”⁶¹ Moo also agrees that this passage “could be the climax of the letter up to this point.”⁶² He sees the passage as being the “cap” of Paul’s discussion of Christian

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Moo, *Epistle to Romans*, 537.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

assurance in chapters 5 through 8. Moo notices two divisions in the passage: Verses 31-34 are “dominated by judicial imagery.”⁶³ Verses 35-39 are the expansion of the “picture by adding to our assurance for the ‘last day’ assurance and for all the days in between.” This assurance and victory comes on basis of the “love of God for us in Christ.”⁶⁴ This is the main theme of the passage. “God’s, or Christ’s, love is the motif of this paragraph, mentioned three times (vv. 35, 37, 39; cf. Rom. 5:5-8).”⁶⁵ Moo’s observations on this passage are in accord with my own. He sees the building momentum that seems to overflow at the end of chapter 8. He sees the summarizing character of the passage. The devotional style of Moo’s commentary on Romans is exemplary of a heart that discerns the spirit of Paul’s message in the epistle.

Homiletic Application and Translation

I picked Romans 8:31-39 because it is a passage that is very dear to my heart, and I am sure that it is dear to others as well. It is also a passage that I have been thinking about a great deal since I became a Christian, because it is the meat of the gospel. Paul says in verse 1 of chapter 8 that “God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.” This means that our fleshly pursuits of righteousness to attain favor with God are futile. In the language of Romans 5, *God* is the one who has reconciled us in righteousness to Him. We do not reconcile ourselves before God. God is the one who has elected and justified us by His Son, and therefore *no person or thing* can ever separate us from God, because what has been done is a complete and finished transaction. Christ is the one who died and was raised and *is* interceding on behalf of all believers. The love that Christ has poured out on us is irreversible and will continue flowing for

⁶³ Ibid., 538.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 539

all of eternity as we worship Him in the splendor of His majesty. And the more I think about these truths, the more I am astounded. This message of the gospel, at times, seems too wonderful to be true, and I can only bow before God and say, with all the worshipfulness that I can muster, “Thank you God. Help me to love you as you have loved me!”

How can the believer apply these things to his own walk with God? First, he can recognize that he can stand before the holy throne of God without fear of condemnation (see verses 31-34). A Christian is a new creation in Christ. The old has passed and the new has come. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If the believer has studied the character of God from the Scripture, he will know that God is mighty and terrible, and that no one can stand up to the fierceness of His wrath. God is the one who struck down Adab and Abihu. God is the one who devoured the rebellious sons of Korah. God is the one who swallowed the Egyptians in the sea. God is the one who struck down Ananias and Saphira for lying. These events should ignite fear in our hearts before a God, Who is indeed a consuming fire. But then we may put our full confidence in God, realizing that although He is greatly to be feared, He is also to be considered as one slow to anger and abounding in mercy to those that truly seek Him. As His children we may approach Him with all of our cares and anxieties. We may cast on Him our burdens, and we may do so without fear of Him releasing his mighty bow toward us. Instead, He looks upon us with the love of the Savior. He cares for us more than the most tender father cares for his son. These things are written to encourage us to go before our heavenly Father without fear of being punished for the sin for which Christ has already suffered punishment.

Second, we can be confident that once Christ takes lost sheep into His fold, they will never be cast out from Him (see verse 35). We are secure in Christ. Our salvation is based on a

price that has been fully paid; the ransom for our sin has been met, and no one can undo the transaction – not our future sin, not a priest, and not even Satan. Nothing can reverse the payment that has been made on our behalf. We have been completely covered by the blood of Christ, and therefore we may be confident that our joy in Christ will continue to abound in love and knowledge; and our place in heaven with the Savior is guaranteed through eternity. And although we must build the confidence that our faith is true by the display of our fruit, the Lord will not delay in building the confidence of his children in their salvation. Have you sinned a sin you feel cannot be erased? Have you done an abominable act that you feel is unforgivable? Have you committed the same sin so many times that you feel that you can never be forgiven one more time? The God of Jesus Christ forgives all sins. Not some. Not just the sins we commit infrequently. Not just the “small” sins. He forgives them all. No sin is too great, or deep, or wide, or abominable for the blood of Christ. His atonement is perfect, complete, whole, and irrevocable. When God looks upon us, He is not even able to look on us as a judge, because there is nothing to judge! He can see only perfect righteousness. We stand before Him in robes of white, glistening in the brilliance of His glory, not because we have robed ourselves in white, but because He has robed us in white!

Third, we may press on boldly against any oppressive forces, knowing that we will be victorious in the end (see verses 36-39). Christ is king over all people, places, rulers, nations, events, and circumstances. Who will stand in the way of Him? Moreover who will stand in the way of Christ’s sovereign plan to bring about the successful enduring of His children? His children will certainly stumble along the way, yes, and they will even have failures, but even these failures are part of the grand sovereign plan of Christ, in order that His sheep may become stronger and mightier for His name. And they will be victorious. They will have the last word.

They will laugh at death and say, “O death, where is your sting?” They will rule with Christ in heaven, proclaiming the glory and grace of God. While they press forth in this sin-cursed world, they will face many trials of suffering – they are even destined to suffer like sheep for slaughter. But they will say as Job, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.” They will run the race with patience, keeping the heart fixed upon the Lord who bought them. They will be persuaded in their own hearts that nothing can separate them – no, not even the strongest and most devastating force in the world – from the love of God in Christ Jesus! It might even be said that not even God Himself could separate from Him those He bought. He cannot turn back on His own word. He cannot undo the completed work of the cross. It is finished! So then, let us go boldly before the obstacles which face us. Let us not be afraid. Let us laugh in the face of trial as we hope in our sovereign Lord who will indeed strengthen us as more than conquerors of this world, and soon we will be with Him.

Translation: 31 What therefore will we say to these things? If God is over us, who is against us? 32 He who indeed did not spare his own Son, but in behalf of us all gave him, how will he not also with him give to us all things? 33 Who will bring charges against God's elect? God is the justifier. 34 Who is the one condemning? Christ is the one dying—but more than that, was raised, who also is in the right hand of God, who also is interceding in behalf of us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will suffering, trouble, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it has been written, "Because of you we are being put to death all the day. We are counted like sheep destined for slaughter." 37 But in all these things we are more than conquerors through the one loving us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things coming nor powers 39 nor height nor depth will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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