

**March 5, 2017**

**John 10:22-30 / Ephesians 3:14-21 / Romans 8:35-39**

**O Love That Will Not Let Me Go...**

Today we come to what has to be – *for the Christian* – one of the most encouraging, comforting, anxiety-reducing, fear-eradicating, and life-changing texts in the entire Bible! In fact, I believe Paul's purpose in sharing these things was to supply the truth that would facilitate the production of such fruit in our lives.

You see, sometimes, when we contemplate the future, in light of something we've seen, or read, or experienced – it can cause fears to arise in our hearts. Fears about pain or aging or disease or physical decay or the loss of our mental capacities. Fears concerning persecution or prolonged suffering or a terminal illness – which might cause us to say or believe or do something that we *FEEL* might cause God to remove His love from us.

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And when you think of it, it IS understandable, because so much of the love we receive on this earth is so conditional. We must often earn it, strive for it, or perform well to keep it. It's often laden with conditions, and expectations, and unspoken requirements.

Sometimes the "love" we've experienced (and I use that term lightly) is nothing but fickle feelings, fleeting emotions, false perceptions, and full of self-interest. It's here today and gone tomorrow.

And because that's what we've often experienced with people, it makes us think (or fear) that God's love might be of a similar kind. Yet Paul's concern in this passage is to eradicate that thought or fear from our hearts and minds. Because *HE* wants us to know that God's love is so unlike any human love we've ever experienced, that we can't possibly compare it to His love.

If the love we experienced was fickle, selfish or conditional love, then of course in some ways, it shouldn't even be called love at all. But even if it was healthy, selfless, sacrificial, and committed love, it's still as nothing when compared to the love of God in Christ!

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So, let's take a closer look at this astounding love which Paul con-fronts us with today, and see exactly what it's like, and why it is so life-stabilizing and life-changing.

And let's begin **FIRST** with v. 35, where Paul sets the stage for everything else he will say in the rest of this chapter by asking the question: "*WHO shall SEPARATE US from the LOVE OF CHRIST?*"

Ans when Paul says "*separate US from the love of Christ,*" he's referring, of course, to the same people he's been focusing on since v. 28 – Believers. Or those God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, sanctified, and will glorify." Or as v. 33 calls them, "*Those God has chosen,*" or in the Greek, "the eklektn" or God's elect.

So, Paul's question is: Can God's chosen be separated from the love of Christ? / Is there something they can do / or experience / or another can do to them / that will cause God to withdraw from them the love He showed them by choosing, calling and saving them?

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And I'm sure you know the answer of some is "yes," while others say "no." It's an issue upon which Christians have always been divided. / I myself wasn't sure my first couple years as a believer.

In fact, most all of you has likely already come to some type of conclusion with regard to that question. You either believe that, "*Yes, under certain conditions one CAN lose their salvation,*" or you believe that, "*No, the true believer CAN NEVER lose their salvation or be separated from His love.*"

Or, like many others, maybe you're not really sure. Because some texts (like Heb. 6:4-6 / Rev. 3:5 / II Peter 2:1) seem to imply one CAN, while other texts (like John 6:37 / John 10:28-30 / and this text before us today) suggest it can NEVER happen.

For instance, one of the FIRST BOOKS I EVER READ after coming to Christ in faith was a copy of Richard Wurmbrand's gripping account of his time as a prisoner in a Russian labor camp entitled, "Tortured For Christ." It details his 18 years of suffering, persecution and torture, in that camp, because he refused to stop preaching the Gospel. I found a copy on a shelf in my house in the Dominican Republic shortly after I arrived there in the Spring of 1980 – *and once I started reading it, I could not put it down!*

Yet as I read it, I remember – very clearly – wondering to myself, as a new Christian, would I be able to endure what he endured? Or would I crack? He was interrogated, beaten regularly, worked to the bone, deprived of sleep, and existed on near-starvation rations. He was sick and cold and hungry, subjected to psychological mind-games, and other forms of torture.

And I wondered: *Would I be able to "hold up" like he did, or would I crack under the pressure? And if I did, would I lose my salvation? Would my inability to endure, or persevere to the end, separate me from God's love?*

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You see, many of the people Paul was writing to had gone through the trauma of losing all they had. In 49 A.D. the emperor Claudius had ordered the expulsion of all Jews from Rome (because of social unrest caused by conflict over Jesus). It was called "The Edict of Claudius."

And since Christians were viewed as a sect of Judaism, they were forced to leave – losing houses, possessions, jobs, friendships, and the

like, heading off with their children and very little else than what they could carry & the clothes on their backs.

What were they to think? Had stopped loving them? Why didn't He protect them from such suffering? Isn't that what we often do? Don't we often measure God's love for us by looking at how good or bad things are going for us? Good health, promotion, or prosperity, God loves us, but bad health, or financial and relational difficulties, and we think He's punishing us or does not love us.

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In fact, less than ten years after Paul wrote this letter, the Christians in Rome would fall under the wrath of Nero. He would falsely blame them for setting Rome on fire, hunt them down, and torture them with inhumane cruelty. Some were smeared with tar, impaled and lit on fire to act as torches for His parties. It was so cruel that even the unbelieving populace took pity on them.

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So what were they to think? That God had stopped loving them? Paul would say, "no." You cannot measure God's love for you by your circumstances at any given moment! If you do, you will be caught in that horribly depressing cycle: "He loves me, He loves me not, He loves me, He loves me not."

God's intense, furious and faithful love for His chosen one's, can-not be measured by our earthly circumstances! Not by trouble, hardship, or the like. Yet it's a mistake many people still make.

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Which brings us to v. 35b – 39, and the **SECOND** thing we can see regarding the love of God. Paul lists many things that might lead US to think about turning away from God – like trouble, hardship, persecution, famine (or starvation), nakedness (that is, the most destitute form of poverty), danger, and the sword (or war). And he includes Christians being slaughtered like sheep (as we've seen in newsreels from the middle east).

Yet although such things might cause US to consider turning our backs on God (and have caused some to do so) they will never cause God to consider turning His back on us. For in answer to the question of v. 35, found in v. 37, Paul says: *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”*

So, to the question: *“Who can separate us from the love of Christ?”* Paul’s answer is *“NO ONE!”* In fact, after listing every possible “who,” or every possible “thing,” that anyone could conceivably suggest as having the capability of separating us from it, he says: “No it can’t! No it can’t! No it can’t! Trouble can’t, hardship can’t, persecution can’t, near starvation can’t, destitute poverty can’t, danger, sword, and martyrdom can’t!

He even goes on in vv. 38-39 to add death, and life, and angels, and demons, and things present, and things future, and height and depth. And then as if to make sure he covers anything anyone could possibly suggest – he adds the all-inclusive statement: **“NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION!”**

NOTHING! That’s what can separate you from the love of Jesus – NOTHING in all creation! In fact, by using the all-inclusive phrase *“nor anything else in all creation”* he even includes US! Because we ourselves are occasionally our own worst enemy! He includes us in the list, because we are all part of “God’s creation.” Even we ourselves, once He by His grace has laid hold of us, cannot separate ourselves from the love of Christ!

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Think of it my friends – for your own comfort and consolation! If you’re a believer, it is because God foreknew you (or foreloved you) and predestined you to salvation – even though He knew everything there was to know about you before you were ever born!

If that isn't grace, I don't know what is! Let that sink in! God predestined those He foreknew, not because, but in spite of the fact, that He knew we would be slaves to sin, and often irritable, selfish, greedy, unloving, disobedient and sometimes downright unlovable!

He chose us to be the recipients of His grace and saving favor – despite the fact that we would fight, resist and rebel against His will, be unholy, ungodly, immoral, twist the truth, practice idolatry, be ungrateful, complain, bicker, be unsatisfied and hard to please.

He saved us even though He knew full-well we would fail and fall and often make a mess of things – over and over and over again! Even though we would struggle and doubt and lose our temper and yell and be impatient and unwise and even do some pretty dumb things on occasion and fail to ever really get our act together.

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Yes, my friends, if you're a believer God foreknew you, as well as everything there was to know about you – from all eternity past. Yet He chose you anyway to be the recipients of a love that is unchanging, everlasting, irrevocable and eternal. That's Paul's point – God's love is ETERNAL. That's why it can't be lost!

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That's my response to those who say one can lose their salvation. If the gift of God to believers, at the time of their conversion, is, “everlasting life” or “eternal life” can it ever be lost and still called eternal or everlasting?

Is it possible to lose that which is everlasting? NO! If one is found to be without eternal life, the only reasonable explanation is that they never had it!

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In fact, these verses state our security in God's love so forcefully, and so comprehensively: That they moved me out of the “unsure” category and into the, “convinced that you can't be separated from it” category!

Although I do have to say (as we shall see in chap. 11) that Scripture does warn very sternly about the very real danger of presuming too heavily on God's grace when we are living in conscious, defiant sin and unbelief (11:20-23). Warnings, which I believe, refer to the presumption of confessing we're believers when we're really not (as in Heb. 6:4-6), or perversely using grace, and justification and security in God's love as an excuse to justify continuing in sin.

It's something we actually find in Jude 4, where we read: "*Certain men, whose condemnation was written about long ago, have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men (that is, men without the Spirit of God) who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality.*"

They were people who simply wanted an excuse to keep on sinning, and found it (of all places!) in doctrine of God's grace, forgiveness and irrevocable covenant love.

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That's why Peter can admonish all believers: "*Be eager to make your calling and election sure.*" Or in other words: Make sure you've really been converted! Make sure you've truly trusted in Christ, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and truly love the Lord! For there are many who say they have, and do, who do not.

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Which gives me reason to pause here, and say to everyone before I get any further into this topic – you need to make sure you're truly in Christ. That you've truly been born of the Spirit and joined by faith to Jesus.

Be sure, as Peter says, to, "*Make your calling and election SURE.*" Make sure you are indeed saved! Otherwise, you may accept as your own a promise that does not belong to you, nor apply to you.

Because the two promises that "*in all those things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*" and "*nothing in all creation will be*

*able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” – are NOT given to everyone.*

Who are they given to? V. 33? The “*Eklektwn*” or “*God’s elect.*” “*Those whom God has chosen.*” THAT is who these promises are given to here, as is quite plain from vv. 28, 29, 30, and 33.

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Which brings us to the **THIRD** thing Paul tells us regarding God’s love. That what we as people need, more than anything else in this world, is to know, and be assured beyond any shadow of a doubt, that we are securely, eternally and irrevocably loved BY GOD! That’s what gets the believer through anything!

And I stress that, because in the past few decades there has been a major shift in emphasis in the church at large, due mainly to a major emphasis in society at large. An emphasis which boldly states that self-love, or loving ourselves, is the most important of all loves.

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Yet you need to know the Bible disagrees. Unlike the contemporary Church, the Bible itself speaks very little about self-love. Because it’s ultimate Author (who is God) knows that what we need more than anything else is NOT to love ourselves, but to know that we are loved by HIM!

And not just loved! But loved by God despite of our sinfulness – in such a way, and to such a degree – that we can’t even begin to fathom it (Eph. 3:14-21)! THAT is what we need more than anything else according to this passage! *NOT* to love ourselves, but to *KNOW* we are loved by God with an strong & eternal love that will never let us go!

A divine love that set it’s affections upon us before the world was made!  
 A divine love that chose us despite our sinfulness! A love that called us despite our resistance and made us alive by grace when we were dead in our trespasses and sins!

A love that humbled itself and stepped out of eternity and condescended to come to earth to sacrifice and suffer intensely for sinners! A love that sought us and called us and laid hold of us and sealed us and justified us and now refuses to ever let go of us! (John 10:25-30).

My friends, please – if you seek to do anything to further your healing, wholeness and growth – do what the BIBLE encourages you to do more than anything else. NOT love yourself (whatever miniscule part that may play in the biblical narrative). But believe and let the truth of God’s extraordinarily great love for you, flood over you!

Isn’t that what Paul prays for all believers in Eph. 3:18? That we might, *“have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love which surpasses all knowledge – that we might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”* THAT is what brings healing, wholeness, growth and the ability to endure anything.

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Then **LAST**, I want to point out from this text that Paul grounds our assurance of God’s love for us in the present (v.35), and in the future (v. 39), on the fact of His love expressed to us in the past (v. 37).

Notice in v. 37 he does **NOT** say, *“In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who LOVES us.”*

**Not at all! He uses the PAST TENSE!** We are more than conquerors NOW, and will be in the FUTURE, by looking to the love God showed us in Christ in the PAST!

**And why does Paul phrase it that way?** Because he wants us to base our assurance that we are loved, and can NEVER lose His love, in

unchangeable divine actions exercised in the past and NOT in ever-changing perceptions or situations or experiences in the present.

The person who is experiencing trouble or hardship, starvation or poverty, danger or imminent death – often has a hard time feeling or believing they are being loved by God. It's hard to feel you're loved when you're experiencing satanic oppression (like Job), or when you're sick or getting punched or beaten or tortured or stabbed or shot or rejected or betrayed. It is. In fact, it's near impossible.

That's why Paul wisely grounds the believer's assurance of God's love in unchangeable events and actions He has carried out on our behalf in the PAST!

He grounds it in the fact that God foreknew or set His affections upon us from eternity past. That God predestined us from the foundation of the world. That He sent Christ to live and suffer and die for us, and sent the Holy Spirit to call and make us alive and convert and justify and sanctify us!

After all: How can I question the love of a God who would forelove and choose and predestine me – knowing all my sin ahead of time? How can I question the love of a God who would send Jesus to live and suffer and die for me – knowing I was ungodly, bound by sin and His enemy? A God who would then send the Holy Spirit to call me, and bring me to salvation, and make my body His home, and seal me unto the day of redemption?

I can't. Because my assurance of God's love is grounded in all those undeserved expressions of His grace to me in the past!

You see, if I look to my circumstances, feelings, perceptions, or present situation – to try and discern God’s love for me – I might never believe it, because many times they imply just the opposite!

NO! I look BACK to all His savings actions on my behalf in the PAST. Because if He loved me then and saved me then and gave me eternal life then – and His love is everlasting, as the Bible says – then I can know NOW that He will never stop loving me!

Try and discern God’s love by your circumstances, and when extremely trying and painful and difficult times come, you will always question His love.

But remember what you’ve received, and that His love is everlasting, and that nothing in all creation can separate you from it – and it will carry you through anything!