



**Romans 8:31-39** *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> 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? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

I've always admired people who take the time to sit down and write letters, especially those who still do so today. In my opinion, writing a letter has to be one of the clearest displays of love that one person can do for another—to pull out the paper and a pen and sit down at the table and thoughtfully formulate their feelings and deliver them in a hand-written note. That's just a very loving-hearted thing to do. Did you know that former US President Harry S Truman had a personal rule which he lived by, which was that every day he was away from his wife, he would write her a letter? And after Bess Truman passed away in the early 80's, her family discovered over 1,300 letters that her husband had written to her over the span fifty years. Even when he was serving as President of the United States, he took time out from his dealings with the world's most powerful leaders in order to sit down and write letters to Bess. Clearly, that was a man who loved his wife.

Now, I don't know what was written in any of those letters. There was a book published in 1983 with about 500 of them included, but I haven't read it. But I can guarantee you that whatever he wrote in over 1,300 letters to his wife did not come close to the level of love that we find in just over 200 *words* in our text before us this morning. Here we see not a powerful world leader, but the Creator Himself, the Almighty God, taking the time to write down these beautiful words as a clear testament to His love. And the best part? These words were written to you. We ought to pay close attention to these words, because when we do, we will come away with no other conclusion than this:

### **God Loves Me Dearly**

- I. His love is provable
- II. His love is immovable

So maybe you're not an avid letter writer, but perhaps you gave a Valentine to some loved one last weekend. Or maybe you consider yourself a part of the Valentine's Day Haters Club, the people who say, "I show my love every day, I don't need a special day on the calendar for that." And that's fine if that's how you feel about that particular holiday, that's not how I feel about it, but I do find that anything I give to my wife on Valentine's Day really just kind of falls short of how I actually feel about her. That's the tricky thing about love: it's easy to say, "I love you," it's easy to go buy some flowers on occasion, but that's just not enough. No, for our "I love you's" to be believable, we need to back them up with action every *single* day, and not just on a few select Hallmark holidays.

Of course, the age-old problem with showing your love through daily loving action is that everyone seems to interpret love in different ways. Have you heard of the “Five Love Languages”? That’s a book that was written by a Baptist Minister by the name of Gary Chapman, in which he shares his theory that there are five different languages in which we show and receive love, and we all have a strong preference for one or two of them. Those “love languages” are (1) Words of Affirmation, (2) Quality Time, (3) Gifts, (4) Acts of Service, and (5) Physical Touch. There are tests you can take to see which of those categories are your strong suits, and chances are those are the ways in which you tend to show your love, and you probably like to *receive* loving affection in those forms as well.

But what happens is that a couple will often have different love languages, and even when they’re showing love to one another, it’s like they’re speaking different languages and can’t understand each other. For instance, we can imagine a wife whose love language might be “acts of service,” and she shows love for her husband by serving—like tidying up around the house and folding the laundry—but at the same time her husband’s love language might be “quality time,” and he’s getting annoyed that his wife is being so busy around the house and not taking time out to spend with him. “Doesn’t she love me?” he wonders. And finishing all the cleaning, she’ll finally sit down next to him which he appreciates, but he doesn’t even acknowledge her labors of love, and so she feels unloved too.

And so, you can see how flawed our love often is. Even if we want to show our love, we daily come up short. And in return we feel slighted, unloved, and unappreciated. But when we say, “I love you,” and often fail to be entirely convincing, this is not a problem for God. If we just take a perusal through the first half of our text, we see clearly that **God Loves [Us] Dearly**, because His love is provable. Let’s re-read the first few verses, and we’ll find all the proof we need. ***“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 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.”***

So, perhaps “quality time” is your preferential love language. Well, God has that for you! As verse 32 says, God gave His own Son up for us all. And before He could give Him up for us as the sacrifice for our sin, He gave Him over to us to be *with* us. He handed His own Son from life in Heaven to life on earth, where He would be born of a human mother, where He would work, where He would hunger, where He would be tempted by the devil. As the writer to the Hebrews proclaims, ***“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”*** (Hebrews 4:15) Yes, Christ has spent quality time together with us on earth, living as one of us, sympathizing together with us, so that He could die for all of us.

But maybe you don’t care so much about quality time, maybe “gifts” are more your thing. Well, look no further than the priceless gifts God has given you. Like in verse 33, where God calls you by a unique name, ***“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?”*** You are ***“God’s elect,”*** meaning that before time began, God *chose you* for eternal life through His Son. And make no mistake, this was a gift, not wages earned. Oftentimes, we think in terms of, “I’m going to heaven, because I believe in Jesus as my Savior,” which is true, but we could be fooled into thinking that our life of faith is something that we decided to start off on by ourselves. But to be ***“God’s elect,”*** means that *you* were elected, you were *chosen* for salvation, not that *you* chose *God*. We see this in the book of Acts, when Paul and Barnabas are preaching about Christ in Antioch, and the result is that ***“when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed”***

**to eternal life believed.**” (Acts 13:48) Those who had been chosen by God believed; and so God has chosen each of you, and now you believe and are saved. Clearly this is a gift of grace.

But not everyone cares about “gifts” so much, and so maybe you are an “acts of service,” kind of person. In Christ, we see the clearest “act of service,” that anyone has ever done for another. **“Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised.”** Greater than any chore or any small act of kindness and costing far more than any effort we might exert in our acts of service, Jesus walked through to the cross so that He could give His very life in place of your own.

And how could we not see loving “physical touch” here as well? For God—not willing that you should perish, not willing that you should have to suffer the very real pains of hell which you deserve because of your sin—He suffered hell on earth. He felt the physical tough of the nails and the spear and the scourging and the crown of thorns certainly, but also the very real burden of all of your sin and all of mine too—all so that we wouldn’t have to bear any of it.

And if you prefer to hear love in “words of affirmation,” well God now has that for you in spades. In the second half of verse 33, we find that comfort: **“It is God who justifies.”** That is to say, when God looks at you, He declares you to be completely innocent, “not guilty,” despite how much guilt we all ought to bear. But God doesn’t stop there, because then we have the beautiful words of our Savior spoken about us, which we find in verse 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.”**

Let’s answer that first question first: **“Who is to condemn?”** Who’s the answer to that question? Jesus. He will be the one separating the sheep from the goats on Judgment Day, welcoming some to His eternal rest, and to others saying, **“Depart from me.”** (cf. Luke 13:27) And yet right now, in heaven, Jesus is speaking on your behalf, as Paul says, He **“is interceding for us.”** The Son of God who will judge you, is also the same one who died and rose and is now praying for you.

So God has proven again and again in so many different ways, citing act of love after act of love to prove to our doubting hearts, that **God Loves [Us] Dearly.** And that is often hard to believe. You know, in our other Scripture readings, we read about God being there to assist various individuals. In our Gospel reading, we heard about God the Father speaking out in divine favor of His Son. We saw the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and going with Him to the wilderness. We heard how the Father sent the angels of heaven to care for Jesus during his forty days of fasting and trial. But obviously that was going to be the case because this was God Himself, Jesus the Son of God. Clearly God was for Him, none of that is a surprise.

But in our Old Testament reading, we also read about God being for Abraham, a sinful human. Calling him to sacrifice his son, his only son, and then stopping his hand from falling, God provided the replacement sacrifice, and then God announced that through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Which shows us that God was for Abraham too! But that’s Abraham, the Father of all believers, so it is not a surprise to hear that God was for Abraham!

But what is a surprise is to hear that God is for us just the same. That’s exactly what Paul declares, **“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”** What can we say to all of this evidence of God’s love? As He proved it over and over, when He called us from eternity to be His very own, when He so valued our lives to give His Son’s life in our place, when He endured the pains and guilt for our sins, as even now He speaks out on our behalf—what can we say to all these things other than this: God is for me. **God loves me dearly.** What a blessing to have all of this abundant proof, because so very often, the devil strives to convince us otherwise.

My son Aaron is one-year-old, and as such he's very much a momma's boy, and I'm reminded of this every time Jess goes into another room and shuts the door behind her. In those moments, it doesn't matter how much fun he's having wrestling with dad, he will immediately hightail it over to that door and pound his hand against it with whines that will invariably escalate all the way to full-blown tears, until momma opens the door once more. "It's ok, I'm right here," she'll say as she picks him up and calms those fears of separation.

So, Paul asks us about our fears of separation from God's love. **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"** Do you ever look at the goings-on around you and wonder if God *has* left you, and you're truly all alone? Sometimes we do have those doubts when the going gets tough. We don't sense God's presence right here with us when we're undergoing all kinds of bad stuff. Bad stuff like Paul lists off, **"tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword. As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'"** We don't know how the Apostle Paul died, but ancient church tradition is that Paul was beheaded with the sword by the evil Roman Emperor Nero. And yet Paul is acknowledging here ahead of time, it might get bad, but **God's Love Is Immovable**. None of it can pull God's love away from me, not even the worst that this world can dish up.

**"No,"** Paul writes, **"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."** In all these things. It's not that being a Christian means that you will be delivered from any of these pains, it means that in Christ you triumph over all of them. Every affliction, trial, trouble, suffering that comes your way comes with the promise of God working all things together for good to those who love Him. (cf. Romans 8:28) And so whatever it is, you can receive it from the loving hand of God, and you better believe that makes all the difference. It doesn't make triumphing over these things easy, it makes it *possible* in Christ. Because in Him, you have an assurance that **God Loves [You] Dearly**, that God is *for* you! You can hold tight to this promise and stand against all the so-called evidence to the contrary, having the confidence of Paul, and declaring, **"I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

Thinking back to my son Aaron for a second—every day he encounters those moments when he thinks he's alone, that mom's abandoned him, even though that will never be the case. And Paul lets you know, it will *never* be the case with God either. God's love in Christ is never going to abandon you. It's a rock immovable on which your faith can rest with certainty. Yes, the bad stuff comes. But none of it, not even the worst of it, has the power to deprive you of God's immovable love. It's that secure. It's that strong. So, what are you crying for?

Now, if you only took one thing home with you today, I'd like it to be verse 32, so we'll close considering this: **"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?"** Take this passage home, memorize it, sheath it in your spiritual quiver so that you can pull it out anytime and find solace and comfort. So that if you ever doubt and fear that God may not be on your side, Paul simply takes your attention to the cross where God spared not his own Son but gave him up for you and for me and for all. And then he asks, "Look, God already gave you his most precious treasure, and He did so freely—what do you really think He's going to withhold from you now?" Considering that, I think we can all happily admit with extreme confidence, **"God Loves Me Dearly."** Thanks be to God. Amen.

**"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."** (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

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1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent  
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