

• Answer to difficulties with appreciating God's grace

1. There is nothing more powerful

2. God helped us to begin and will help us to finish

3. God's grace is greater than our weakness and sinfulness

4. No calamity can separate us from God's love

• Not tribulation or distress

• Not persecution

• Not famine

• Not nakedness, peril or the sword

Now Paul seems to pause for breath. <sup>31</sup>*What, then, shall we say to these things?* It is as though he looks round on his congregation and asks them, 'Are you convinced? Have you seen why you can never be condemned?' Some Christians find it hard to believe that God's grace can be as wonderful and as generous as Paul has argued. The next few verses are answering a number of underlying difficulties

1. The first difficulty he answers is: 'Might not some powerful opposition rise up against us, overthrow our salvation, and prevent us from getting to glory?' He replies: *If God is for us, who is against us?*

2. A second difficulty that Paul wishes to reply to is: 'Might it not be that, although I have started on my way in the Christian life, I might not finish the course?' Paul answers: <sup>32</sup>*He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?* The argument is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has done the big thing, delivering up Jesus, will he not do the little thing? Will he not meet any need that I have to enable me to finish the course? Compared to what God has already done, anything else he might need to do is small and insignificant.

3. Paul sees a third difficulty: 'Might I not be finally condemned because of my great weakness and sinfulness?' The question is answered in verses 33 and 34. <sup>33</sup>*Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies!* <sup>34</sup>*Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus who died, yes who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.* We are all so conscious of our weakness and wickedness that we feel that somehow God's grace will not be able to protect us. But I am one of God's elect. The purpose of God cannot be overthrown. Jesus has died for me. The price has been paid for my total forgiveness. Jesus is alive – the proof the atonement has been accepted. Jesus is praying for me – and his prayers cannot be turned down!

4. The next difficulty is this: 'Might not some terrible calamity cause me to fail and so separate me from the love of God?' The question is answered in verses 35–37. <sup>35</sup>*Who shall separate me from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* He lists some of the troubles that we might face. **Tribulation and distress** refers to the various troubles that put pressure on us to sin or to despair. He had experienced all of them himself. One thinks of the many pressures that might come upon us: 'accidents' and calamities, troubles from war and violence, times when enemies cause us heartache, times when we face jealousy or criticism or conflict or rejection or humiliation, ill-health, poverty, pain, loneliness, slander, false accusation, ill-will of one kind or another. **Persecution** confronts Christians from time to time. It is easier to face when the entire church is affected, but more difficult to face when one is facing a vicious attack alone. Also, there might be **famine**, times when Christians might go without food in the course of living for God. **Nakedness** refers to times when the believer has scarcely any clothing. **Peril** refers to the dangers that might confront the child of God. **Sword** is the instrument of execution. There may be times when the Christian is in danger of losing his life. Paul quotes a verse from the Psalms to reinforce his point. <sup>36</sup>*As it is written, 'For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we are considered as sheep destined for slaughter'*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> quoting Psalm 44:22

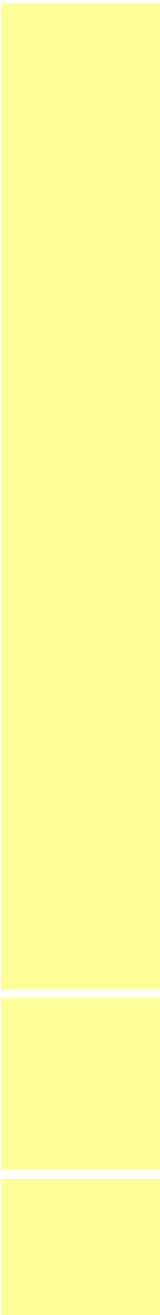
**Could not my own failure separate me from God's love?**

- God has already done everything that needs to be done for our total safety
- But maybe I can separate myself from the love of God?
- He is not denying that we can ever fail or fall
- But he is denying that the love of God will ever be taken away
- His final conclusion - nothing

Are we really able to stand against such pressures and trials? Yes, Paul says, we are. <sup>37</sup>*But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* The tense is a past tense. It is not simply that God loves us, although that is true. But Paul's point is that God has **already** done everything that needs to be done for our total safety. My own weakness will not stop me getting to the new heavens and new earth in which dwells righteousness. This thought might worry me: it is true that none of these things can block the way to my getting to glory but maybe I can separate myself from the love of God? Christians have been known to give way under pressure. Surely I **might** fall, under the pressure of tribulation or persecution. Could not my own failure cause me to be separated from the love of Jesus? But this was the very anxiety that Paul was thinking of when he wrote Romans 8:35–37! The danger that he had in mind was that we ourselves might turn away from God's love in Christ Jesus **because** of the tribulation or persecution or whatever that might come upon us. This is the very thing that Paul is denying is possible. He is not denying that we can ever fail or fall. He knows too well that we can fail badly. He is not denying that we can fail, but he is denying that the love of God will ever be taken away. Even if we fail, the love of God will not be taken away. We shall still never be separated from the love of God in Christ. It is no good saying, 'But we ourselves could stop ourselves from getting to glory.' Paul was thinking of that very question. He was dealing with the very things that we might think could rob us of salvation. When he says nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love, are not we ourselves included in 'all creation'? Would it not completely nullify everything Paul has said in Romans 8 if there were after all a possibility that something **shall** separate us from God's love to us in Christ?

Paul comes to his final conclusion. <sup>38</sup>*For I am persuaded that neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup>nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.*

Through many dangers, toils, and snares  
I have already come;  
Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.



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