

7-1-1937

## Sermon Study on Rom. 8, 33-39

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### Recommended Citation

Laetsch, Theo. (1937) "Sermon Study on Rom. 8, 33-39," *Concordia Theological Monthly*: Vol. 8 , Article 57.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol8/iss1/57>

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**Study on Rom. 8, 33-39****Eisenach Epistle for Eleventh Sunday after Trinity**

With remarkable unanimity Romans 8 has ever been regarded as one of the sublimest flights of oratory, rarely, if ever, equaled by anything that the human mind has conceived or the pen of man has written. The grandeur of the language is more than matched by the exalted nature of the contents of this unique chapter. In the first part of this chapter, vv. 1-17, "the apostle reminds the Christians that the Spirit of God dwells in them and that therefore they are under obligation to live according to the Spirit, who pledges to them their sonship and heavenly heritage; and he solemnly warns them against living after the flesh lest they die and perish." (Stoeckhardt, *Roemerbrief*, p. 371.) In the closing verse of this first part the apostle had spoken of the necessity of suffering with Christ, v. 17. The second part of the chapter shows why every believer ought to be willing to suffer with Christ. The future glory far outweighs the present suffering, vv. 18-25; God's own Spirit supports us in all tribulations, vv. 26-27; all things must work together for good to us, v. 28; God has predestinated us to eternal life, vv. 29-30; nothing can rob us of our salvation, vv. 31-39. This last argument is developed in a series of seven questions, which finally change into a triumphant assertion of unwavering, unconquerable assurance of obtaining the final victory over all enemies of our salvation, of being forever united with God and His love which is in Christ Jesus.

Of the seven questions, the first is one of worshipful amazement, "What shall we, then, say to these things?" The remaining six questions form a remarkable climax of ever-increasing joyous triumph, culminating in the bold statements of vv. 37-39. The first two of these six questions, found in v. 31, immediately preceding our lesson, really comprise the sum and substance of the entire passage. The four remaining questions merely unfold the details, serving to increase the assurance of our salvation.

If that God who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, if that God be for us, who shall, who can, be against us? How is it possible, conceivable, that He shall not with His own Son also freely give us all things? If He has given us His Son, with whom He is one in essence, He has actually given Himself to us. And if we have God in and with His Son, what can there be lacking for our salvation in time and eternity? Ps. 73, 25, 26. This is the theme expanded in the lesson for the Eleventh Sunday after Trinity.

It may not be out of place to note that the apostle is writing to believing children of God, the called saints, Rom. 1, 7, 8. He is



not preaching a missionary sermon; he is not endeavoring to persuade them to become Christians; he is not seeking to convert them. That change has been wrought in them. His purpose is to strengthen their faith, to impart to them some spiritual gift to the end that they may be established, 1, 11. His desire is to remove all doubt and fear as to their salvation, to fill their hearts with heavenly confidence, so that they will be disturbed neither by vexing doubts as to their election nor by anxious worries as to their future glorification.

*"Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth,"* v. 33. Who are these elect, chosen, gathered out? We need not be uncertain as to their identity. The apostle had spoken of "them that love God," "them who are the called," the believers; for they alone love God, they alone are the called. These believers were not called in a haphazard manner, on the spur of the moment. They are the called "according to His purpose," v. 28. This purpose is brought out in vv. 29, 30. Those whom He foreknew He would predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, would call, would justify, would glorify. The apostle v. 30 uses the aorist, not as though God had elected only those who already in time had been called, justified, glorified. The aorist is to bring out the infallibility of God's election, which in some had already accomplished its purpose, that of eternal glorification of body and soul, while the glorification of those still living at the time of this writing and those who would in future be called was to be regarded by them all as so assured as if it had already been accomplished, as if they already had been glorified. That faithful God whose grace and calling are without repentance, by whom they were called unto the fellowship of His Son, will also confirm them unto the end. He will do it, Rom. 11, 29; 1 Cor. 1, 8, 9; 1 Thess. 5, 23, 24. Hence the elect of v. 33 are the believing children of God of all times and places.

The apostle also informs us as to the motives which prompted God to predestinate the elect. He was not moved to this choice by anything in man, by man's works, character, etc. Even the choice of Jacob rather than of Esau as the ancestor of the Old Testament people was not according to works, chap. 9, 11, 12; and the election unto eternal life of the remnant of Israel, the true children of God among Israel, is not of works, but of grace, 11, 5, 6. This election, however, is not an absolute decree, an arbitrary act of God. While there was nothing in man that God took into consideration, He did consider something in Himself, viz., His decree to send His Son into the world as the Redeemer of mankind. We are elected in Christ, Eph. 1, 4. Him God had chosen, elected, Is. 42, 1; Acts 2, 23; 4, 28; Rev. 14, 8, to be the Savior. In this



Christ, because of His vicarious atonement, God elected, predestinated, those whom He foreknew, those whom He chose to elect according to the good pleasure of His will, Eph. 1, 5, 6.

These are the elect of whom the apostle is speaking here, the absence of the article denoting the quality of being elect, so that we might translate "such as are chosen, elect." They are God's elect. We were chosen not by fallible man, unable to finish all his plans, nor by angels, created beings of limited power, who have no jurisdiction over heaven. We were chosen by God, the Lord of heaven, Himself, who is God indeed, omnipotent, unchanging, ever gracious, ever wise, ever able to carry out His intentions, cp. Is. 40, 26, 27.

If this God has made any person one of His elect, who shall lay anything to the charge of such a one? There are indeed plenty of enemies trying to accuse us before God. There is Satan, Rev. 12, 10; there is the Law, John 5, 45; there is our own heart, Rom. 2, 15; 1 John 3, 20; there are our fellow-men, who time and again confront us with accusations and bring their charges before God's throne. Yet the apostle says there is no one who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect. Why not? Have they not sinned? Have they not transgressed the commandments of that very God? Folly it would be to deny it. Are they, then, not chargeable? May not accusations be brought against them and rightly so? No, says the apostle. How is that possible? The answer, "God the Justifying!" Note the strong emphasis on God, increased by the repetition, θεοῦ: θεός, the θεοῦ at the end of the sentence speaking of the accusations, the θεός at the beginning of the sentence speaking of justification. God, that is the end of all efforts to lay anything to the charge of the elect; God, that is the beginning, the sum and substance, of their justification. No man would dare to do that; that is something God alone can do and actually does. As we are God's elect, so we are God's justified, justified, however, not by an absolute decree. God did not simply overlook, cancel, forget about, the sins and wrong-doings of His elect. Such an attitude would conflict with His eternal, unchanging righteousness and justice, Ps. 5, 4, 5; Eph. 2, 3; Rom. 5, 10 (enemies, those against whom the enmity of God is directed). Neither does God justify because of some good quality in man. The apostle had vigorously denied the possibility of any good in man, Rom. 1. 2. He had summed up his findings in Rom. 3, 9 and again vv. 19-23. God justifies by *grace*, free grace, for Christ's sake, 3, 24, 25, 27, 28. In this manner He declares His unchanging righteousness, makes it possible for Himself to be and remain the Just One and the Justifier of the ungodly, 4, 5; 5, 18, and to apply this justification to all that believe in Jesus, 3, 26.



**God, the Justifying.** Paul does not use the aorist participle, since he does not refer to the objective justification, embracing all men, pronounced on Calvary, Rom. 5, 18; 2 Cor. 5, 19, or to the subjective justification, which took place when man was converted, brought to faith in Him that justifieth the ungodly, Rom. 4, 5; nor does he use the future participle, as though he referred only to the final justification on the great day of Judgment, Matt. 25, 34 ff. He uses the present participle, which indicates that this justifying act is an enduring, a continuous act. No matter how often the elect of God have sinned, no matter how often they are charged by their enemies before the throne of God in the hope of finally gaining a hearing, there is no prosecutor, be he human, be he a spirit, that can successfully press his claim against the elect. All their efforts to lay a charge against them must fall flat. Why? God is justifying them all the time, daily, hourly, every moment of their lives. Sin on the part of the elect and charges on the part of their enemies can be no more continuous than justification on the part of God. A truth almost too precious to believe! A grace beyond human understanding, made possible only through the all-satisfying vicarious atonement of the Son of God. Because of this work of Christ we can apply the words of the prophet to our justification also: "Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of His understanding," Is. 40, 28. Cp. Rom. 5, 20 b. 21.

*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us, v. 34.* It is immaterial whether we read the present or future participle, since the future would be the logical future and would not place the condemnation into the future nor restrict it to the final condemnation. Κατακρίνειν, literally to judge down from one's high position, judge against, hence condemn. Again there are plenty of such as condemn the believers. The enemies advancing their charges against them have already prejudged their case, have already pronounced the sentence of guilt and punishment upon them. Again their condemnation, their verdict, is of no effect, will not, cannot, harm the elect. As v. 33 denied their right to charge them with any wrong because there was no guilt, so v. 34 denies them the right to condemn because the punishment has already been borne, punitive justice has been satisfied. Four facts indisputably prove that, two lying in the past, two pertaining to the present and future, all four accomplished by none other than Christ, and every one accomplished for us, in our interest, the triumphant, emphatic ὑπερ ἡμῶν at the end of the sentence referring to every one of the four items. The first fact is,



**Christ died.** Paul had already brought out the vicarious character of that death with such clarity that a mere reference to it would call to the mind of the readers all that it implied. Cp. 3, 24, 25; 4, 24, 25; 5, 6-21; etc.

**Yea rather, that is risen again.** He does not mean to deny the efficacy of Christ's death, but even that death would not have been able to save us, had it not been the death of Him who was raised again, *ἐγερθεῖς*. "The apostle improves upon an expression which has not conveyed all that was in his mind." (*Expositor's Greek Testament*.) By recalling Christ to life, by raising Him, God has declared that His death is a sufficient payment for the sins of mankind, that now His outraged justice has been completely satisfied, that therefore there is no more condemnation to any one who would accept that vicarious death as his own.

**Who is even at the right hand of God.** Our Proxy, who was delivered because of our offenses, who was willing to bear all our penalties, is now at the right hand of God, absolved from all guilt, freed from all penalty. Who, then, shall condemn us, those for whom He performed His work of suffering? Who, then, shall condemn us for a guilt which no longer exists, which God Himself has canceled? Else would the Sin-bearer now stand at the right hand of Him who is the Holy One? Who can condemn us, what penalty, what wrath, what displeasure, on the part of God need we fear if He that was bruised for our iniquities, upon whom lay the chastisement of our peace, now is no longer a suffering servant, but the glorified Lord? Or do you still doubt that no one can condemn us? Behold, there stands He *who also maketh intercession for us*. Also, on top of all that He has done and is doing, He pleads for us. *Ἐντυγχάνειν*, to fall in with a person, to meet a person for the purpose of conversation, deliberation, supplication, etc. Christ stands at the right hand of God, not idle, not mute. He has placed Himself there for a purpose, namely, of conversing with His Father on our behalf, of telling Him that He died for us, that He was raised for our justification, that He stands at God's right hand for us; that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, their Lord and Savior. And He pleads not as one who is subordinate to the Father, whose plea therefore is no more than "a request, properly so called," as Meyer holds. He speaks as One standing at the right hand of His Father, as One who is His equal, as One who has the right to say to His Father, "Father, I will," I purpose, I am determined, "that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am," John 17, 24.

The whole work of Christ, from His conception to His final surrender of the Kingdom, 1 Cor. 15, 24, is a work on our behalf, for us: in the past His death and resurrection; now and to the end



of time, His being at the right hand of God for us, making also intercession for us. Who can condemn us? Whether we live or die, though our bodies lie moldering in the grave and shall be turned to dust and ashes, though it may seem as if we, like the unbelievers, had tasted death, had suffered the penalty of our sins, at the right hand of God stands He who died and was raised again, our Advocate, who is at the same time the Propitiation for our sins. Who shall condemn?

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* V. 35. Luther, Sinaiticus, and some minuscules read "the love of God"; Vaticanus, "the love of God in Christ Jesus"; most manuscripts, "the love of Christ." It does not matter which variant we accept. The love of God is the love manifested in Christ; the love of Christ is the love of God. The saving love of God and Christ is here meant. The genitive, of course, is not the objective, but the subjective, God's love toward us. The apostle names seven experiences which might seem to separate the elect of God, the believing children of God (for of them alone he speaks here; cp. vv. 33. 28—31), from the love of Christ. Θλίψις, a pressing together, oppression, tribulation; the general term, including all that follows, and the general fate of all followers of Christ, John 16, 33; Acts 14, 22. Στενοχωρία, narrowness of place, straits, where one cannot escape the pressure, which renders it the more oppressive, the harder to bear, distress. On the difference in the connotation of the two words cp. 2 Cor. 4, 8, "troubled, . . . yet not distressed."

*Persecution*, again the common lot of all believers, John 15, 20; 2 Tim. 3, 12, so hard to bear. Cp. Smalcald Articles, *De Potestatu*, etc., § 42. *Hunger, nakedness*. While fleeing from persecution, only small food supplies and less clothing could be taken along in order to guard against hunger, to protect against wind and weather, Mark 13, 15. 16. *Peril*, danger, of loss of property, of life and limb. *Sword*, metonymically used for a violent death, the death of a criminal, a shameful death. Note the climax, first in the two general terms, tribulation and distress, then in the five concrete forms of these tribulations and distresses, beginning with persecution; that will lead to shortage of food; gradually one's clothing will wear out; then comes danger of sickness as a result of undernourishment and lack of clothing, this weakness increasing the never-ceasing peril of falling into the hands of the enemies; and finally death. A sorry lot indeed! Yet in spite of all this the apostle raises the triumphant shout: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* Both here and in v. 39 he uses the word χωρίζειν. Χώρα means a space lying between two objects; χωρίζειν, to create



a space between, to part, to separate, a term used quite frequently of the separation, the divorce, of married people. Note the emphatic form of the question. Paul does not ask, Shall anything cause the love of Christ to cease? No; who shall separate us from the love of Christ? God's love, Christ's love, extends to all mankind, John 3, 16; Luke 19, 10. But there is no union, there is rather still a space intervening, between this love and the unbeliever. The unbeliever and Christ have not yet been joined together. That union is effected only through faith, John 14, 23; 17, 20-23; 1 John 4, 15. And since every true Christian should firmly believe that he is one of God's elect, vv. 28-31, he should confidently and without the slightest doubt or hesitation exclaim, Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?

Satan and his allies seek to create a space between us and this love by severing the bond of our union with the love of God through depriving us of our faith. It was Satan who asked for permission to test Job's faith, Job 1, 2; Satan, who spoke through Job's wife, Job 2, 9; Satan, who desired to sift Peter as wheat, Luke 22, 31; Satan, who goeth about to devour by creating afflictions, tribulations, etc., 1 Pet. 5, 9, 10. His purpose is to sever the believers from the love of Christ, to destroy their faith, which is the only bond uniting them with this love. This fiery trial is not to be regarded as something strange, unusual. No, says the apostle, that is to be expected. *As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*, v. 36. The apostle quotes Ps. 44, 22 to prove that suffering is the general lot of the believers. But though believers, as the context shows, vv. 9-16, are sorely tried, though Satan seeks to tell them that they are cast off from the love of God, v. 9, yet because they are suffering "for Thy sake," for the sake of their Savior and God, vv. 1-8, their heart is not turned back, vv. 17-21. In the strength of their God they are conquerors, vv. 23-26. Therefore the apostle, as though taking up the refrain of this psalm of old, bursts forth into the paean of victory:

*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us*, v. 37. Nay, ἀλλά, on the contrary. Though vv. 35 b and 36 are true, that shall not separate us from Christ's love; rather are we more than victors through Him that loved us. The aorist participle ἀγαπήσαντος "denotes the act of love *kat' exochen* which Christ accomplished by the sacrifice of His life" (Meyer). He that loved us and gave Himself for us is He that permits these afflictions to come to us for reasons which His wisdom and His love deem sufficient. Ought we ever to doubt His love? Why should we not trust Him indeed that the afflictions must work together for good unto us? He has foretold them, v. 36; John



16,1—4; why should we be offended or doubt His love if they do happen to us? Moreover, He that sends them is He through whom we are made conquerors, yea, more than conquerors. That is the purpose of our afflictions sent by Him, and this very purpose bespeaks His ever-continuing love toward us, His desire to glorify us in a manner similarly as He Himself was glorified—through conflict to conquest, through battle to victory, through cross to crown. There is no special honor in defeating a weak and puny opponent. But to vanquish a strong, resourceful, wily enemy, to battle through to victory in spite of blackened eyes and aching limbs and bruised body, that is a conquest worthy of the name. Such conquerors we cannot be by our own strength. "With might of ours can naught be done." Relying on our own flesh, we should be found shirkers, disgraceful losers. We are conquerors alone through Him who loved us. In Him we have righteousness and strength, Is. 45, 24; 40, 30. 31. Yes, through Him we are more than conquerors, supervictors, not merely because we are victors in a battle which requires superhuman strength, but because our conquest is not only a bare victory, on the contrary, a super-victory, like unto the victory that He gained over all His enemies, in whose power and by whose aid we utterly rout all our foes, tread them under foot, make a show of them openly, triumphing over them through Christ, glorying in tribulation, Rom. 5, 3; Acts 5, 41; 16, 25; 1 Thess. 1, 6. 7; Phil. 1, 28—30; 2 Tim. 4, 7. 8. Hymn 273, 4. Who could call that a separation from the love of Christ?

It cannot be otherwise. We shall not be separated from the love of Christ. We are more than conquerors; *"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 creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord,"* vv. 38. 39. "I am persuaded" expresses "the apostle's personal conviction" (*Expositor's Greek Testament*); but there is no reason why every Christian may not make this conviction his own, just as little as the "I reckon" of v. 18 is not to be confined to the apostle exclusively. V. 31 he had said, "What shall we then say?" and that includes everything up to v. 39. There is no indication that the apostle has gained this conviction by special revelation. Every Christian may and should be just as triumphantly sure of his salvation as he. Neither death, referring back to "sword," the last word in the first list. No death, be it ever so painful and shameful, nor life with all its vicissitudes, its joys and sorrows, its dangers and pitfalls, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, no angelic spirit, no matter how highly exalted he may be, to which of the various ranks of angels he may belong, may separate us from the love of God. The



apostle speaks here as he does Gal. 1, 8, conditionally, even if it were possible that these good spirits should so far forget their duty, Heb. 1, 14, as to do the very opposite, this will not part us from God's love. *Nor things present, nor things to come*, be they what they may, *nor height, nor depth*, neither confinement on the highest mountain peak nor in deepest dungeon, death in bowels of the earth or in unfathomed depths of the sea (compare by way of contrast Amos 9, 1-3), *nor any other creature*, nothing in all creation, *shall separate us from the love of God*, the love of the almighty, unchanging, ever faithful Rock of Ages, the love *which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord*. Christ, the official name, denoting Him as our Prophet, Priest, and King; Jesus, that name all other names above, the name that saves us; Lord, Owner, by virtue of creation and redemption. *Our*, ἡμῶν, the final word of this majestic chapter, as assuring and comforting as it is full and sonorous, keeps ringing in our ears as a lasting, unforgettable memento of the precious things we have heard. *Our*, all that Christ, Jesus, Lord, implies, is *ours, mine*. Who, then, shall separate us, who shall separate *me*, from the love of God, since it is love in Christ Jesus the Lord of *ours, of mine*? Trust Him to perform that good work which He has begun.

A strictly analytical outline would unfold the rich content of this passage in the following manner: *If God Be for Us, who Shall Be against Us?* 1. Who shall lay anything to our charge? 2. Who is he that condemneth? 3. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?—In the introduction one may speak of uncertainty as one of the most dreadful, nerve-racking sensations. Rather face the worst than constantly live in harassing doubt. In spiritual matters uncertainty is fatal. There is no uncertainty in Paul's triumphant hymn. Theme: *The Certainty of Our Salvation Is a Certainty of Faith*. 1. A certainty of faith (based neither on our works nor on an absolute decree, but on the Scriptural doctrine of justification, v. 35, of Christ's work, v. 34, of God's almighty, gracious love, vv. 35-39). 2. A certainty of faith. (Who shall charge? v. 33; condemn? v. 34; separate? v. 35 ff. "I am persuaded," v. 38 f.)—*We Are More than Conquerors through Christ*. 1. Conquerors over all that dares to accuse and condemn us; 2. conquerors over all trials and tribulations.—*The Comfort the Doctrine of Election Offers*. 1. No one can accuse or condemn us. 2. No one can separate us, etc.—*Nothing can Separate Us from the Love of Christ*. 1. Not our sins, vv. 33-34. Only believe! 2. Not trials and temptations, v. 35 ff. Trust your God and Savior!—*Christ's Work the Firm Foundation of Our Salvation*. 1. He died and rose for us. 2. He intercedes for us. 3. He protects us in all trials. To Him all glory!

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