

Sermon Growth Guide

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Conquering Love | Romans 8:31-39

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Key Verse: Romans 8:38-39 – “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Big Idea: What shall we say? God is for us! Our present is known and covered by the love of God. Our eternity is secure by Christ’s sacrifice.

Foundations

These final verses of Romans 8 are the culmination of the previous chapters and specifically Romans 5:1-11. Paul once again explains the Father, having given over sinners to their sins (Romans 1:28) in his mercy, his grace, and his love, gives over his son to death on a cross so that we might be justified. So that we, as believers in Christ, would not be condemned on the day of judgment. In Christ, we have utter assurance of our final destiny. Be at peace.

But, Paul is also preparing and reassuring these new believers and us that before we reach our heavenly home, our days on earth will not be easy. One wonders if Paul is now sharing a very personal testimony in 35-36. He’s been persecuted, hungry, beaten, and jailed. He’s been in danger and threatened by the sword. (Historians believe Paul was eventually killed by the sword in Rome.) He knows from experience that nothing can separate him from the love of Christ. He reminds his readers, God’s children suffer but not apart from God’s sovereignty, not apart from God’s good purpose. (v36 quoted from Psalm 44:22.) No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors. We not only conquer, we are blessed. Our sufferings bear the fruit of endurance, character, hope. By the deep love of God the Father, through the cross of Jesus, we can experience victorious living today and into eternity.

Understanding God’s Word

Pastor Tim built a spiritual tower using this love letter from God. The very foundation is knowing God is for you. As you climb from one floor to the next you come to understand that Jesus is our vindication and although Satan, earthly enemies, even your own conscious may condemn you, ultimately there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. From the top of the tower we experience God’s all encompassing love.

Applying God’s Word

We live in the in-between. Our salvation is assured but, like all of God’s people, we will face the lure and distractions of our earthly life, the death of loved ones, the temptations of politics, the fear of an uncertain future for us or those we love. Consider how the conquering love of Jesus holds you in the in-between. How does your suffering form you into the likeness of Christ?

Witnessing God’s Word

On May 19 the Wall Street Journal published an article titled, China is Throwing Christians in Jail, but This Pastor Refuses to Back Down. Ezra Jin, a Fuller graduate, sits in a dank cell in China. His church is burgeoning despite the arrest. He is not defeated. He is flourishing just as Paul describes. In the middle of your struggles, with whom can you share your experience of God’s grace and conquering love.

Well, last week I could hardly talk. I was knocked on my back. I had to rouse myself up to swallow. Wow, we are frail. I don't say that to get your sympathy. Many of you have suffered much worse for much longer. It just makes me reflect on how frail we are and where our true security lies. Today is Pentecost. This was, and is, a Jewish festival, one of the three feasts that brought people to Jerusalem. Easter happened at Passover—the day remembering how God led the Hebrews out of Egypt. Fifty days later God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses. The Torah followed. So each year, fifty days after Passover, the people gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost to celebrate the gift of God's Word. After the Passover where Jesus was killed and rose again, the Passover that became Easter, came the Pentecost that became the birth of the church. The Holy Spirit fell on the believers in Christ. The church was born in celebration of Word and Spirit.

God's Word is full of God's Spirit. The Spirit and the Word walk hand in hand. A passage like this makes that clear. This passage rises to such heights so quickly it is hard to keep it pinned down to its context. This is a first-century letter to a Roman church, but it is a love letter from God straight to your heart. Let God speak directly to you today. What Are You Praying For? We prayed for inner peace, resurrection life, enduring hope and renewed creation, and today we pray for Conquering Love. Do you believe you can hear from the Lord today by his Holy Spirit? Then you will hear of a God who wins by love, a God whose love for you is unassailable, invincible, impregnable, like a fortress. How frail we are and how strong the tower of God's love for us.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31) What then shall we say about what things? Let's go back. Well, about how in Romans 7 we are still struggling

against our addiction to sin called “the flesh.” About how in Romans 8, we have a restored relationship with God and have the Holy Spirit, but we still live in a fallen world. We don't know how to pray, but the Spirit prays for us with groans beyond words. And about how we have assurance, the certainty of salvation. Let's loop back to the certainty of salvation. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (Romans 8:29-30) This is a glimpse of how our salvation looks from God's point of view. We often get pictures of salvation from our point of view. This is from God's point of view, so we can have a glimpse, but not a full understanding. His ways are not our ways; his thoughts are not our thoughts; He is the Almighty and Everlasting Creator, we are the frail and mortal creature. It's like a woven rug. We look up from beneath and try to capture the shape and structure; God looks down from above and sees the whole thing mapped out perfectly. We get a glimpse, but we don't really get it. But what does it tell us? We see a chain of five unbreakable links—God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified—five links of a chain of grace by which God has hammered out our salvation from first to last. It's a chain that holds us safe. You say, what about rejecting the light and choosing darkness? What is our role. These are good conversations that drive us deeper into the Word, but there are things left unsolved. Salvation belongs to the Lord. Our comfort is this, the glimpse of God's view of salvation settles our hearts on the certainty that we are saved as an act of God. God has done it, so nobody, not you, not me, not anyone else, nobody can undo it.

So, what can we say? What shall we say about these things? We shall say, we shall believe, we shall proclaim: God is for us. God wins with a conquering love. Now watch as Paul builds a spiritual tower of

divine truths. He asks five questions. The first is this, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” In one sense, the answer is, “Well, plenty can be against us. You’ve mentioned some already. We are frail. The world, the flesh, and the devil all can’t wait to wreck our lives, and sometimes it feels like they are winning. Anxiety is at an all-time high. There is a lot against us.” If God is for us, who can be against us? It means, who can win? Who can succeed? Who has more power than God to keep our lives and carry us into eternal glory? Be honest now. Who are you thinking of? Your boss? Your personal enemy? Who has the power? The Mayor, the Governor, the President, the economy, the nations, the secret cabals? We are building a tower here. The foundation needs to be solid. Banish all doubts. There is no one more powerful than the Lord your God—and he is for you.

Second question, second floor, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32) Are you starting to think God is holding out on you? That is a lie from Satan. It’s the same lie that goes all the way back to the Garden. Banish it. God gave Jesus his Son for you. Jesus gave his life for you. Having given you the greatest sacrifice, the most treasured gift imaginable, do you think God intends to hold back the things you truly need? “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32 KJV)

Third floor: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.” (Romans 8:33) Who has the authority to accuse? Again, I can think of a bunch of people. Our human enemies are quick to pick up and throw anything they can find. Our own conscience accuses us. The devil attacks us with daggers of accusation at our weakest points. None of them can stand. Jesus has paid for our sins and God has declared us justified if we put our faith

in him. “So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this: ‘I admit that I deserve death and hell, what of it? For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God, and where He is there I shall be also!’” (Martin Luther)

Fourth floor. Who can bring a judgement? “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:34) This is a divine truth so beautiful it has been part of Christian liturgy for thousands of years. “Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.” Nobody can slip in the side door and get in the way or threaten our standing. It would be just for God to punish us as wrongdoers, but Christ has paid the penalty. Now it would be unjust for God to give a punishment for something that has already been punished. In the ultimate tribunal, we already stand acquitted.

Fifth floor. Are you hanging in there? Here we go. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35) What can separate you from the love of Christ? Do you know how much he loves you? From the ground floor all the way up, this tower of salvation is built on undeniable divine truths. Now what can separate you from the love of Christ? Hardship? Hard seasons of pain when life does not deliver what you ordered. Maybe. I’ve known people to allow the wind of hardship to blow them up against the rocks. But if you tilt your sails toward Jesus, not away, I’ve known many more who say that is when they truly learned who Jesus is. In the middle of hardship, in the middle of suffering, I knew Jesus

best when I needed Jesus the most. Persecution? The church grows fastest when persecuted hardest. Famine, nakedness? When you live each day relying on Christ for provision you get closer and closer to his heart. Danger and sword? There are no atheists in foxholes. What can separate you from the love of Christ. Nothing! “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37) See that, “him who loved us.” This is love. Not that we love God; but that God loved us when we acted like enemies. He loved us. Christ never stops loving you. Even when you run away from him—he loves you.

Fifth floor. Walk out on the terrace and take it in. You are not in the filthy streets of Rome. You are not in the tired mess of Colorado Springs. You are on the fifth floor now. Take a look around. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39) This is a tower of truth, a bulwark of divine truths we need to hear when we are drenched in worries. “We urgently need them today, since nothing seems stable in our world any longer. Insecurity is written across all human experience. Christian people are not guaranteed immunity to temptation, tribulation or tragedy, but we are promised victory over them. God’s pledge is not that suffering will never afflict us, but that it will never separate us from his love. This is the love of God which was supremely displayed in the cross (5:8; 8:32, 37), which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5), which has drawn out from us our responsive love (8:28), and which in its essential steadfastness will never let us go, since it is committed to bringing us safe home to glory in the end (8:35, 39). Our confidence is not in our love for him, which is frail, fickle and faltering, but in his love for us, which is steadfast,

faithful and persevering.” (John Stott) Conquering love.

We are dripping with anxiety in our times. If we are not careful, we will allow these worries to erode our confidence in Christ, damage our most cherished relationships and cast our souls into despair. John Calvin said, “He alone shows real confidence in God, who being content with his protection, dreads nothing in such a way as to despond; the faithful are doubtless often shaken but are never utterly cast down.” Here is a mighty tower of divine truth. “The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” (Proverbs 18:10) This is a bulwark against anxiety and distress. Not a castle in the clouds, but a tower of salvation built on solid, eternal foundation stones one that rises like a castle brick by brick on impregnable affirmations of divine truth and conquering love. The spiritual things are the substantial things. Here is the tower. Run to it.

How? How do I run to that tower and find safety and rest? On Pentecost, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is within us. Jesus gave up his Spirit; he breathed his last on the cross, so that we could have the Spirit of God inside of us. We are not just in a relationship with God, but God is inside of us. How does that make the external threats appear to you, knowing that inside is the Spirit of the Living God? If God is for you, who can be against you? Pray that the conquering love of Jesus breaks down every barrier in your heart. Pray that the conquering love of Jesus breaks down whatever restrains the wayward and the lost. Pray that the conquering love of Jesus declares victory over every power, every dark strain of evil. Jesus is the God whose victory is love. Run to his tower and be saved.