

Who shall separate us?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 August 2020

Preacher: Bob Akroyd

[0 : 00] Verse 18. Verse 18.

Verse 18.

Verse 18.

Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died, more than that he was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake we face death all day long. We are considered a sheep to be slaughtered.

[2 : 26] 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.

Amen. Amen. Good morning and welcome. It's a great privilege always to be at Brunnsfield Evangelical. It would be much better to be with you in person, but I understand that's happening next week.

But it's a privilege to bring God's word to you and to proclaim in Jesus who we are. Not what others might think and not even what we might think ourselves, but what God has to say to us, about us, and for us.

So with you this morning, I'd like to look at the passage that has been read. Romans chapter 8 and verses 18 to 39. It's that chunk of scripture, actually from verse 28 to the end of the chapter.

It's that chunk of scripture that is so familiar, so precious, so encouraging. And maybe for you it might not be a familiar passage, but as you heard those words read, I'd like to highlight a few of the truths that are contained.

[3 : 48] The famous CBS News anchorman, Walter Cronkite. He would always sign off his broadcasts on CBS Evening News with these words, and that's the way it is.

Well, as we move ourselves back to 57 AD or thereabouts, we're with the Apostle Paul, and as he's writing to this Roman church, what is the way it is?

How is it in Rome for his audience? What is it like? What is happening? Well, let me just say that it's not a propitious time to be a follower of Jesus in the first century AD.

To be there in the heart of Rome at the center of the empire, that is not the place that you would want to be as a follower of Jesus. Why? Because in this city that is filled with emblems of power and authority and glory and majesty, none of those emblems proclaim Jesus.

And to proclaim your allegiance to Jesus means that you are no longer allied to Caesar, that you are no longer one of his followers, because you have a greater master, a higher Lord, and your allegiance is to that Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 04] So a Christian in the first century AD is in the minority. They are weak. They are often despised. They often can seem to be marginalized because they are marginalized.

And what's more, we find that this early church has its fair share of problems internally. So it's not just external pressure. There's internal problems. There's moral lapses and decay.

There's internal theological debates and heresies. So you think 2,000 years ago, it is not a great time to be a follower of Jesus.

Maybe let's fast forward to 20 centuries, and you might think if Cronkite would say, and that's the way it is here today, the end of August 2020, it is not a good time to be a follower of Jesus.

It's not easy. We seem to be in the minority. We seem to be despised. We have our fair share of problems externally and our fair share of problems internally. But with that rather bleak introduction,

let me tell you what God says.

[6 : 10] Let me tell you what the Apostle Paul says to this small and despised and divided and vulnerable group of believers at the heart of the Roman Empire.

He says, What then shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? You see, when God is on your side, or rather when you are on his side, one person can become a majority.

One person or a small group can be in the ascendancy. Not because of who they are, but because who they are aligned to. And I want you to think of those words, God is for us.

And the question, who can stand against, who can be against us? What shall we say? What shall we say in response to these great truths? How can we comprehend them first?

How can we respond to them secondly? And what does this mean for us today? Here, the end of August 2020, the city center of Edinburgh, coming out of lockdown.

[7 : 19] Because we might have a lot of ideas about ourselves. The culture or society around us might have their own opinions of us. But let me remind you that what God says is true.

Always true. And what he says about you is the most important verdict of anyone. Or the most important assessment. And with you today, I'd like just to notice a few things that leap off the page. Because what the Apostle Paul has to say is positive. Encouraging. And so often we find it difficult temperamentally to hear the positive.

To hear the encouraging. We hear something positive. And in our minds, we counterbalance that. Or we simply reject what we've heard. I was listening to Radio 4, which is always a good endeavor. If you're not a Radio 4 listener, I hope you become one. But on Radio 4, I heard a psychiatrist say that for every one negative thing that you or I hear, we need to hear at least five positive things to balance out the negative.

[8 : 24] Now you might say, well, that's secular, psychiatric nonsense. Well, my colleagues in the seminary where I work who study Christian counseling say that that's true, but it's actually probably even greater.

That for every one negative thing you hear about yourself, you need to hear seven or more positive things to balance that out. Why? Because temperamentally, we are more inclined to believe the negative.

More inclined to believe what's wrong rather than what's good or what's right. So what God is saying here in his word is that he is for us.

And in the scripture, there are some magnificent truths that come before our attention. And you think of the incarnation, and you think of the birth of Jesus, and how is that described?

Well, Jesus has given, among many names, Emmanuel, God with us. So God is with us. He's now come down to our level. He's now pitched his tent. He's made his dwelling among us.

[9 : 31] God with us. The second great redemptive event in the New Testament is the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. And what does that mean? That means that now God is dwelling in us.

That the Holy Spirit has come, is poured out on the church so that we are now filled with the Spirit. That instead of weakness, there's strength. Instead of deadness, there's life.

Instead of separation from God, there's union with God through Jesus Christ. God with us.

Incarnation. God in us. The truth of Pentecost.

And the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And here before us, God for us. This great work of Jesus Christ, the atonement, this demonstrates that God is for us.

And who is the us? The us is the man, the woman, the boy, the girl, the weak, the strong, the wise, the foolish, that person who placed their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 32] If you are one of that category, I'm not asking you how much you know. I'm not asking you how consistent your walk is. I'm not asking how deep or how strong your spiritual life might be.

But if your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul is speaking to you. And if your faith is not yet in the Lord Jesus Christ, he still speaks to you.

And by demonstrating this reality, he wants to present to you this truth of the gospel. So this is hope for the believer. And this is hope for the non-believer.

But this hope is found only in one person, and that's in the person of Jesus Christ and the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. There's a great summary that was given by John Wesley.

John Wesley, that great preacher of the awakening. And John Wesley continually preached on the new birth. You must be born again. And he said, you can summarize it in this way.

[11 : 33] He said, if any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two. The doctrine of justification and that of the new birth.

The former relating to that great work which God does for us in forgiving our sins, and the latter in that great work which God does in us. And it's with this great truth, God, for us, the work of Jesus on the cross, that I want to begin to answer a few of the questions that the Apostle Paul raises.

Now I understand that your minister had a previous career, that he seemed to be in the career of law. So too, the Apostle Paul has a legal mind and has a reasoning mind.

And very often the illustrations that the Apostle Paul brings us into include the law court, not exclusively, but we have here the law court brought before us very powerfully.

Because what does the Apostle Paul do? He raises three questions. He talks about a charge. He talks about condemnation. And he talks about separation. Now in so doing, he's basically framing what a court case looks like.

[12 : 47] Especially a criminal court case. Because in a case of law, you would have the defendant in the dock. And the defendant would be charged with some crime, some misdemeanor, some felony, some less than serious, or some very serious crime.

So there's a charge. And there's the finding, is this person innocent? Is this person guilty? Now in ancient Rome, they didn't have the not proven verdict as you do here in Scotland.

So you have the charge, and then you either have the acquittal, or you have the condemnation. And the condemnation is that the punishment belongs to the guilty. The person who is guilty will be punished in some way.

And the third phase is the phase of separation. Now, we see this in the court cases today, that if somebody is found guilty, they are punished. They might be fined.

That means that they're separated from some of their money. They might be imprisoned. I'm a prison chaplain, and Monday mornings, I'll find myself in Salkton prison. And there you have a group of men and women who are separated from their families, separated from their homes, separated from society.

[13 : 57] And in the case of capital punishment, which would be a capital, which certainly existed in ancient Rome, in the case of a capital charge, in a capital verdict of guilty, there would be separation from life itself.

So with you just briefly, I'd like you to notice these three questions that the Apostle Paul asks and answers, but all within the context of the Son.

At least six times in these few verses, Jesus Christ is mentioned by name or referred to as Son or referenced as Him. Six times in just a few verses, which remind us that the message here from beginning to end is about Jesus.

Now that's just not a truism that's good for Sunday school lessons. You know the story of the child who was asked in a children's address, what do you call the animal that lives in a tree and has a bushy tail and gathers nuts?

Child raises his hand and says, I know the answer is Jesus, but it sounds like a squirrel. Now this isn't a Sunday school answer, but the answer is Jesus. The answer is Jesus to each of the three questions that Paul presents.

[15 : 10] And let's look at them in turn. We're told that Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, was not spared.

That He was given up for us all. And that if that was the gift, how much more will God graciously give us in verse 32, all things that are necessary.

God is for us. Who can be against us? He didn't spare His Son. He gave Him for us all. And look at verse 33, which is question number one. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

Who will bring a charge? Who will bring a charge against you? Who will bring a charge against me? Who will accuse us of doing wrong? Well, that's a long list, isn't it? We have our own conscience. We have the evil one. We have our family. We have our friends. We have our colleagues. We have our neighbors. There's no end to the list of those who could bring a charge against us.

[16 : 11] And sadly, very often, that charge is true because we are not the people that we are meant to be. I came across this extract from Pilgrim's Progress.

And this is where a Christian encounters Apollyon, the evil one. And in the dialogue, Apollyon says to Christian, Christian responds, Wherein, O Apollyon, have I been unfaithful to him?

Thou didst faint at first setting out, when thou wast almost choked in the gulf of despond. Thou didst attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden, whereas thou should have stayed till thy prince had taken it off.

Thou didst sinfully sleep and lose thy choice thing. Thou wast also persuaded to go back at the sight of the lions. And when thou talkest of thy journey and of what thou hast seen and heard, thou art inwardly desirous of vain glory in all that thou sayest or doest.

Listen to Christian's response. All this is true, and much more which thou hast left out. But the prince whom I serve and honor is merciful and ready to forgive.

[17 : 28] You see, all these charges, the Christian says, are true. And what's more, your charge is inadequate because I'm actually much worse than you suggest. That my crimes, that my sins are far more than you bring before me.

Who will bring a charge against one whom God has chosen? Listen to the answer. It is God who justifies. God who declares you righteous.

Oh yes, the charge is true in a sense. You are guilty. But now the gospel, because of the atoning work of Jesus Christ and the cross not spared but given up, God can declare you righteous and just.

He can maintain his justice and declare the sinner justified. That's the good news. Notice in verse 34, question number two, the condemnation question.

Who is he that condemns? Now condemnation means that you are found guilty in the courtroom of God. We've already said that the charges are actually true.

[18 : 32] That we are sinful by action, sinful by nature, sinful by word, sinful by thought. That we don't do the things we should, that we do the things that we shouldn't time and time again.

And sin has a consequence. Hence the wages of sin, we're told, is death. But the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord. Who is he that condemns?

Well, the answer again, Sunday school answer, but nonetheless true, Christ Jesus who died. So the condemnation fell on him, the innocent for the guilty, the one who was pure for the impure, the one who was right for the one who was wrong.

The condemnation falls absolutely, but the condemnation fell 2,000 years ago on the cross, on Christ. So that condemnation now cannot fall on the Christian believer.

No charge will stand. Why? Because we have one who stood in our place. No condemnation will stand because we have one who was condemned in our place. Christ Jesus who died, more than that.

[19 : 38] You see, the atoning work of Jesus is not just the Friday event, but the atoning work of Jesus is the whole work of salvation, Friday to Sunday. You want to include even ascension in his heavenly session that he died, he was buried, he rose, he ascended, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

That's who he is, that's where he is, that's what he did, that's what he is now doing. So question number two is who is he that condemns. Because he's at the right hand, he's not condemning us, he's interceding for us.

Your prayer life might be inconsistent, so is mine. But let me tell you that his prayer life is perfect and persistent, that he continually prays, he continually intercedes.

And the third and final question, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And we have lists here. We have trouble or hardship. Let's just look at those for a moment.

Trouble are those things that are outside of ourselves. Hardship or distress can mean those things that are within ourselves, some internal strife, internal struggles.

[20 : 50] And that really captures everything. Because the troubles of this life are either outside of ourselves or inside of ourselves. And Paul says, you name it, and the answer is none.

What charge will stand? No charge. Who is he that condemns? No one and nothing. And what shall separate us? And the answer is nothing. Nothing in this world.

Nothing in this life. Nothing in heaven above. Nothing in the earth below. Not the past. Not the future. Not any powers. Not any principalities. Because you have that list from verse 35 in verse 35. And then you have another list from verse 38 which has again these great words. Angels, demons, present, future, height, depth, anything else in all creation.

So, the charge won't stand. No condemnation will be found. And no separation is possible. Now this is not your view of Jesus. This is not the strength of your faith, the depth of your commitment, but

this is the strength of his commitment to you.

[21 : 58] This is what he says about you. This is what he says to you. This is what he has done for you. And the conclusion of this is magnificent. Because we're told that we are now described as conquerors.

No, not conquerors but rather more than conquerors. And with this I want to bring our time together to a close. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Now the audience understood a conqueror. They understood a general or the Caesar who succeeded in battle. Because after the battle, especially a significant battle, there would be a parade.

It was called a Roman triumph. These parades could last for days. And they would slowly make their way through the streets of Rome. And it would be like a build up. Because at the beginning of the parade you would have the prisoners of war, the slaves, those captured in battle.

You would have all the loot or all the treasure that was accumulated because of the victory. Then you would have the soldiers. Then you would have the generals. Then you would have the statesmen, the politicians.

[23 : 09] And as the triumph proceeded through the streets of Rome, the last in the procession was the conqueror. The great general, the Caesar himself. And all eyes would be fixed on him.

Now what Paul is saying is take that image of the conqueror. Take that image of the victor. Take that image of all the city turning out to celebrate.

And he says that is an inadequate image to describe you, Christian. Because you're more than that. You're greater than that. Your status is higher than that. Now the audience who received this message 2,000 years ago, and I would suggest the audience that receives this message today has great difficulty believing it.

Because it doesn't seem to be true. We look at ourselves and we don't seem to be more than conquerors. We aren't said to be more than conquerors by the society that surrounds us.

Certainly the evil one would never say such a thing about us. But God's word is always true. He speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So if you are in Christ today, you are more than a conqueror through him who loved us.

[24 : 20] And nothing will be able to separate us, you and me, from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. You see, the love of Jesus is not just emotional, though it is.

There's an emotional element, of course. It's not just sentimental, but it's powerful, personal. It's a commitment that was achieved on the cross, fulfilled in his work.

So he lived, he died, he rose again from the dead, and in him we are more than conquerors. He conquered, and we become conquerors.

He succeeded, and we succeed. He won, and we win. But the key is him. If you are in Christ, all of these benefits and blessings belong to you.

But if you are outside of him, the charges still stand, the condemnation condemnation still stands, and the threat of separation still looms. So with you this morning, I want you to hear what God has to say, what God has to say about his son, what God has to say about the work of his son, and what God has to say about all who trust in his son, that this is who we are.

[25 : 34] Many years ago, Abraham Lincoln was often asked during the American Civil War whether God is on our side. And famously, he wrote a letter to one of his correspondents that was published in the newspaper.

Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right. Are you on his side today?

Is your trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Because all of these promises then become yes and amen in Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter what you think about yourself.

It doesn't matter what others say about you. It doesn't matter about your failings or your limitations. But if this is true, and it is, that the weakest of all Christians is more than conqueror through Christ Jesus who loved him, who loved her, and who gave himself for us.

If God is for us, who can be against us? Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the truth of your word.

[26 : 38] but we also thank you that you accompany your word with your spirit. That the spirit takes this truth and applies this truth to human hearts. And I pray for each one of your people today that you would remind us of these truths.

That these are, these statements are who we are in Jesus Christ. And for any who might be hearing this, who are not yet committed, not yet converted, not yet convinced, might they hear what you have to say about your people.

Might they hear what you have to say about your son. Might they hear what you have to say about his work and might they place their hope and their faith in him. So there would be no charge, no condemnation, and no separation for them as well.

Hear our prayers, Lord. Answer us, we pray. In the name of Jesus, we ask. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.