

**“Therefore...How Are We to Live?”**  
**“Defeat & Victory”**

Today we're in the final week of our series on Romans. We've been working our way through chapter eight. It's a chapter that not only lifts up some of the main ideas Paul is sharing in his letter, but also some of the central and overarching themes of the entire Bible.

If you missed any of the sermons in this series, I'd encourage you to pick up copies (out in the back), or to go online and to read or listen to the ones you missed. Romans is a letter that's worth coming back to quite often, and chapter eight is one that pulls it all together.

Today it's all about the love of God for us, and about how God's love, in Christ, sets the foundation and the framework for everything else in life. In fact, I'll go so far as to say (here this morning) that if you can grasp what these final verses of Romans chapter eight are all about, then you've (not only) grasped what the Bible is all about, but you also have a good start on understanding why we're here and how we are to live.

And so, let's get into it. Open your Bibles (if you're not already there) to Romans chapter 8. We're beginning today in verse 31. It's all about the love of God.

Let's start (before even getting into our text) by recognizing the fact that when it comes to the love of God for his world, for us, that (for many of us) it's hard to fully grasp what God's love really means, because that word “love” has been so misused in our society.

We say we love all kinds of things (in this life), and we mean different things when we say each of them, but there's only one word we can use. And so, (we say) we love McDonald's, but there's only one word. We say we love our new set of clothes (same word). We love music. We love baseball. We love tennis. I love my car. I love my job. I love my wife. I love jello and I love Jesus. Now, we mean different things when we say each of them, but there's only the one word. After a while, it's hard to know what we really mean.

For Paul, it was a bit different. There were a number of words Paul could have used to describe God's love for us. (He had a number of options.)

One word he could have used is the (Greek word) “eros.” Eros is a word used to describe a love that's based on feeling. It's romantic. We can't control it. (It's a feeling.) And so we fall into love or we fall out of love.

Another word Paul had (at his disposal) is the word “philia.” Philia is a word used to describe love that's based on mutual benefit or commonality. There's a “give and take” in this kind of love, and it's good, it's positive: friendship, loyalty, faithfulness. In Romans, chapter 12, it's the word Paul uses to describe what God wants for his church. There's a commonality, a mutual benefit. It's a good thing.

Another word Paul could have used is the word “agape.” This is a word to describe a love that is selfless, sacrificial, unconditional. There are no requirements, no conditions, no expiration date. This is a love that keeps on loving even when nothing is given in return.

So, which word do you think Paul uses (in Romans 8) to describe God's love for us? What he uses is the word “agape.” It's the same word we find in John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” There are no conditions to God's love for you. There are no requirements you need to meet. It's not an “if” and “when” and “because” transaction. He just loves you. He loves you.

Now, for many, that's not the experience we've had when it comes to love. (That's not a judgment; it's just true.) So much of the love we see (and experience) in this life (with other people) has some kind of a string attached. There's a condition. There's a requirement. We're loved because of what we do or who we are.

I love you because you provide for my needs. I love you because you've walked with me through some tough times. I love you because we're related...and I have no choice.

Whatever it is, it doesn't matter. If there's a condition attached, if there's a “because” in the equation, then it's in trouble. Because what happens when the “because” changes? Then what?

I love you because you're beautiful...beauty changes. (Then what happens?) I love you because you're funny. Then you get married, and they're no longer funny. They're annoying. (Then what?) I love you because

you're successful. What happens when you fail, when you no longer are? What happens when the "because" changes; then does the love change?

What we're finding with the love of God (in this chapter) is that love in its purest form has no "because." There are no conditions to God's love. If there's a "because" to the love of God, it's nothing more than God loves you because God loves you. He loves you because he does.

Now, I know this is simple. It's basic to our faith. (I don't want to spend too much time.) But for (some of you) here today, you need to hear this. And you need to hear this because at times (for all of us) we have times when we don't feel very loveable. Something you've done (or didn't do), a chapter you're in, a decision or an action that you made or took.

Maybe you aren't very loveable. (It could well be.) It doesn't matter. That doesn't change God's love for you. It's not a matter of if you "did something" or if you "didn't do something." That's not what makes God love.

God doesn't love you (more) because you're here this morning. He doesn't love you (more) if you put in your 10% when the offering goes by. God doesn't love you more if you dress modestly, if you live humbly, if you're a great leader, score the most points in a game, a gifted teacher. That's not how it works. God's love is not conditional upon what you have done.

He doesn't love you more, if you've never been addicted to drugs, if you've never slept around, if you haven't had an abortion. He doesn't love you (more) if you've never done those things. He doesn't love you (less) if you have. God's love isn't based upon what you've done or who you are. His love is based upon what he has done and who he is.

Here's the reality for us. It's all level here. There's not one of us (here today) who is higher up or lower down. It's all the same. Every one of us, there's no difference. It doesn't matter what you've done. That's not how it works. God loves you because God loves you.

D. A. Carson describes God's love this way. (He says): "Picture Charles and Susan walking down the beach hand-in-hand. They've kicked off their sandals and the wet sand squishes between their toes. And Charles turns to Susan and gazes deeply into her hazel eyes and says, 'Susan, I love you. I really do.'

What does he mean when he says 'I love you?' Well, he may mean (something like this), 'Susan, you mean everything to me. I can't live without you. Your smile takes my breath away, your sense of humor, your personality, your beauty, the scent of your hair, everything about you transfixes me. I love you!'

(Carson says), what he certainly does not mean is this: 'Susan, quite frankly, you have such a bad case of halitosis, it would embarrass a large herd of garlic-eating elephants. And your nose is so bulbous it belongs in the cartoons, your hair is so greasy it could oil an eighteen-wheeler, and your knees are so disjointed they make a camel look elegant. I love you!' He doesn't mean that!

So (Carson says), when God says 'I love you' what does he mean? Does he mean something like this? 'You mean everything to me. I can't live without you. Your beauty, your smile, your witty sense of humor; everything about you I like. Heaven would be boring without you. I love you!' Is that what God means?

Now, maybe this sounds funny (and we laugh). But, honestly, this is the kind of therapeutic approach to God's love that we see every day. When you hear God's love talked about, it's often exactly in that way. God's loves you because you're special. It's what you bring to the table. Does God love me? Of course God loves me. Hello! Hello!

That's the approach that so many people take when it comes to God's love. Of course God loves you, because you're special. You're beautiful. You're smart. People like you...and God loves you, too!

That's not the message of God's love. That's not what Paul is saying. Here's what we know about God's love, when God says he loves you, (D. A. Carson writes), "Morally speaking, you are the people of the halitosis, the bulbous nose, the greasy hair, and the disjointed knees. Your sins have made you disgustingly unattractive. But I love you anyway. I love you because I love you." And being loved like that (by God) has the power to change everything.

Here's the deal. You have always been loved like that by God. You have always been loved like that by God.

And so, what does Paul do with that? He takes it and he applies it. That's how faith works. That's why God gives it. (Verse 31): "What, then, shall we say in response to this (to what God has done)? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

That was the message from last week. You might have all kinds of things working against you: your health, your job, your marriage, your finances. It doesn't matter. God takes all of it and (in his sovereignty), in a way that only he can, he works it for his good purposes.

That doesn't mean he causes it, that he wants it, that the things you're going through (right now) are his will, that it's all good. (Of course it's not.) That's bad theology. It's not in the Bible. It's not what it says. It says he takes it, he uses it, he pulls it all together (and because he's God and we aren't) and he can see what happens (before it happens), he works it all together for good.

If God is for us (which he is), then who can be against us? It doesn't matter (who's against us), because God is for us. (Verse 32): "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all; will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

Do you see what Paul is doing? Paul is arguing our case. He's arguing from the greater to the lesser. (He says), "If God did not spare his own Son," (that's as great a sacrifice as there could be) "won't he also graciously work in our lives for the rest?" The answer is, "Of course he will." Why wouldn't he?

You tell me. Is there anything more valuable to God than his own Son? (There isn't.) But when it came down to it, when the choice had to be made, God was willing to give up what was most valuable to him for you.

(Now, follow it through.) If God was willing to do that, to give what was most valuable to him (for you), doesn't it make sense (naturally follow) that he will give you (in life) what you need?

John Stott says, "The cross is a guarantee of the continuing unfailing generosity of God." The cross is a guarantee. What God did on Calvary determines (eternally) your value to him.

I remember (a few years back), going to the second-hand sports store (with our boys) to trade-in a number of things we had used, but no longer needed. We brought all these things in, laid them on the counter, and were hoping to get a good return. When we heard what they were offering, we were disappointed, and so I asked.

The clerk explained how it works. He said that the value of the items (you bring in) is determined by what people are willing to pay for them. He said it's not random. We can't give you what you want. We can only give you what they're worth, what people are willing to pay. (It's simple, makes sense.)

It's the same principle when it comes to your life. Your value (and worth) to God was forever defined by the cross, by what God was willing to pay. If ever you're feeling like you don't matter (your life doesn't count), look to the cross, see what God paid, and you'll see how much it's worth.

(Verse 33): "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?" (We all know the answer.) Revelation 12, Satan is called "the accuser." He accuses us (it says) "day and night."

Maybe he's doing that to some of you right now: whispering in your ear that you're not worthy of God's love. (Do you know something? You're not.) It doesn't matter. That's not the point. God is on your side. (That's what Paul is saying.) Who cares, then, who it is that condemns?

1 John 2, verse 1 (it was our first lesson): "We have one who speaks to the Father in our defense." It doesn't matter who condemns you. Jesus is there in your defense.

Imagine (for a moment) that you're on trial, standing before God; he's the judge. He has this big folder, and it's packed; all of the charges are being laid out against you, your whole life. God starts reading. (You know you're guilty.)

On the charges of (let's just say), losing your temper and punching a hole in the door. (Let's just say.) Jesus says, "I paid for that." On the charge of cheating on a test (Jesus says), "I paid for that, too." On the charges of gossiping and lying (Jesus says), "I paid for that." On the charges of lust and greed (Jesus says), "I paid for that." Every time a charge is brought against you, your attorney speaks on your behalf. He is the atoning sacrifice. I paid for that one!

Because of all that (Paul says), verse 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Do you hear what Paul is saying? Do you see what the Bible is all about? God's love for you is not determined by any condition or circumstance of your life. God's love for you is determined forever because of the cross. In fact, he even says that. (Did you hear it?)

"We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.) Now, it sounds like it already happened, like it was past tense: "him who loved us."

Do you know what Paul's saying? (Don't miss it.) He is not saying that it was something that is now in the past; that God loved you and now he no longer does. (That's not what he is saying.) What he is saying is that (what happened in the past) is what defines God's love for you in the present.

No one put Jesus on the cross. It wasn't the soldiers. It wasn't Pilate. It wasn't the religious leaders. Jesus laid down his life for you. Jesus was on the cross because Jesus chose to go to the cross. That's what Paul is saying. He died for you. He loves you.

That's what he said when he died. "It is finished." It's over. It's complete. It's not going to change. "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Let's pray.

Gracious God, we thank you for your love, for calling and choosing us as your children, and for loving us and forgiving us and for helping us become more than we are through your Spirit. We thank you that the victory already belongs to us, that in Christ, you made a claim on our lives that will never go away. Help us, in faith, to believe in your promises and to commit our lives to you, that what you have done for us would eternal change how we live. In Jesus' name. Amen.