

Sermon #1,145: Romans 8:31-39

5-17-15 (Easter 7, Exaudi and Catechumen Examination), Bethany-Princeton MN

Hymns: 55, 551, 414, 176)

TAKE SERIOUSLY GOD'S PROMISE, "NOTHING SHALL SEPARATE YOU"

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank You that through Your Word and Holy Spirit You have connected these young people to You in their baptism, and that you have kept them in the true faith during these years. We pray You to keep them in this faith throughout their lives. Persuade them, persuade us, of what You already know and see: that nothing shall be able to separate them from You. Keep them connected to You by Your continuous stream of mercy and grace which flows from Your wounded side, as they use their baptism in repentance and as they commune with You in the Lord's Supper. By these Your means of grace, every day incorporate them into Your body and cleanse them with Your blood that they may have confidence to say:

*Naught, naught, can e'er condemn me, nor set my hope aside;*

*Now hell no more can claim me, its fury I deride.*

*No sentence e'er reproves me, no ill destroys my peace,*

*For Christ my Savior loves me and shields me with His grace. Amen!*

**The Text, Romans 8:31-39. <sup>31</sup> 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 delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession 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 peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written: "*For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*" <sup>37</sup> Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**

**<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life,  
nor angels nor principalities nor powers,  
nor things present nor things to come,**

**<sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other creating thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus, our ascended Lord: Grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here the apostle Paul asks question after question. But they aren't really questions. He's using questions as a way of giving definite answers. It's like asking: *"Am I an idiot?"* You are not in that case seriously asking for an opinion; the answer is an emphatic: *"No, of course not."* You don't ask such a question with doubt in your mind – but to emphatically sweep aside any such thoughts.

That's what St. Paul is doing here:

**"If God is for us, who can be against us?"** A: No one!

Another one: **"Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?"** A: No one!

**"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ"** – but He won't condemn you.

**"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"** A: No one! Nothing!

**"Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"** A: No way!

Every answer to these questions is an emphatic "no." These questions are doubts. It is not that St. Paul never had doubts, or that you are to deny that you doubt at times. You don't have to be afraid that if you doubt, your Lord would say to you, or your pastor would say to you: *"Oh no, you can't! Shh, don't tell anyone, just keep it to yourself. Pretend you didn't have that thought. We do not have doubts in the Christian Church."* That kind of reaction is not in accord with Paul's words.

In Paul bringing up these questions, it's an example of not hiding the doubts, or hiding from them. It's taking the doubts, which live and thrive in shadows and darkness, and bringing them into the light. When doubts – which are lies from the devil – are brought to the Light, they wither. The Light is a Person: the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. The Light is the Truth, He who said, **"I Am the Truth,"** before whom doubts cannot stand. He doesn't want the doubts hidden, buried, or denied. He says: *"Bring them to Me. I will destroy the doubts!"*

You four who are being confirmed need this, as we all do. You need what these last 9 verses of Romans 8 say to you, which you've learned by heart. You

are at an age – and living in an age – when doubting wants to take over. Today's world rather diabolically suggests that it is a virtue to doubt, without supplying the means of arriving at the truth. Whatever the doubt is, all doubts ultimately cast aspersions on whether you stand before God uncondemned. It has to do with the certainty of your salvation. In other words, it's about justification.

That has been the goal of all your instruction in Sunday School and the catechism: to instill the belief that you are continuously justified, declared righteous and forgiven by God. You might've hardly noticed, but right in the heart of these verses St. Paul addresses this. In all Scripture it is hardly any more clear or emphatic as this, when he says: **"God justifies!"** He says that's what God is like: He justifies, what He is about is justifying sinners, declaring those who are guilty by their sins to be completely pure and innocent for Jesus' sake, by His gift. But notice, he says this in the midst of all the would-be doubts, all these questions.

When we are dealing with doubts, we are in the realm of speculation, in the realm of thoughts and ideas. This is the devil's home court. He is an expert at exploiting your human reason. He makes you wonder if what God says is true. The most important truth that God says is that He justifies you. So the devil puts questions in your mind whether this is true. When your sins are declared forgiven by God often you don't feel forgiveness. In your mind you still see your sins. Your doubts in this area are to wonder if it is true after all and if it is even real, especially when you know how in spite of it you still continue to sin.

So first St. Paul shows that it is not a theory or an idea or unreal. He says it is personal. He puts us face to face with a Person, Jesus Christ: that **"Christ died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us"** – that is, He pleads with His blood, to the Father, for you and your forgiveness. There is Christ's blood, His crucified and risen body, His mouth speaking to the Father. All painfully real and personal.

But then, secondly, St. Paul puts this in very visual, physical terms. He repeats a question: **“What, or who, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?”** God inspired St. Paul to ask the question this way. It’s one or the other. You are either connected or you are separated.

This is a picture we can all understand. When you are little you hold your parents’ hand. When you as a little one were in a busy public place with your parents, the horrible thing is to lose the grip, to be separated from the secure grasp of your parent’s firm hand. That is the picture St. Paul is using here: being separated, or being connected and united.

The real horror is separation. That is what hell is: separation from God. That is why you get this sick feeling, why guilt is so oppressive, why a person can reach the depths of despair over sin. It’s because the fallen nature that we are born with knows, as the Bible says, that **“your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Is 59:2)**. Every time you are aware of your sin, this horror comes back, what Paul brings up here, what could **“separate you from the love of Christ,”** this horror of, by your own sinful doing, being outside the eternal love of God. The devil whispers into your conscience this spectre of separation. He makes you wonder if you will be severed, cut off, separated in the end.

What St. Paul is declaring here in such emphatic terms, what you four memorized in the **“neither death nor life”** part, is God’s promise that nothing shall separate you from Him and His love. It is repeated for a reason. Nothing shall separate you. Nothing shall separate you. It is a promise. From God.

The devil does not want you to take this promise seriously. God does.

So what you have confessed today about the sacraments is really essential. You have learned what Baptism is, what blessings it gives you, how it has this power, and how to use it. You have learned what the Lord’s Supper is, what blessings it gives you, how it has this power, and how to use it.

But now I'm going to teach you once more about the Sacraments, with St. Paul's help in Romans 8. What you are ready to learn now about the Sacraments is that they especially make it clear that you are not – and shall not be – separated. The fact that you will not be separated – the coming true of God's promise – is very certain and definite, from God's viewpoint. But from our viewpoint here below, it seems like there are so many things that could keep this from happening. It's like being in that busy public place, so easy to let go of His hand.

But Baptism and the Lord's Supper show how He keeps you.

First take Baptism. Just two chapters before this, in Romans 6, the apostle Paul writes that when you are baptized into Christ Jesus, you are baptized into His death and also into His resurrection. Then he says this: ***“If we have been united in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be united in the likeness of His resurrection” (Ro 6:5).*** He uses the word united, which is the opposite of separated. He is saying that in baptism you are united.

Your Baptism connects you to Jesus' sin-cleansing death on the cross. Through the speaking of the words *“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”* the blood of Jesus came into the water and cleansed you. But it was not just a onetime act. It is a continuous connection. By repenting of your sins which is daily using your baptism, the stream of Jesus' blood is a continuous stream by which His cleansing blood is flowing into you and through you, making you continuously clean in His sight, continuously justified.

Second, take the Lord's Supper, where you four are going to come soon. You know the chief benefit in the Lord's Supper is the forgiveness of sins. But it is not just something that you obtain. It's not just *“I'm going to the Lord's Supper to get forgiveness,”* like it's a Forgiveness Store. Thinking of it all broken-up like that is once again putting us on the devil's home court. But in the Lord's Supper, as His very body is eaten by you and as His very blood is drunk by you, He Him-

self is in you and – this is what we are talking about today – you are truly in Him. By giving you His body to eat He is incorporating you into His body. By giving you His blood to drink His cleansing blood is flowing into you, through you, so you are completely clean. This is His continuously being connected to you, continuously being united with you. The Sacraments don't only give something to you. They keep you connected to Him. As you are continuously connected to Him, what are you not? – separated from Him.

This is how you take His promise in these verses seriously. You use your baptism in repentance and faith. You come to the Lord's Supper.

Never, ever, ever listen to the lying voice of the devil, to the doubts, that you might possibly end up separated because of your sins, and think as a result that God's forgiveness is not for you. God's forgiveness is always for you.

In the end your sins do not separate you from God. It is only staying away from His healing medicine, His Word and Sacraments, that can separate you. So it is that you can say emphatically: nothing **“shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** It is right there in front of you, at the baptismal font, on the altar in, with, and under the bread and wine, and in His forgiving Word that the pastor is commanded to speak to penitent sinners. These are the means by which you know Him as the God who justifies you continuously, who is always only keeping you connected to His eternal love. Amen!