

Romans 6... 7...8

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Romans 8:36 As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."

Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

More than one writer or screenwriter has used the gimmick of a person's letters to their loved one being intercepted by an evil third party and thus never delivered. It always causes the person who receives no communication to conclude that they are no longer loved. They often look elsewhere for love.

In our case we have the love letter of Jesus to us in the Bible we hold dear. Reading and re-reading it ought to assure us that He loves us with an everlasting and unchanging love.

Still there are things that try to interfere with our appreciation of His love. Some of them are listed for us.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...

The love of Christ is the love He has for us; for you. It was proven on the Cross when He took your place. It is illustrated in many romantic metaphors. Thus it is not just a duty that Jesus took upon Himself. It is His delight.

The question assumes that there are forces which will make every effort to interfere with **the love of Christ**. Since Jesus cannot change, and His love cannot falter, these forces are directed against us to make us doubt our Savior's love.

Those forces include the following:

1. **Tribulation.** The word properly refers to pressure from without; affliction arising from external causes. It means, however, not infrequently, trial of any kind.
2. **Distress.** This word means *narrowness of place*; and then, great anxiety and distress of mind, such as arises when a man does not know where to turn himself or what to do for relief. It refers, therefore, to distress or anxiety of mind. We live in an age obsessed by distress and its potential cures through medication or meditation.
3. **Persecution.** This is the specific trial or trials that come simply because you are a believer and take a stand for Jesus.
4. **Famine.** We haven't really experienced shortages because we have lost everything for the sake of the Gospel.
5. **Peril.** It is a general word referring to dangers of any kind. If there is intended to be a progression in these words you can see that once you've lost everything and are literally homeless you are in great peril.
6. **Sword.** As if the preceding weren't bad enough, you could be martyred.

The point is that these could all occur and yet they cannot in any way alter Jesus Christ's love for you. You may not 'feel' the love, but it is just as powerful as ever.

Romans 8:36 As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."

It's **written** in Psalm 44:22. God's saints in the past were thus mistreated. Do we conclude that God did not love them? Do we conclude some failure or fault in them was a reason for the Lord to turn away from loving them, thus separating His love from them?

No, quite the opposite! When we see Job or Joseph or Abraham or David in some **tribulation** or **distress** or **persecution** or **famine** or **peril** we understand it was precisely on account of God's love they were mistreated! When we see an Old Testament prophet killed by the **sword** we rejoice he was so loved by God.

Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Instead of thinking we have somehow lost the love of Christ on account of these things we ought to recognize we gain from them. We gain a sense of His presence in them. We gain maturity from them.

Others gain from us as we exhibit grace in our trials. The Lord receives glory as the angels look upon us.

In all these things hints at our being *in* them, in going through them. It's a reminder to be ready and waiting for trials so that we lessen the initial chaos.

You know what I mean: A trial overtakes us and, at first, we don't think it is a trial. We don't see it as something spiritual that can help perfect us. After a while it comes into focus. Better to be ready and exhibit God's grace from the very beginning.

On the phrase **more than conquerors** Albert Barnes writes:

We gain the victory. That is, they have not power to subdue us; to alienate our love and confidence; to produce apostasy. We are the victors, not they. Our faith is not destroyed; our love is not diminished; our hope is not blasted. But it is not simple victory; it is not mere life, and continuance of what we had before; it is more than simple triumph; it augments our faith, increases our strength, expands our love to Christ.

- being changed to bring change -
Through Him who loved us. Notice the past tense – **loved**. Jesus loves us still but we know He does because He **loved** us at Calvary and died for us. There He proved His love most definitely.

Through Him is a reminder that we can do nothing without Him but all things through Him. The very trials themselves draw forth His presence, His sustaining grace. Again Paul's point was and is that these things which on the surface seem separators are really connectors. They connect us to the deepest understanding and experience of **the love of Christ**.

I spoke of two lovers, one of whom does not 'receive' the daily letters written by the other. There is thus a tendency to feel unloved and then to seek love elsewhere.

I think that we do not produce tough Christians anymore. The slightest trial throws them. They immediately feel insecure in **the love of Christ**. Rather than settling in with their love letter for a long wait they begin to seek love elsewhere:

1. Some seek it in the material realm by turning or returning to old habits. They seek to fill the perceived void with the very things that left them empty in the first place.
2. Others seek love in a more 'spiritual realm, but one in which the Word of God is not always the final authority. They are looking for **the love of Christ** through methods not authorized or soundly condemned by the Bible. Whether it was the psychologizing of Christianity in the 1980's or the current Emergent Church (EC) movement, it's an effort to experience something in order to prove or at least feel loved by Jesus Christ.

To stay in my illustration: These folks act as though their not receiving any love letters. It's because they are unhappy with the Word!

1. When psychology crept in to the church it was because Christian leaders felt God's Word was not sufficient for our 'modern' difficulties.
2. The EC wants to open you up to a whole new way of thinking about the Word. They want you to add the thinking of other religious and spiritual traditions. For them the Word is too narrow; or at least the understanding of the Word as authoritative is too restrictive.

Jesus couldn't love you any more than He does! You don't need to go looking for Him. Just read His letter everyday.