

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 8: 35-39

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 8. We will read verses 35-39 today.

Paul confidently assures us of how certain and steadfast the salvation God has prepared for us is. He asks five consecutive questions: If God is for us, who can be against us? The answer, of course, is no one—not even God's enemy, Satan. Since God spared not only His only begotten Son for us, will He not also freely give us all things with Christ? Yes, as long as we have Christ, we have all things. Who can accuse those whom God has chosen? Not even the accuser, Satan, can, because God has justified us. Who can condemn us? Even if we occasionally stumble, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us within, and Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, also intercedes for us; as long as we confess and repent of our sins, God will forgive our sins, and there is no longer any condemnation.

The final question, and the most important one, is: Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Today, we will examine this question closely.

Verse 35: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? The Greek word for “separate” originally means “to create a space,” implying creating a distance, so it is translated in English as “separate.” The Chinese Union Version's translation as “隔絕” (isolate or cut off) is slightly stronger. This question is posed in a negative form, so Paul's intended meaning is even stronger than the Chinese translation suggests.

In fact, it is not easy for a true believing saint to be completely cut off from God; however, it is easy for us to fall into circumstances that create a distance between us and God, making us less close to the Lord. For example, we may usually have morning devotions, but when caught up in busy circumstances, we find no time for devotions, thus creating a distance from God. So, Paul's original meaning is that all kinds of tribulations cannot create a distance between us and the love of Christ; in fact, it is the opposite—when we fall into tribulation, we need the love of Christ even more to help us overcome these challenging circumstances.

Paul, called by God as the apostle to the Gentiles, preached in unfamiliar places, facing all sorts of unknown circumstances. Having gone through many tribulations and trials, he casually lists seven kinds of circumstances he personally experienced, none of which could create a distance between him and the love of Christ. We know that Paul was an apostle of faith; he trusted in God in all circumstances, and through God's supply and support, he triumphed overwhelmingly in various situations. Paul recorded his experiences in his epistles, and these epistles became the content of faith for later generations of saints.

Here, we follow Paul's description and compare it with his personal experiences to understand how the love of Christ continually accompanied, supported, and supplied Paul. If we trust in Christ as Paul did, we too can triumph overwhelmingly.

Let us examine them one by one. Shall tribulation? During his three missionary journeys, Paul constantly faced various tribulations. When things go wrong, one's zeal can easily be worn down, causing love to grow cold. But Paul was able to rely on God in all things, and after passing through tribulations and being delivered by God, his faith increased, making him bolder and more faithful in walking the path ordained by the Lord. Toward the end of his third missionary journey, he called the elders of the Ephesian church to Miletus, and in his exhortation to them, he expressed his attitude toward various tribulations. It is recorded in Acts 20:23–24, "Except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Shall distress? The word “distress” originally refers to a narrow space, emphasizing being confined in a situation with no way out, leading to despair in the heart. Paul testifies of himself in 2 Corinthians 4:8, “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair.” Thus, distress could not separate Paul from the love of Christ.

Or persecution? The word “persecution” originally refers to a hunter pursuing prey until it is caught. During his missionary journeys, Paul encountered opposing Jews who followed him from city to city, inciting crowds to persecute him. Paul also testifies of himself in 2 Corinthians 4:9, “Persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Paul speaks of his personal experiences, showing that all kinds of persecution could not separate him from the love of Christ.

The next two we will address together: famine and nakedness? Food and clothing are basic human needs for survival, but Paul, in fulfilling his role as the apostle to the Gentiles, set aside even these basic needs. This is in stark contrast to some modern famous preachers who travel by private jets, stay in five-star hotels, hold crusades with a minimum attendance of 5,000, and require top-tier sound systems and worship teams—a world apart from Paul, the greatest missionary in history.

Paul himself was often hungry and naked. He testifies of himself not just once. In 1 Corinthians 4:11, “To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.” In 2 Corinthians 11:27, “In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” Though Paul lacked abundant material supply outwardly, he had abundant spiritual supply inwardly. Thus, he could testify in Philippians 4:12–13, “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Next, peril? In 2 Corinthians 11:26, Paul says: “In journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.” Paul lists eight kinds of perils in one breath, all of which he personally

experienced, testifying that the love of Christ helped him overcome all these dangers.

Finally, sword? After his third missionary journey, Paul went to Jerusalem, where Jews from Asia followed him and incited the whole city to riot. Acts 21:30–31 records: “And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.” God sent the Roman commander to rescue Paul. After this incident, more than forty Jews conspired together, swearing to kill Paul. Acts 23:12–13 records: “And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.”

Paul indeed faced the sword and the threat of death, but he experienced that even the sword could not separate him from the love of Christ. Through all the tribulations he encountered, Paul testified that the love of Christ never left him. It was this unfailing love that enabled Paul to press forward faithfully, completing the course God had prepared for him.

Verse 36: “As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’”

Here, “as it is written,” Paul quotes Psalm 44:22, “Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Psalm 44 is a psalm of the sons of Korah. The sons of Korah should have perished in the event when Korah rebelled against Moses and Aaron, being swallowed up by the earth. This event is recorded in Numbers 16:31–32. Yet, by God’s special mercy, some of Korah’s descendants survived. They were those who deserved death but did not die, and thus they deeply knew God’s mercy. They became a group of poets, specifically writing psalms to praise God’s grace and mercy.

Paul himself was once a persecutor of Christians, but through God's great mercy, he was saved by grace and became the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul was constrained by God's love and became a devoted follower of the Lord, to the point that, for the Lord's sake, he was regarded as a sheep for the slaughter to be killed all day long, seemingly without hope of survival. But human perception does not matter; what matters is how God sees it. Thus, Paul immediately brings us to verse 37.

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

Through Him who loved us. We must recognize that the Lord is the Lord of all circumstances. In the most difficult and dangerous situations, the Lord still reigns; not only does He reign, but He reigns in love. The Lord loves those who belong to Him and protects those He loves. Therefore, Paul could boast that in all these things, he was more than a conqueror. Not just a conqueror, but more than a conqueror.

The Chinese Union Version translates it as "through the Lord we are more than conquerors," but it does not fully convey Paul's true meaning. The word "through" in the original text is the preposition *dia*, translated in English as "through," meaning "by means of the Lord" or "passing through the Lord." The Lord Himself is the victorious Lord, and we, being in His victory, can overcome all circumstances. In other words, it is not we who fight the battle, but by continually abiding in Christ Jesus, as Christ has overcome, we overcome with Him—this is Paul's secret to victory.

Verses 38–39: "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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In verses 35 to 37, Paul emphasizes that no circumstance can separate him from the love of Christ. Thus, he lists his personal experiences, testifying that through the Lord who loves him, he could be more than a conqueror in all these things. Therefore, verse 38 begins with “I am persuaded.”

The word “persuaded” is translated in the KJV as “persuaded” and in the NIV as “convinced.” That is, from his past experiences, Paul reached a conclusion, and he was persuaded and convinced. Next, Paul lists ten things, stating that none of them can separate him from the love of God. These ten things are likely grouped in pairs, totaling five groups.

Unfortunately, the Chinese Union Version’s translation follows the KJV, which slightly deviates from the original Greek order. Two other commonly used English versions, the NIV and ASV, follow the original Greek order exactly, placing “powers” before “height.” If we follow the original order, it neatly forms five pairs. Let us examine them one by one.

The first pair: nor death nor life. Death and life are opposites. For humans, death is the peak of suffering, but for saints, God always places us in death and then brings forth life. That is, by continually experiencing death, we gradually shed the old man and increasingly experience the gaining of life, allowing our new man to be renewed day by day.

The second pair: nor angels nor principalities. Angels are ministering spirits sent by God to serve the saints. Principalities, as mentioned in Ephesians 2:2—“the prince of the power of the air”—refer to the dark forces ruled by Satan that seek to destroy God’s children. Thus, angels and principalities are opposites; angels help us fulfill God’s will in us, while principalities seek to disrupt God’s work. Paul is convinced that we are kept in God’s love.

The third pair: nor things present nor things to come. This pair is clearly opposite. We all live in the present, and what we do daily are present things. However, whether what we do now has value depends on things to come. These “things to come” do not refer to tomorrow or even next year but to things in eternity. When Christ returns, our bodies will be transformed, and God’s glory will be manifested

in us. If what we do today increases the glory we will manifest in eternity, that thing has value; if what we do now does not increase our future glory, it is worthless, and the time spent is entirely wasted.

Dear brothers and sisters, if we reexamine our daily busyness with this value system, we will surely gain a heart of wisdom and learn to spend our precious time on the most valuable things.

The fourth pair: nor powers nor height. The word “height” appears only twice in the New Testament, here and in 2 Corinthians 10:5, where it refers to “every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.” Following the logic of the previous pairs, this pair is also opposite. “Powers” likely refers to God’s mighty power, which can break down every proud thing in the human mind, recapturing the heart to obey Christ.

The fifth pair: nor depth nor any other created thing. “Depth” is not an accurate translation; the Greek word means “depth,” as in deep things. Paul uses this word several times: in 1 Corinthians 2:10, it refers to the deep things of God, and in Ephesians 3:18, Paul uses it to describe the depth of Christ and His love.

“Any other created thing” is a term used repeatedly in this chapter, in verses 19 to 22, four times. Paul says that all created things earnestly long for the liberty of glory. These two terms are not directly opposite but indirectly so. All created things eagerly long to be delivered from the bondage of corruption; however, in God’s profound wisdom, God, through Christ’s deepest love and grace, first gains His children, and through their growth and maturity, manifests the glory of God’s sons. Only then will all created things together enjoy the liberty of glory.

Paul lists ten things in one breath, divided into five pairs, some positive, some negative. After listing these ten things, his conclusion is that none of them can separate us from the love of God, which is in our Lord Christ Jesus. As long as we abide in the Lord Jesus Christ, we can not only enjoy and experience the Lord’s love but also obtain God’s love. With God’s love, we naturally triumph overwhelmingly in these ten things.

Dear brothers and sisters, having covered the first eight chapters of Romans about God's great salvation, including legal redemption and organic salvation, Paul concludes with praise to God, extolling how reliable and steadfast God's salvation is. Having read these eight chapters, we, like Paul, should offer our thanks, worship, and praises to God.

Let us pray together: Dear Father, how we thank You. To save us, You were willing to sacrifice Your only begotten Son, sending Him to earth to accomplish redemption for us. We, who originally deserved destruction, have the standing to come before the throne of grace and experience the great work of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ for us.

On the objective side, through faith, our sins are forgiven, and we are justified by the Father; on the subjective side, we walk the path of sanctification. Though our path of sanctification is winding, sometimes high, sometimes low, if we live by the law of the Spirit of life, we can be mindful of the Spirit; if we live by the law of sin in the flesh, we live in the law of sin and death.

Though our condition may fluctuate, within us, the Holy Spirit sighs and intercedes for us repeatedly; at the right hand of the Father's throne above, Christ also intercedes for us. We have confidence that we will complete the path of sanctification and, when Christ returns, receive glory.

Dear Abba Father, thank You for preparing such a great salvation for us. Like Paul, we can only offer our thanks and worship to You. We know that all things we will encounter cannot separate us from Your love, which is in our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we ask Father God to keep and bless us, that we may live in the Lord Jesus Christ every day. We offer this prayer, petition, and thanksgiving in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.