

Inseparable

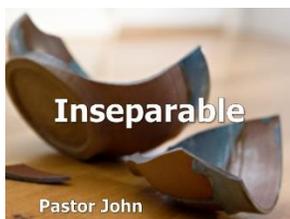
July 30, 2017

Romans 8: 26-39

²⁶ In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words. ²⁷ All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people. ²⁸ We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him. They are the ones God has chosen for his purpose, ²⁹ and he has always known who his chosen ones would be. He had decided to let them become like his own Son, so that his Son would be the first of many children. ³⁰ God then accepted the people he had already decided to choose, and he has shared his glory with them.

³¹ What can we say about all this? If God is on our side, can anyone be against us? ³² God did not keep back his own Son, but he gave him for us. If God did this, won't he freely give us everything else? ³³ If God says his chosen ones are acceptable to him, can anyone bring charges against them? ³⁴ Or can anyone condemn them? No indeed! Christ died and was raised to life, and now he is at God's right side, speaking to him for us. ³⁵ Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, suffering, and hard times, or hunger and nakedness, or danger and death? ³⁶ It is exactly as the Scriptures say, "For you we face death all day long. We are like sheep on their way to be butchered."

³⁷ In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. ³⁸ I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, ³⁹ and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!



Today we continue in our “Broken” series. We began by looking at how we can become broken spirits with broken bodies. But within that idea, we also came to see how God desires to bring us healing and wholeness. Then last week we looked at the ‘labor pains’ we sometimes experience as God is at work in our lives, shaping and molding us into the new creations we were meant to be. Today we move further into Romans 8 as we look at how we are inseparable from the love of God we find in Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

Today’s passage is one of my favorites. In this passage, Paul has so much to say about our connection to God. In times of loss, when we feel as broken as we can feel, verses 38 and 39 are often read. These are familiar words to us. Hear them again today: *“I am sure that nothing can separate us from God’s love — not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!”* Nothing. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that we find in Jesus Christ. Do you hear that – nothing can separate us from the love of God that we find in Jesus Christ. Nothing.

I am sure that nothing can separate us from God’s love – not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below.

Nothing can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!



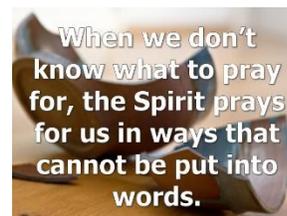
There are times in our lives when we are absolutely sure of God’s presence with us, times when we can see His hand at work in our lives. Last week we were blessed to hear

Jeanette's testimony of answered prayers and of God's healing hand in the life of her daughter-in-law. In her voice we could hear the rock-solid faith that God was with them in the prayers, in the healing process, in and through it all. And then there are moments when we can physically feel the presence of God with us. It is a feeling and an experience that stays with us forever.

Following my junior year of college, I was involved in a tragic accident. As I lay in the hospital bed, I was in continual prayer for the life of one I loved. Then the doctor entered the room and told me that Audrey did not make it. As he was sharing this news with me, my brother arrived. He simply leaned over and hugged me. In that moment, I was held in his love. But I also had the tangible sense of God's arms wrapping around me and holding me there in my pain and brokenness. Neither David nor God could make that pain and hurt disappear in that moment, but both were equally present to me in that time and place. That was over 30 years ago, but the feeling of being held in God's arms is as real to me today as it was then. Perhaps some of you have had a similar experience. These experiences are undeniable moments when we have been touched by God and they forever shape our faith. These experiences and moments remind us and say to us that God is real and present in our lives.

Even though we have these experiences when God is undeniably present to us, we also have times when it feels like God is not present, when it feels like God is absent. As we go through life, we have moments and even seasons when we struggle to sense God's presence in our lives. More often are the moments when

we have difficulty connecting to God. There are moments for me when I cannot put the things I am feeling into words. There are times when I cannot even form the words into prayers. And there are times when I do not even know where to begin. In all of these moments, which maybe you have experienced as well, we are told that someone else is praying for us. In the beginning of today's passage, Paul tells us that the Spirit is here to help. In verse 26 he writes, "*when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words*". When we do not know what or how to pray – it is okay – the Spirit has our back. Paul goes on to assure us that God knows both our thoughts and the mind of the Spirit as it prays for God's people. There is great assurance in knowing that we are not alone. God knows our needs and the Spirit continually lifts our needs up in prayer before God.



When we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words.



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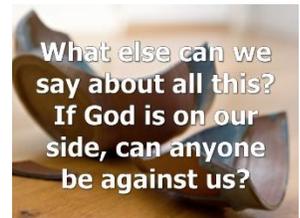
Verse 28 brings us even greater assurance of God's love for us. At times, we cannot see God's plan for our lives. At times, we struggle to move past the "why?" question. Some illness or disease or loss or grief has beset us and we cannot see outside of that time of questioning or past the pain and brokenness. Yet God is at work. God is active and involved even when we cannot sense it. Verse 28 reads, "*We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him*". These are powerful words. These are words full of promise and hope. These are words to cling to. Thanks be to God that He is always at work to bring good to our lives.



We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him.

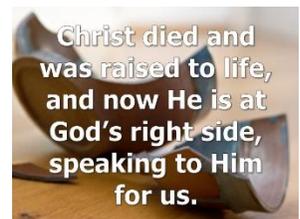
Even when we cannot sense it, God is at work, calling us, knowing us, shaping us into who He created us to be. God is at work for our good.

The hope and promise of today's passage does not end here though. Oh no. Not even close. For me, the hope and promise grows exponentially in the next section of our passage. It speaks of God's power and might. In verse 31 Paul asks us, "*What can we say about all this? If God is on our side, can anyone be against us*"? Who can be against us if God is on our side? No one and nothing. There is nothing that can be against us or defeat us if God is on our side.



What else can we say about all this? If God is on our side, can anyone be against us?

Not only does the Spirit intercede and pray for us and not only is God on our side, but we also have Jesus on our side. To me, this is where hope and promise begin to grow exponentially. In the next verse, we read, "*God did not keep back his own Son, but he gave him for us*". It is in this giving that God showed His love for us. It is His time upon the earth that Christ lived as we live. Verse 34 tells us how this fact impacts us now. Verse 34 reads, "*Christ died and was raised to life, and now he is at God's right side, speaking to him for us*". In heaven, Jesus speaks for us. He does not speak as a divine being but as a man who lived in the flesh. You see, when Jesus lived here on this earth, he experienced the things we experience. He felt the sadness and the grief when a friend died. He felt the pain and hurt when he was rejected by his fellow men. Although He was without sin, Jesus felt the temptation that we feel. So when Jesus sits at



Christ died and was raised to life, and now He is at God's right side, speaking to Him for us.

God's right hand and speaks for us, it is from a place of understanding and empathy. He has walked in our shoes, so when Jesus speaks for us, He speaks from the places where we have felt pain and hurt and brokenness, from the places where we have sinned and fallen short.

I can picture Jesus saying, *"But God, let me tell you what it was like..."* There is a connection there that Jesus has with us from the time He spent on earth. This is what makes separating us from Jesus and His love so hard. This is what Paul is talking about in verse 35 when he writes, *"Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble, suffering, and hard times, or hunger and nakedness, or danger and death?"* Jesus has been through it all. There is nothing we go through that He himself did not experience here on earth. So when we go through these things, Jesus is right there, going through them with us, bringing us strength and peace and comfort and whatever else we need. And don't forget – the Spirit is right there too, praying for us constantly.



Earlier, I shared that our passage today refers to fact that God gave His Son for us. It also lays out the question that if God was willing to give His only Son for us, *"won't He freely give us everything else?"* I believe the answer to this question is 'yes'. I think it is yes because, as I shared earlier, God is always at work for the good of those who love Him. God desires to work good into all of the situations in our lives. When cancer occurs or when a loved one passes away or when our spouse tells us that they are done with the marriage, it is not God causing these things to

happen. Sickness and disease and violence and disaster and other bad things are part of our world. Just as the rain falls on the good and the evil, so too do the things of life. But the difference for you and I, for those of us who believe in God and have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, is that none of these things can separate us from the love of God we find in Jesus Christ.

We will go through difficult things and we will have brokenness and times of suffering in our lives. Our faith does not spare us from these things of life, but it does allow God to be at work in the midst of all that life brings. God works in many ways, all for our good. We may learn something about ourselves or we may be strengthened in an area because of something we went through. We may be changed and have more compassion for others that are in similar situations because of a trial we went through. We may be able to reach out and extend empathy and understanding to another who is in crisis because of how God worked in and through us when we were there. When we are in pain or when we are broken, God is right there. Nothing can separate us from God's love. That love is a constant, always working for good in our lives.

To close, I would like to share one more experience when I found God to be present in the midst of loss and brokenness. As a pastor at my last church, I was asked to come to a home to visit with Virgil. Virgil and Tami had been married in the church. She still attended pretty regularly, so I had gotten to know Tami pretty well. Virgil had won one battle with cancer, but the long second round was going to the cancer. He was angry at God and had not been

to church in quite a while. I arrived unannounced to Virgil. Tami didn't think he would welcome me in if he knew she had asked me to come. As we talked, I came to understand his pain and anger and I saw that he was a broken man. He was mad and angry at God because of the cancer. He did not like the fact that cancer was winning. But part of Virgil wanted to be close to God. We talked through a lot of the 'stuff' and came to a time of prayer for ultimate healing and for God's presence in his life. The three of us shared communion together and we had one more prayer before I left.

Just a couple of days later, I received a phone call from Tami asking me to come to the hospital. I went right up and found Virgil surrounded by his family and closest friends. Virgil had come in just the day before and he was already pretty non-responsive at this point. We talked a bit and then held hands and had a prayer together. There was a peace in the room that God had brought into that place. We all knew that Virgil was good with God and that he was at peace with his situation. He had come back to the God he loved and all was well with his soul. Within the hour, he drew his last breath and peacefully slipped away. Tami cried and we did our best to comfort her. Different people held his hand and said their goodbyes. But through it all was the presence of God and we all knew that God had brought Virgil home to a place of eternal glory. There was no more pain and no more cancer. In the seconds right after Virgil drew his last earthly breath, God was present in a visible and real way.

When we met a couple of days later to plan Virgil's memorial service, his sister Mary was again there. They were very close. As we talked about those last moments of Virgil's life, the topic of God's presence came up. It turns out Mary saw and experienced what I saw and experienced. Just after Virgil drew his last breath, what I can best describe as a cluster of small white lights appeared and danced over us. They were flittering around in the corner of the room, up by the ceiling. It looked like what I imagine an angel flittering there would look like. What Mary shared that afternoon was exactly what I saw and experienced too. She said when she saw the lights she was overcome with the feeling that everything would be alright, that Virgil was there in spirit saying goodbye and giving her the reassurance that he was just fine. To Mary it was an audible voice. Then it flittered one last time and took off, departing that place. God was present for those in a time of great pain and loss. It was just one more experience of a real and tangible God that loves and cares for His children.



The vase that represents our brokenness is a bit more whole today. Another piece has been glued back on. It is still broken and not quite whole. In that sense, it is a bit like you and I. The God that loves us dearly is at work in us each day, through every experience we have, through both the good and the bad, working to bring us wholeness and to shape us into who He created us to be. Hear again Paul's words of promise and hope:

³⁷ In everything we have won more than a victory because of Christ who loves us. ³⁸ I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, ³⁹ and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Nothing can separate us from God's love for us in Jesus Christ. Amen!! Thanks be to God. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What is it that you find most often 'separates' you from God's love in Christ Jesus? Is it busyness or anger or fear or worry or something else?
- 2) How have your past experiences with God's presence during times of brokenness and pain strengthened your faith? How do they draw you in?
- 3) When you sense that God is starting to feel distant or absent, how can you invite and allow God to be present? Who else can help connect you?