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Who Shall Separate Us?

Romans 8.35-37

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. **Heroes** have always been a part of human cultures
 - 1. Ancient mythologies boast of heroes of various kinds
 - a. Gilgamesh was the favorite of the Mesopotamian culture in the third millennium B.C.
 - b. In the Sumerian Gilgamesh poems, which included the Epic of Gilgamesh, he rescued giants, drove creatures away from goddesses, and revolted against his evil overlord
 - 2. Perseus was a Greek slayer of monsters, including Medusa and her two immortal older sisters who had snakes for hair, fangs and claws, and eyes that could turn people to stone
 - 3. Odysseus, the hero of Homer's epic Odyssey, was known for his intellect, cunning and versatility
- B. Even in the Bible, the Hebrews had their own idea of the hero, embodied in David
 - 1. While as history, not in the same character of the mythologies, his slaying of the giant Goliath catapulted David into the status of a hero
 - 2. And of course, as a leader of the Hebrews into battles with the Philistines, his capacity for leading his armies to grand conquests led to such folk exultations as "Saul has killed his thousands, David his ten thousands"
- C. As I think about heroes, however, I'm amazed by how pervasive is the culture of heroism is in our society
 - 1. Now I'm very much aware that it is hard to find true heroes today
 - a. With the media so invasive into the lives of public figures, it is rather easy to uncover everyone's human frailties and moral failures
 - b. What would today's media have done with George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt and Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas MacArthur?
 - 2. Even today there is a cottage industry of scholars seeking to uncover the infidelities of our American heroes of years gone by
 - a. And so diminish the personas of so many of those on whose shoulders our civilization rests
 - b. And one can debate whether that is a good or bad thing
 - 3. But that in no ways kills our hero culture
- D. No! Our hero culture is alive and well, and has been for some time

1. It exists in the cult of superheroes
 - a. If we have managed to deconstruct our human heroes, the human fascination with the heroic continues unabated in the realm of fiction
- E. **Superheroes** have captured the imagination of our culture, especially since the beginning of the 20th Century
 1. The English word itself seems to have originated in 1899
 - a. And very often portrayals of superheroes were larger than life characters
 - b. They would go around masked or otherwise costumed, hiding their true identity
 - c. But always going about righting wrongs and saving damsels and others in distress
 2. The first may have been the British play *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, about an Englishman leading a double life
 - a. An ordinary man by all accounts, but a master of disguise, an expert swordsman and escape artist
 - b. Who goes about saving people from the guillotine during the French revolution
 3. In the early Century we were treated with Zorro and Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon
 4. The Golden Age of Comic Books fueled the American fascination with superheroes
 - a. With such characters as Superman, Captain Marvel, Batman, The Flash, Green Lantern, and Captain America
- F. Today it's impossible to keep track of all the superheroes
 1. There are literally dozens of them
 - a. And their popularity continues unabated
 2. **Comic Con** is a real thing!
 - a. Comic Con is a comics convention
 - b. And Comic Cons have expositions every year in every state of the union!
 - c. And of course, no one goes to one of these (I'm told) unless they are dressed like their favorite superhero
- G. Now, just for the record, I've never really been into the whole comics scene
 1. I do not now, nor have I ever had, a comic book collection
 2. I do not own any superhero tee shirt
 - a. And not even when I was a child dressing up for Halloween did I ever don a superhero costume
 3. My library does not contain any comic book
 - a. (Though I will admit to owning the Complete Works of Calvin and Hobbes – though Calvin was no superhero!)
- H. At the same time, I am fascinated by superheroes
 1. And I believe that there are real superheroes
 - a. Who are in disguise

- b. And who are in this building
 - c. Today!
 - I. We are in our series on the book of Romans – The Pure Gospel
 - 1. And we have been in Chapter 8
 - 2. Chapter 8 is the pinnacle of Romans
 - a. The summit of the Mt. Everest of all New Testament epistles
 - 3. It is about our assurance of salvation
 - a. The salvation that we have only by faith in Jesus Christ alone
 - J. Chapter 8 is part of a larger section of Romans in which we are introduced to the benefits of our salvation in Christ
 - 1. It begins in Chapter 5 when we learn that having been justified by faith we have peace with God
 - a. No longer enemies
 - b. But now friends
 - 2. We also learn in this section that we have access to the Father through Christ
 - a. That we are saved from the wrath of God – the judgment that we deserve as sinners
 - b. That we are members of the family of God
 - c. That the Spirit of Christ in dwells the believer
 - d. That we are united with Christ
 - e. And that we are freed from the penalty and power of the Law of God
 - K. Once we reach Chapter 8 the good news only continues to multiply
 - 1. We discover that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus
 - 2. That the Spirit of God transforms our minds
 - a. Generating in us both life and peace
 - 3. And that the Spirit of God gives life to our mortal bodies
 - a. That we are adopted into God’s family
 - b. And the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are His children
 - 4. And we learn that the sufferings of our present time are not worth comparing to the glory that awaits us
 - a. That the redemption of our bodies is our great hope for those of us who trust Jesus
 - 5. And we learn that the Spirit helps us in our weakness
 - a. Even praying for us when we cannot even pray for ourselves
 - 6. And that God works all things together for good for those who love Him
- II. **Five Incontrovertible Truths**
- A. And then to affirm the basis for these extraordinary blessings of our salvation in Christ we are introduced to five incontrovertible truths
 - 1. Also known as the **Golden Chain of Salvation**
 - 2. Establishing the One on whom our salvation depends is not ourselves

- a. For if it were, what kind of assurance would that be?
 - 3. But it depends on God
 - a. From start to finish
- B. **Romans 8:29–30** (ESV) —
 - 1. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
 - 2. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called,
 - 3. and those whom he called he also justified,
 - 4. and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- C. Every person whom God saves
 - 1. Everyone who trusts in Jesus alone for salvation
 - a. Not in themselves
 - b. Not even in the Church
 - c. But only in Jesus
 - 2. Has been foreknown by God
 - a. Fore-loved – is the only way to understand it, the object of God unmerited favor
 - 3. And every person whom God foreknew He predestined
 - a. Predestined for what?
 - b. Predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son
 - c. Transformed from sin to sanctification
 - 4. And every person whom God predestined He called
 - a. That is, by the Spirit of God our hearts of stone were turned to hearts of flesh
 - b. And we were born again, regenerated by the Holy Spirit
 - 5. And every person whom God called He justified
 - a. Declared us “not guilty” before the Divine tribunal
 - 6. And every person whom God justified He glorified
 - a. Said in the past tense as from God’s perspective, it is a fait accompli, a done deed
 - b. Our transformation into glory complete in Christ Jesus
- D. Five incontrovertible truths
 - 1. Foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified
 - 2. The unbroken chain of our salvation
 - a. All done by God

III. **Five Unanswerable Questions**

- A. And yet the glories of this chapter only crescendo as we are led into five unanswerable questions
 - 1. Rhetorical questions – which have an obvious, unspoken answer
 - a. An answer which commentators have said are unanswerable
 - b. Because the answer is always no one or nothing
- B. **Romans 8:31** (ESV) —
 - 1. 31 **... If God is for us, who can be against us?**

2. No one!
 - a. Now there are plenty of things and people who might be against us
 - b. But the point is that, once we recognize that God is for us, all those things and people fade into the ether
 - c. And become of no consequence in our lives
- C. **Romans 8:32** (ESV) —
 1. 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, **how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**
 2. God so loved us that He gave up His own Son for us
 - a. Of course He wouldn't deprive us of any lesser blessing that is for our benefit
- D. **Romans 8:33** (ESV) —
 1. 33 **Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?** It is God who justifies.
 2. The cosmic prosecutor has not standing, no case, since God has already rendered His verdict – “Not guilty!”
 - a. Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?
 - b. Well, no one!
- E. **Romans 8:34** (ESV) —
 1. 34 **Who is to condemn?** Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.
 2. There is no executioner
 - a. It turns out that the only One who could execute judgment is the One who took upon Himself our judgment
 - b. And who sits at the right hand of God
 - c. Who even now is interceding for us
 3. Who is to condemn?
 - a. No one!
- F. And now we come to the last of the five unanswerable questions
- G. **Romans 8:35** (ESV) —
 1. 35 **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?**
 2. The obvious answer – which is why it's unanswerable – is no one!
 3. If we are foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified...
 4. If God is for us...
 5. If no one can bring a charge against us...
 6. If no one can condemn us...
 7. Then – no one can separate us from the love of Christ!

IV. **Who Shall Separate Us?**

- A. First we must observe that this is a rather odd question – the way it's posed
 1. **Who** shall separate us?
 2. But the options that are then listed are not “who” options
 - a. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword

- b. They are all “whats”
 - c. They are things, not persons
 - 3. But the question says “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”
 - 4. This is simply a reminder that behind all of the “whats” stands a “who”
 - 5. Just as all the superheroes are always fighting against a “who”, against an evil personage of one sort or another
 - a. We too have an enemy, a “who”, who seeks our demise, our destruction
 - 6. **Ephesians 6:12** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood,
 - b. but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness,
 - c. against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
 - 7. Yes, we have an enemy
 - a. The enemy of our souls
 - b. And the “things” that are listed are simply the instruments used by the enemy of our souls – Satan
 - c. The great deceiver and accuser
 - d. Who wants us to think these are just adverse circumstances
 - e. But he tries to use them to deceive and discourage and even destroy us
 - f. He wants to think God is not good, not kind, not compassionate and certainly not in control
 - g. But of course, he’s a liar and the father of lies
 - 8. It’s good that we know that
 - a. Because any time we find ourselves distraught and discouraged by our circumstances, we should be reminded that there is an enemy who is trying to use those things to drag us into doubt and despair
 - 9. But when we realize that, we can say, “Get thee behind me Satan!”
 - a. “I will refuse to be distracted from my goal”
 - b. The goal of glory
 - c. Which God has ordained for me in Jesus Christ!
- B. The second observation I should make is that we should count the “things” that are listed
 - 1. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword = 7
 - 2. There are seven things listed here
 - 3. Now, you can make too much of numbers in the Bible
 - a. But as you know, they often have significance
 - b. The book of Revelation is structured by a system of sevens
 - 4. And seven is the number of wholeness or completeness
 - a. And the seven things listed here are thus representative of anything that might cause difficulty or trial for the believer
 - 5. Maybe the things on this list are of no concern to you
 - a. None of you looks like you’re starving (don’t ask me how I can tell)

- b. And I don't see a naked person anywhere in sight
 - c. And the vast majority of you have not been in a circumstance in which you have been persecuted to the degree that you're about to have your head cut off (though that happens to Christians with regularity in various parts of our world)
 - d. And maybe your particular issue isn't on this list at all (though tribulation or distress could encompass a whole host of human difficulties)
6. But not to worry – whatever might tempt you to deny God, his goodness and greatness, is included
- a. The list represents anything and everything that can be imagined
 - b. And the seven, I believe, is meant to convey the comprehensive nature of human insult and injury
7. Let's look at each one for a moment so you can get a sense of the range of things that often derail believers and knock Christians sideways for a while

C. **Tribulation**

1. **Tribulation = thlipsis (Gk) – pressure**
- a. Tribulation = tribulum (L) – threshing sledge
 - b. Grains were brought into the threshing floor, and a wooden threshing instrument which was covered with strips of metal was dragged over the stalks to separate the grain from the chaff.
 - c. Tribulum – because it pressed out the grain
2. Have you ever felt like the pressures of life were bearing down on you, tearing you apart?
- a. Life can be hard
 - b. Abuse as a child or as a spouse
 - c. Loss of a job
 - d. Loss of a loved one on whom you depended
3. But you need to know, such pressures will never separate you from the love of Christ!
- a. It doesn't matter what the pressure is
 - b. Or how severe it is
 - c. Christ is always there
 - d. And His love will carry you through
 - e. All the way to the goal of glory!

D. **Distress**

1. **Distress = stenochoria (Gk) – narrow place or affliction**
2. In English it is familiar in medical terms – stenosis
- a. Stenosis is a narrowing of a vessel or tubular structures in the body
 - b. Spinal stenosis – narrowing of spaces in the spinal canal, causing pain, nerve damage, and even paralysis
 - c. Arterial stenosis is a narrowing of the arteries, restricting blood flow
3. In this passage it comes to us as a distress
- a. Which means being confined in a narrow or oppressive space

- b. Where your options are increasingly limited, with little possibility of escaping
- 4. It might apply to someone in a dead-end job, too old to be retrained, but not making enough money to make ends meet
 - a. Or a single mother, with several children, maybe with one with special needs
 - b. On a tight budget with a job with no future possibility of growth
- 5. Lots of people find themselves in such distressing circumstances, and they can't see the way out of their difficulties
 - a. Their life is being squeezed out of them by the constricting conditions
- 6. But even when such distresses overwhelm you, know that not even that can separate you from the love of Christ!
- 7. Boice: you may be in narrow straits now, but you are an heir of heaven, and one day your horizons will be as vast as the universe and as soaring as the stars.

E. **Persecution**

- 1. **Persecution = diagma – an organized program to oppress and harass people**
- 2. This is when there are people who are out to do us harm
 - a. Most of us are not subject to outward and egregious harm because of who we are or because of our faith
 - b. But there are those in this world that find themselves in just those circumstances
- 3. But increasingly there are more subtle pressures placed upon us because we are believers in Jesus
 - a. We find it often in workplaces
 - b. When teachers are disciplined or even fired because they refuse to lie to children about their sexual identity and call them by male or female pronouns based on their sex at birth
 - c. When companies pass over employees for promotion because they refuse to comply with policies which are unbiblical or illegal
- 4. And of course even in the United States there are cases like Jack Phillips who refused to make custom cakes celebrating events which are against his conscience according to scripture
- 5. The thing about persecution, the Bible teaches us that we will have such things
 - a. Jesus says two things, at least, about persecution
- 6. First, He says that we will have it
 - a. **John 15:18–19** (ESV) — 18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”
- 7. Second, He says it is a blessing!

- a. **Matthew 5:11–12** (ESV) — 11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
- 8. Dear friends, even conscious, intentional persecution – systematic attempts to distract, discourage our destroy you – will never be able to separate you from the love of Christ!

F. **Famine**

- 1. **Famine = limos (Gk) – hunger**
- 2. Famine in the ancient world was common
 - a. As agrarian societies experienced all kinds of variations in weather, crops can fail, and whole societies can experience hunger
 - b. Famine is what brought Israel to Egypt!
 - c. And Joseph was the relief agency!
- 3. Even though such is uncommon in our nation, there are many societies around the world that continue to experience such circumstances
- 4. Natural disasters, like fires, earthquakes, or floods, put people in those circumstances
 - a. And we’ve certainly had our share of those things in our nation
 - b. Fortunately, there are a lot of governmental and non-governmental forms of assistance available so that people in our nation don’t usually have to stay in such circumstances for as long as they do, say, in Africa or south Asia
- 5. And we are grateful for ministries like CAMA Services and Samaritan’s Purse for stepping in during such episodes
- 6. But even in the midst of famine, such circumstances still cannot separate you from the love of God

G. **Nakedness**

- 1. **Nakedness = Gymnos (Gk) – unclothed, stripped**
- 2. In the Bible this tends to be associated with famine and the outcome of being without adequate covering
- 3. Economic hardships contribute to it in our world
- 4. But even nakedness cannot separate you from the love of Christ!
 - a. You are clothed now with the righteousness of Christ
 - b. And will ultimately be endowed with white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb of God
- 5. You will be dressed royally, fully prepared for the Kingdom!

H. **Danger**

- 1. **Danger = kindynos – dangerous or threatening circumstances**
- 2. These are dangers which are common to all people by virtue of their living in a fallen world
 - a. Or of dangers which are particularly focused on being a follower of Jesus
- 3. In the case of believers, there are many places in the world today where Christians are arrested, attacked, beaten and killed

- a. Voice of the Martyrs is an excellent organization devoted to chronicling such people and places
 - 4. In our nation, we sometimes find that those who most loudly acclaim tolerance and liberality turn out to be the most intolerant of Christians
 - 5. But even when we find ourselves in such dangerous circumstances, this too cannot separate us from the love of Christ
- I. **Sword**
- 1. **Sword = machaira – small sword used in sacrifices, dagger**
 - 2. This represents the full extremity of danger and persecution
 - a. Where Christians are murdered for their faith
 - b. Martyred
 - 3. The early church was acquainted with this
 - a. Stephen was the first
 - b. Then James
 - c. And indeed, eventually every apostles most likely succumbed to the sword in some way except John
 - 4. Remember, Christians are called “witnesses”
 - a. And the biblical word for “witness” in the Greek **is martyria**
 - 5. But not even the sword can separate us from the love of Christ
 - a. Indeed, to live is Christ and to die is gain!
 - b. Even in death, even in martyrdom, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ
- J. Now maybe you’re thinking, “Ok, Paul – this is a nice theoretical treatise about the difficulties of life
- 1. “But you don’t understand my situation!”
 - 2. I’d be careful about using that argument if I were you
- K. **Romans 8:36 (ESV) — 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”**
- 1. Paul uses this quotation from Psalm 44
 - a. But he uses it in application to himself
 - 2. Just think for a moment about all the things he went through due to his faith in Jesus
 - 3. **2 Corinthians 11:23–29 (ESV) —**
 - a. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.
 - b. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.
 - c. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods.
 - d. Once I was stoned.
 - e. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;
 - f. 26 on frequent journeys,
 - g. in danger from rivers,
 - h. danger from robbers,

- i. danger from my own people,
 - j. danger from Gentiles,
 - k. danger in the city,
 - l. danger in the wilderness,
 - m. danger at sea,
 - n. danger from false brothers;
 - o. 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.
 - p. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.
 - q. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?
4. No! Paul has every right to speak the way he does
- a. He's been through tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword
 - b. All because of the gospel
 - c. And he knows that nothing that he has gone through can separate him – or you and me – from the love of Christ!
5. Because he knows that
- a. Those whom He foreknew
 - b. And those whom He predestined He also called
 - c. And those whom He called He also justified
 - d. And those whom He justified he also glorified
6. And he knows that
- a. If God is for us, who can be against us?
 - b. And He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also graciously give us all things?
7. And he knows that no one can bring any charge against those who belong to Jesus
- a. And that there is no one to condemn
 - b. Because Jesus died for us, rose for us, sits at God's right hand for us, and intercedes for us!

V. **More than Conquerors**

- A. And that's why Paul says...
- 1. **Romans 8:37** (ESV) —
 - a. 37 **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**
- B. *In all these things*
- 1. What things?
 - a. Well all the things he has mentioned – which are all representative of everything that we imagine could ever go wrong in our lives
 - b. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, even sword or martyrdom!
 - 2. And as we go through those things, telling Satan to get lost

- a. And walk through them in faith
 - b. Knowing that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us!
 - c. We are more than conquerors!
- C. **More than Conquerors = hypernikao (Gk)**
- 1. Nikao – root is nike
 - a. **Nike is the Greek word for victory**
 - b. In Greek mythology, Nike is the goddess who personifies victory
 - c. And is often seen as “winged victory” in art
 - d. Think of Nike as an ancient Greek Wonder Woman!
 - 2. Prefix is **hyper**
 - a. From which we get our word hyper
 - b. Which means **above and beyond, or exceeding, or beyond normal**
 - 3. The Latin version of hyper is **super**
 - a. As in Superman
 - b. Or Superhero
- D. Now you may remember, just moments ago, I told you
- 1. That I believed that there were superheroes
 - a. In disguise
 - b. In this very room
 - c. Today
 - 2. And you maybe laughed it off and forgot about it
 - 3. But I was absolutely serious
- E. Because in all these things
- 1. These tribulations
 - 2. These distresses
 - 3. These persecutions
 - 4. These famines
 - 5. These nakednesses
 - 6. These dangers
 - 7. These swords
 - a. We are super victors!
 - b. Super conquerors’
 - c. Super heroes
- F. Not because we possess x-ray vision, or elasticity, or incredible physical strength, or are able to attach ourselves to walls like Spiderman, or are able to leap tall buildings with a single bound, or are faster than a speeding bullet
- G. But we are more than conquerors – super conquerors
- 1. Through Him who loved us
- H. Him – Jesus Christ
- 1. Whose Spirit lives in us
 - 2. He is our superpower
 - 3. But we are more than conquerors!