

Romans 8:35-39 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This passage contains the last of four rhetorical questions that Paul asks in chapter 8. He asks a question that the answer is obvious. Then Paul defends the known answer with Biblical evidence.

No one / Nothing can come against us – God gave His son

No one / Nothing can bring a charge against us before God – God is the one who deems us right

No one / Nothing can sentence us – Jesus has been punished for us and now Jesus is in the position of honor being the intercessor for us

No one / Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ

Verses 35-39 create, in a way, a chiasm:

1. Who will separate us?
2. Will any physical force?
3. We are more than conquerors.
2. Will any spiritual force?
1. Nothing will separate us.

Now we have a question about separation. The answer is emphatic, and the answer is a positional truth. But Paul takes the positional truth to impact the mental attitude of the believers.

Separate is “**χωρίζω** *chorizo* (*khoh-reed’-zoh*).” This verb is akin to the adverb/preposition “**χωρίς** *chōris* (*chor-ih*)” (without – Romans 3:28; 4:6) which are both rooted in the noun “**χάσμα** *chasma* (*khahs’-mah*).” This is the word where we get chasm. This root noun is only used in Luke 16:26 and means a gulf or void, an impassable distance. The verb “**χωρίζω** *chorizo* (*khoh-reed’-zoh*)” seems less dramatic, but the thought remains (Matthew 19:4-6; Acts 18:1-2; 1st Corinthians 7:10,15). We have the same thought of relationships. We often say that there is something between us, something that is separating us. This question in Romans 8:35 is not a question of temporary separation or a full departure, one from another — a divorce. This rhetorical question indicates any separation, any gulf (large or small). Nothing can separate us.

This phrase “separate from the love” is used again in verse 39, the one difference is that it’s “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So this chiasmic section leads and ends with the rhetorical and emphatic conclusion.

Due to this construction (rhetorical and restatement), the normal assumption is that the idea of separation encapsulates all the previous rhetorical questions.

In verse 35, Paul moves into a list of external physical conditions. The next list in verse 38-39 is about the external spiritual forces. The external physical conditions are the most effective burdens that would cause a believer to relent. The list of spiritual forces appears to be a level of hyperbole — think of anything; nope not even that.

Both lists have ideas that can be grouped; they are also summarized by three words (tribulation, powers, any created thing). The first: distress, persecution. The second: famine, nakedness. The third: peril, sword. The fourth is in verse 38: death, life. Fifth: angels, principalities. Sixth: things present, things to come. Seventh is in verse 39: height, depth

This begins with tribulation. “**θλίψις** *thlipsis (thlih-psis)*” means pressure; this pressure is always external and speaks to the world’s efforts to cause a person to yield. Although part of the list, this is probably a general concept of pressure. Everything in the first list can be understood as a pressure.

The first duo is distress and persecution. Distress, “**στενοχωρία** *stenochōria (stehn-ah-khoh-ree’-ah)*,” is a seldom-used word (4x), usually in context with “**θλίψις**” (2nd Corinthians 6:4-5). The one time it is not used with “**θλίψις**” it is still used in a list (2nd Corinthians 12:7-10). The word obviously meant something to the readers and was probably a common word. The verb form is used in 2nd Corinthians three times in two verses (4:8; 6:12). The word means tight or narrow, so the verb means to restrain. The noun indicates that which restrains and may have been used for a literal or metaphorical restraint. There may be an implication of imprisonment but it could be anything that prevented openness. The best translation is restraint.

Coupled with this is persecution. “**διωγμός** *diōgmos (dee-ohg-mahs)*” is “the chase or the pursuit” (Acts 13:50). In the New Testament, this word is used for persons chasing you in order to do harm or make you leave.

Between the two words we have the idea of outside influences trying to prohibit the movement of the believers. The implication is because of their belief or outspokenness of the Gospel.

The next group is famine or nakedness. Famine is “**λιμός** *limos (lee-mahs)*” and the word indicates hunger. If the hunger is wide spread it is a famine, but when applied to an individual or a family/group, the implication is hunger from a lack of means, hunger due to poverty.

“**γυμνότης** *gumnotēs (goom-nah-tays)*” means either literally without clothes or without the proper clothes. Both the hunger and the lack of proper clothing are normally, as is here, due to the lack of means.

Next is danger or sword. Both words have a true sense of potential of physical harm. Danger is “κίνδυνος *kindunos (kihn-doo-nahs)*” and means hazard, at risk, and can indicate battle. Here, the best is a literal understanding of danger.

Sword is “μάχαιρα *machaira (mah-khai-rah)*” which is literally a sword. Figuratively it can mean that with which you do battle (The Word of God is a sword). As a large knife, it separates (limb from body), figuratively the sword separates (war). The verb means to fight, quarrel. In this scenario, the word seems to indicate that there is a physical, dangerous fight with literal swords or weapons that is meant to kill or maim.

In 2nd Corinthians 11:21-28, Paul defends his authority and identifies his hardships as due to the furtherance of the Gospel.

This challenges the thought that a believer who is doing right will not suffer in regards to not having food and clothing. Paul did. James 2:15-16; 1st John 3:17; Galatians 2:9-10

Few of us, if any, have ever experienced this level of destitution. Most will not; Paul’s point is that even if one experiences the reproach and humiliation of true hunger and true nakedness, does that mean that God has forsaken the believer? Did God forsake Paul in those times?

We understand that God is for us and nothing can happen to us that will separate us from Christ. We know that in this world we will have pressure, trials, pain, sufferings, some even to the level of imprisonment and death. We are told to not fear, God is always with us.

Jesus told His disciples, “Behold, an hour is coming, and has *already* come, for you to be scattered, each to his own *home*, and to leave Me alone; and *yet* I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (**John 16:32-33**).

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In Numbers 16, some of the Levites challenged Moses and Aaron believing that they also had the right to burn offerings before the Lord, something that was particular to Aaron. Korah was the leader of the rebellion; he was one of the chief priests under Aaron (16:1-3). In the account, Moses spoke directly to Korah as the leader of the rebellion. In short, the rebellion was judged and the earth opened up and swallowed the 250 rebellious Levitical priests lead by Korah. Numbers 16:36-40 – Korah became the name by which all Israelites were reminded not to rebel against God’s anointed leaders. Being associated with Korah was a very bad thing.

In Numbers 26, a census is performed. In 26:8-11, the sons of Korah did not die. 1st Chronicles 6:31-38 — Korah was in the direct lineage of Levi. This genealogy demonstrates that they are called Kohathites. Kohath was a son of Levi and Korah was in the line of Kohath. Those who ministered with song were of this specific line. The reason the “sons of Korah” is used is to remind Israel not to go above the station appointed.

Now, to the Psalms where there are eleven Psalms titled “A song of the sons of Korah.”

Psalm 44 is a lament, a cry for help in a great deal of sorrow. The psalm details that Israel had not rebelled, they had kept the covenant and yet they were literally being killed (Psalm 44:18-22).

Paul’s use of this psalm is to demonstrate that suffering because of being associated with the Jehovah is not a new thing. In fact, Israelites themselves have persecuted every prophet of God (Acts 7:51-53). Pressure from the world inevitably follows the believer who lives in the will of God. The pressures vary in kind and intensity, but they are always there. Is our response “woe is me” or do we have a better understanding as to take an eternal perspective and not be shaken by temporary physical problems?

Verse 37 provides an emphatic statement in response to all the pressures and the fact that persecutions are as old as human history.

The verse begins, “in all these things.” Whenever you see pronouns, always ask “what things?” The pronoun does not look forward because of the word “gar,” so, as suspected, it does look back to the list of pressures.

The words “we overwhelmingly conquer” translate one word, “**ὑπερνικάω** *hupernikaō* (*hoop-ehr-nih-kah-oh*).” This is a compound word from “*huper*” and “**νικάω** *nikaō* (*nih-kah-oh*)” which means victorious, to prevail. This is the only time this combination is used in the New Testament and the meaning of the verb is captured well in this translation. The verb here is present indicative. This means that the fact that we are super-victorious is a current situation and not a potential one. This means that even when we are not functioning in a victorious manner, we are still victorious. Since this is not potential but current status, this means that it is not based on what we do, but it is due to our position with Christ.

This is also evident in the verse that says that this is through “the one who loved us.” This is an articular aorist participle, speaking of course of Jesus Christ (John 16:33; 1st John 5:4-5).

In verse 38, we have Paul emphatically stating that he is “convinced.” This is the verb “**πείθω** *peithō* (*pay’-thoh*)” which means to be convinced, to persuade, to be persuaded. The grammatical form is perfect passive indicative. Perfect tense — he has been and continually is persuaded. Passive indicates that this is based on the information he has received and it has convinced him of the truth.

If you need convincing of this truth, you cannot convince yourself, you must review the information and allow the doctrinal truth to influence the way you think. Knowledge of the truth does not always transfer into effectual use of the truth. In order to perform adequately in this doctrine, one must choose to use it when challenged. Remember, God does not deliver us out of our pressures but gives us the tools to be able to endure the pressures — believing and relying upon these promises. This doctrine you have learned needs to be translated into doctrine that is believed – faith. Then it must be used in moments of trial – perseverance. Faith is not profitable to you unless you use it.

James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Next is a list of four pairs of hyperbole. These are idioms to make the obvious stand out. The first is life nor death. What is not contained in the two extremes of life and death? Is there anything in this life that can separate us? How about death (Philippians 1:21-22)? No, death is simply a graduation.

Paul then moves on to angels or principalities (**ἀρχή** *archē*). This speaks to powerful agents of the spiritual realm. "**ἀρχή**" indicates rank, that which has dominion. Paul uses this for the dark, spiritual, demonic forces (Ephesians 3:10; 6:12).

Next is "things present nor things to come." This is obviously an idiom as well and covers anything that is here and anything that is about to arrive. This could be referring to the church age versus the end times. The same word "**μέλλω** *mellō*" (about to be, on the point of happening) is also used in this regard in Ephesians 1:21. This word seems to also indicate a shift in dispensations (Galatians 3:23; Colossians 2:16-17).

The next word is "**δύναμις** *dunamis*." This can be placed into the list or separated out as an overall point of powers in general.

Then we have in verse 39, height nor depth. This is probably an idiom of heaven or hell. This seems to signify, as angels and principalities do, a reference to forces beyond the physical realm.

Then finally, we have the restatement that nothing (any created thing) has ability to separate (same word as v35) us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing can say it better than Scripture and a review of 8:26-39 should bring us to an understanding that, once claimed, we are God's possession and nothing can separate us from God; not even God Himself can separate Himself from those to whom He has identified.

John 10:27-30 2 Timothy 2:13 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." If we are unbelieving, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.