

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON THIRTY-THREE)**

THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN **(PART SIX)**

In **Lesson 28**, we commenced our examination of the doctrine of the security of the Christian's position in Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Christian's security in Jesus Christ teaches that God, by His own power, through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, keeps or preserves those who have been born again until the day of Jesus Christ. We are persuaded by the weight of Scriptural evidence that the position of individuals who have been saved by the grace of God is very secure. Their salvation and their secure position is based upon Christ's perfect and finished work on the cross of Calvary, and not upon anything that they have done or can do. It is the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, not the faithfulness of the saved individuals that guarantees this security.

In **Lesson 29**, we commenced a detailed study of **Romans 8:28-39**. We stated that there is perhaps no other passage in the Holy Scriptures that so forcefully speak to the Christian's security being bound up with God's sovereignty, the unchangeableness of His purposes and the constancy of His good pleasure. In this Lesson, we will conclude our examination of this passage, by considering verses **35-39**. Before we do so, however, we will briefly go over the ground that we have covered so far.

In verse **28** Paul writes, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."*

This is one of the most remarkable verses in the entire Bible. Paul gives us in the verse, an absolute guarantee that for those who love God because they have been called to fulfill his designed purpose, every detail of their lives is continually woven together to fit into God's perfect plan for their lives! This verse, all by itself, should be enough to convince us that our position in Christ is very secure!

But what is Paul's amazing guarantee based upon? How in the world can he be so confident that *"all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose?"* In the next two verses, verses **29-30**, Paul explains to us the basis of his guarantee and the reason for his great assurance, by using five words: **foreknow**, **predestinate**, **called**, **justified** and **glorified**. He writes, *"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."*

In verse **28**, Paul refers to the *"purpose"* of God. In verses **29-30**, he explains what this purpose is. It is a plan of sovereign grace, which is so comprehensive that it entitles every saved person to trace his or her salvation back to an **eternal decision by God** to bring them to glory and to look forward to that glory as a **guaranteed certainty**.

In these verses, the Apostle Paul highlights the sequence known as **"the golden chain of salvation,"** which highlights the order in which Almighty God saves His people. This golden chain indicates very clearly that **salvation is from start to finish a work of the Lord**.

We learn from these two verses that God, in the sequence of salvation, first brought us under **the sovereignty of His wisdom**. He **foreknew** us. Before He chose us in Christ, He knew everything about us, yet He still loved us and chose us.

Then, He brought us **under the sovereignty of His will**. He **predestinated** us to be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ and He did so before the foundation of the world. God put limits or boundaries upon us in eternity. He determined that we would be conformed to the image of His Son. That is our destiny.

Thirdly, He brought us **under the sovereignty of His command**. He called us. He summoned us with a divine summons, and made us willing to obey the summons.

Fourthly, He brought us **under the sovereignty of His righteousness**. He **justified** us. He rendered a verdict of “Not guilty” over us and declared us to be righteous in His sight. He imputed to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ, giving us a standing before Himself, which is so flawless, so spotless, so pure, so pristine that no power in the heavens, no power on earth and no power in hell can bring any accusation against us that has the potential to condemn us.

Finally, He brought us **under the sovereignty of His glory**. He **glorified** us. We do not have to wait until we die or until Jesus Christ returns to know if we will ultimately be saved. In the eternal plan of God, we are already glorified!

But some persons may ask the question “What about all the years between my initial conversion and my death or the coming of the Lord? Is there not a possibility that during the years of testing and trial, something may go wrong and I may lose my salvation and be deprived of eternal life?” The answer is an emphatic “No!” Brothers and sisters, we are not only **predestined** for glory, we are also **preserved** for glory. In the closing verses of this extraordinary chapter (verses **31-39**), Paul draws his entire argument in respect of the Christian’s security to a triumphal conclusion in a series of challenges to every influence that might oppose the confident assurance of the Christian of God’s ability to bring to a satisfactory completion, the work that He begun in his or her life. Paul explores every possible point of departure from the salvation which is in Jesus Christ our Lord and concludes that every such point is blocked and guarded by the amazing grace of God. We are not only saved, we are safe!

Before he explores any of the possible points of departure, however, Paul makes a statement that clearly indicates that he already knows what he will find at the end of his exploration. In verses **31-32** he writes, *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”*

The **Message** translates the passage as follows: *“So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn’t hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn’t gladly and freely do for us?”*

The **Passion Translation** provides the following rendering: *“So, what does all this mean? If God has determined to stand with us, tell me, who then could ever stand against us? For God has proved his love by giving us his greatest treasure, the gift of his Son. And since God freely offered him up as a sacrifice for us all, he certainly won’t withhold from us anything else he has to give.”*

Paul’s argument in these verses is that while the saints will certainly face oppositions, testing, trials, sufferings, disappointments and even failures, none of these have the potential to destabilize their position in Christ. This is so because God is for them. Since God is *“for us,”* our spiritual survival is assured. The words *“for us”* express the eternal commitment of almighty God who loves us with an everlasting love. He demonstrated that love by sacrificing His only begotten Son for us. Jesus Christ is the best gift that God has to offer and with Him, God gives us everything else that He has to offer! Paul’s argument here is from the lesser to the greater. If when we were sinners, God gave us His best, now that we are His children, will He not give us all that we need? Jesus used this same argument when He tried to convince people that it was foolish to worry and fear. God cares for the birds and sheep, and even for the lilies; surely He will care for us! God freely gives all things to His own!

Since God is for us and since we have received the best that He has to offer, plus everything else, why should we not be assured that it is well with our soul at the present time, and shall remain so until the day of Jesus Christ?

The first point Paul explores is sin. Can sin separate us from the love of Christ? Paul deals with this decisively in verses **33-34**: *“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”*

Brothers and sisters, sin cannot affect the security of our position in Christ because God has justified us. This means that He has declared us righteous in Christ. Satan would like to accuse us and he has sufficient evidence to do so, but we stand righteous in Jesus Christ.

We are God's elect - chosen in Christ and accepted in Christ. God will certainly not accuse us since it is He who has justified us. For Him to accuse us, it would mean that His salvation was a failure and that we are still in our sins.

Understanding the meaning of justification brings peace to our hearts. When God declares the believing sinner righteous in Christ, **that declaration never changes**. Our Christian experience changes from day to day, but justification never changes. Satan will accuse us, men may accuse us and we may accuse ourselves, but God will never take us to court and accuse us because Jesus has already paid the penalty and we are secure in Him. The Judge of Judges has already dealt with all the charges against us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In **Isaiah 50:5-11**, we read the following:

- 5** *The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me, and I have listened. I have not rebelled or turned away.*
6 *I offered my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mockery and spitting.*
7 *Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a stone, determined to do his will. And I know that I will not be put to shame.*
8 *He who gives me justice is near. Who will dare to bring charges against me now? Where are my accusers? Let them appear!*
9 *See, the Sovereign Lord is on my side! Who will declare me guilty? All my enemies will be destroyed like old clothes that have been eaten by moths!*
10 *Who among you fears the Lord and obeys his servant? If you are walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the Lord and rely on your God.*
11 *But watch out, you who live in your own light and warm yourselves by your own fires. This is the reward you will receive from me: You will soon fall down in great torment. (New Living Translation)*

Here we have a portrait of Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. In verses **7-10**, we see Him confidently expecting to be vindicated by God from the false accusations that have been made against Him. Because we are *"in Christ,"* our union with Him is so intimate and so unbreakable, we can be assured that His righteousness with which we are clothed, will secure our acquittal also. It is for this reason that Paul can so confidently write in **Romans 8:1**, *"Therefore, now, there is not even one bit of condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"* (**The New Testament: An Expanded Translation by Kenneth S. Wuest**). There is no condemnation now, nor will there be in the future.

Verse **11** indicates that those who trust in their own righteousness, who *"live in their own light,"* will *"fall down in great torment."* The saints, however, are aware that they have no righteousness of their own and so their only hope is to *"trust in the lord and rely on their God"* (verse **10**).

There can be no condemnation for us because the same Saviour who died for us is now interceding for us in heaven. He is at *"the right hand of God,"* the position of honour and executive power. As our High Priest, He gives us the grace we need to overcome temptation and defeat the enemy (**Hebrews 4:14-16**). As our Advocate, He forgives our sins and restores our fellowship with God (**1 John 1:9-2:2**). Intercession means that Jesus Christ represents us before the throne of God and we do not have to represent ourselves.

After dealing unequivocally with the question as to whether or not sin can separate us from the love of God, Paul, in verses **35-39**, explores a multitude of other points of departure from the security of our position in Christ. He concludes his argument by showing the finality of our hope for glory. He triumphantly declares that nothing, absolutely nothing, can shake the security of the Christian's position in Christ.

ROMANS 8:35-39

- 35** *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*
36 *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*
37 *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In verse **35** Paul asks, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*” What is the Apostle referring to when he refers to “*the love of Christ?*” Is he referring to our love for Christ, or to Christ’s love for us. The context clearly indicates that Paul is referring to the love of Christ for the saints. Having already stated that “*God is for us*” (verse **31**), and that He “*spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all*” (verse **32**), and that no one is able to successfully “*lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?* or to condemn them (verses **33-34**), Paul now stresses the permanence of the love of Christ under all adverse circumstances. He argues that no such circumstance can affect Christ’s love for His elect. Indeed, it is because of His love for us that we are victorious over all such adversities. Finally, he expresses his persuasion that no created thing shall ever separate us from that love.

Brothers and sisters, one of the great tests of our spiritual health is what we think about the love of Christ as it relates to us. In **Ephesians 3:14-19** Paul wrote, “*When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. **Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God***” (New Living Translation).

Beloved ones, the love of Christ is eternal, for it is that love which constrained Him to leave Heaven’s throne and come down to this earth to redeem us. Paul speaks of that love in **Philippians 2:5-8**: “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*”

The love of Christ for us is deep, for it is that love which urged Him to press on to the end of the road as He humbled Himself to the death, even the death of the cross. The love of Christ for us is broad, for it is that love which opened the arms of God to sinners and made it possible for the very ones who nailed Him to the cross to be forgiven. The love of Christ is unchanging, for it is that love which comes to us today in the midst of our need, whatever it may be, and takes us out of darkness into light, and from doubt to certainty, and from death to life.

In **Romans 8:35-39**, Paul presents the love of Christ for us in the phase of its permanence. In this passage, God stoops down to tell us that the love of Christ is not fickle. He left the splendor of heaven and came down to earth. He allowed Himself to be led to Pilate’s judgment hall where He was buffeted and spat upon. He submitted Himself to the cruelty of scourging, He walked to Calvary and permitted men to nail Him to the cross. From that cross, He cried out in love, “*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*” We read of these things in His Word and that very Word tells us that they happened for our salvation. And then we look upon Him with amazement, and dare to question whether or not He really loves us! How could we ever doubt that He does? What more does He need to do to prove to us that He loves us? Here in this passage, He tells us that nothing can separate us from His love. Will we believe the voice of our Shepherd or will we believe the “*voice of a stranger*” (**John 10:5**), which tries to convince us that the love of God is not sufficient to secure us until that great day? What depths of sin and depravity yet remains in our hearts when we who have heard of, and experienced the love of Christ, can still doubt its reality and permanence.

Paul lists seven circumstances that might be advanced for consideration in answering the question “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*” He asks “*shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*”

We must bear in mind that when Paul spoke about these adverse circumstances, he was not speaking hypothetically. Paul was not an armchair theologian. He had personally experienced at least six of these circumstances. He speaks of his experiences in **2 Corinthians 11:23-33**:

23 *Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again.*

24 *Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes.*

25 *Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.*

26 *I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.*

27 *I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.*

28 *Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.*

29 *Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?*

30 *If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am.*

31 *God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying.*

32 *When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas kept guards at the city gates to catch me.*

33 *I had to be lowered in a basket through a window in the city wall to escape from him.*

(New Living Translation)

The only one of the seven circumstances that he had not yet experienced was the sword and he would experience it soon enough!

What was Paul's assessment of the effect of these circumstances as it related to the Christian's security in Christ? He writes, "*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*"

It would have been wonderful if God had declared us to be conquerors. But we are told that in the midst of all these things, we are more than conquerors. How is this so? We are more than conquerors because our enemies are much stronger than us. Paul reminds the Ephesian church that "*We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*" (**Ephesians 6:12**). If our enemies were natural, our victory would be natural. But since they are supernatural, then our victory is supernatural.

We are more than conquerors because of the intensity of the warfare in which we are engaged. In earthly battles, soldiers are sometimes called upon to fight day and night. But there comes a moment when flesh and blood cannot take more and the struggle comes to an end through the utter exhaustion of the soldier. But in the spiritual warfare, there is no ceasefire, no suspension of hostilities, no quarter asked or given.

We are more than conquerors because the result of the battle we are fighting is eternal, and therefore, our victory is eternal. Because our victory is an eternal one, we are more than conquerors.

We are "*sheep for the slaughter*" but yet we are "*more than conquerors.*" What a contrast! And how is it that sheep for the slaughter can be more than conquerors? Paul says, "***Through him that loved us.***" It is the love of Jesus Christ for us that makes us "*more than conquerors.*"

Verses **38-39** comprise Paul's final statement in respect of his response to the question which he himself had asked in verse **35**: "*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ.*" His final statement is one of absolute assurance: "*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Can **death** separate us from the love of God? Of course not! Death ushers the Christian into glory! In **2 Corinthians 5:6-8**, Paul confirms this truth: *“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”*

In **Philippians 1:21-23**, He writes *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”*

Death cannot separate us from the love of God.

Can **life** separate us from the love of God? Not at all! In **Matthew 28:20** our Lord promised, *“I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”* In **Hebrews 13:5-6**, we read, *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”*

Life cannot separate us from the love of God.

Can **angels** separate us from the love of God? No! *“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”* (**Hebrews 1:14**) God has appointed them to minister to us who are the heirs of salvation. How can they then separate us from His love?

Angels cannot separate us from the love of God.

Can **principalities** and **powers** separate us from the love of God? No, for the simple reason that our Lord has already exposed them, defeated them and disarmed them at the Cross. In **Colossians 2:13-15**, Paul writes, *“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross”* (**New Living Translation**).

Principalities and **powers** cannot separate us from the love of God.

Can **things present** separate us from the love of God? Certainly Not! God describes Himself in **Exodus 3:14** as the I AM, the One who dwells eternally in the present. We human beings are creatures of time and we express our mode of being in three tenses of time - I was, I am, I will be. But God inhabits eternity and He expresses His mode of being in the eternal present - I AM, I AM, I AM. As it relates to God, the past, present, and future are swallowed up in an all-embracing present. When we read, for example, in **Ephesians 1:4** that God chose us in Christ *“before the foundation of the world,”* we must realize that the Bible has stated the issue from our perspective. Since God lives in the eternal present, there is to Him no difference in time, between the moment He chose us in Christ and the moment He called us. He controls things present in His eternity!

The very same is true concerning **things to come**. There is to God no difference in time between the moment when He chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world and the moment when we are glorified. That is exactly why Paul can speak in **Romans 8:30** about our glorification as if it has already happened, because as far as God is concerned it has happened!

Things present and **things to come** cannot separate us from the love of God.

Can **height** or **depth** separate us from the love of God? Absolutely not! Jesus Christ has already descended to the deepest depth and scaled the highest height for us. Paul speaks about this descent and ascent in **Philippians 2:5-11**:

5 *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

6 *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:*

7 *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:*

8 *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:
10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;
11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In **Ephesians 4:8-10**, we read the following concerning our Lord: “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)”

Neither **height** nor **depth** can separate us from the love of God.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: “Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, ‘For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.’) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow — not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below — indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (**New Living Translation**).

Because nothing can separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord, our position in Him is very secure.

One of the reasons why Paul can say with such confidence that nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ is because Christ is alive now! He is at the right hand of God interceding for us. This means that He is ensuring that moment by moment, the benefits of His atonement are being effectually applied to us. This moment by moment application of the benefits of His finished work of redemption will continue until He returns for His bride.

Paul states emphatically that there is nothing that shall separate us from the love of Christ. In other words, the love of Christ effectively safeguards the Christian from being separated from Christ. The love of Christ is therefore a special and particular love. It is a love reserved for and lavished upon His elect—those who are referred to in Romans 8:28-30: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” The love of Christ that Paul speaks of is not a general love of all, but a specific love for His bride.

In **Ephesians 5:25-27**, Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.” Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives.” The love of a husband for his wife is a special and particular love. He does not love every woman with the same degree of love that he has for his wife. So it is with Christ! The sanctifying, preserving love of Christ is reserved for the church!

Without apology we say that Christ has a special, sanctifying, preserving love for His bride. If you are a member of the church then the Word of God gives you the assurance that there is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ.

Jesus Christ loves His own with an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable love, which secures us in tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. It safeguards us in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, in victory and defeat, in success and failure, in life and in death. And His love preserves His church until the day when He will “present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).