

## **Romans 8 v 35-39**

### Introduction

This passage brings to an end the section on Romans chapters 6-8, and is so appropriate for the first Sunday of the New Year. So far, we have dealt with blessings of past and present, what God has done and is doing for us now. But what about future blessings? What is going to happen in unknown future. What if some power and force breaks up our relationship with Lord, robbing us of past blessing and destroying us? Often in back of mind at beginning of New Year. Grateful for the past etc but what of the future? Done all right so far, but will it hold? What disappointment, heartbreak, threat to us and ours?

Using these words of Paul let us courageously look all possibilities in the face, and then heed assurance and final promise Paul provides.

### Seven Adversities and Ten Adversaries

Paul describes forces arraigned against the Christian and threats he must face. The seven adversities (8:35) were more practical realities for Paul than for us. He endured every one of them, he had first hand experience. This is the way that Jesus went also. Early believers knew these as daily experience – as Christians in some parts of the world still do today.

In our comfortable condition we find it difficult to imagine that these things have been and still are daily reality in a literal way for some Christians. Seven adversities:

- Tribulation – trouble and anguish.
- Distress – calamity, misfortune, mental grief, distraction of mind.
- Persecution – in all its forms and in most devilish ways.
- Famine.
- Nakedness.
- Peril – danger, never sure what will arrive next moment from natural elements or enemies.
- Sword – final and most extreme adversity.

Then in 8:38-39, ten adversaries, who repeat some of things he has already itemised, or lie behind them.

- Crisis of death.
- Calamities of life.
- Superhuman evil powers, forces of evil in the universe, angels, principalities and powers.
- Time – things present and things to come.
- Space – height and depth. May also be astrological terms. Ancient world believed man's whole life was tyrannized over by stars.
- Nor anything else in all creation, just in case he has forgotten something else or overlooked any matter.

So he lists adversities and adversaries. Things that threaten us, make us afraid, threaten to undermine our relationship with God, and destroy our security. Every conceivable enemy, most extreme changes of condition, most potent orders of being, all possibilities of time and space, and any and everything else in whole of God's universe.

### Assurance Given

In relation to both lists – **Nothing can separate us (part us, divide us) from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (8:39). These threats and enemies are very real. Rob us of great deal - material possessions, health, pleasure and happiness, and our most precious earthly possessions – our loved ones, nearest and dearest. Sometimes these things can cast men into temporary darkness. We may lose a *sense* of God's love – but they can never take away the *fact* of God's love in Christ Jesus.

World may be falling about our ears – but God has not deserted us. May merely bring him closer. Still closer than breathing, his presence is there all the time, to comfort, strengthen and succour, to help and rescue. Never cease to be encircled and empowered by his love.

**The love of God which passes knowledge** (Eph 3:19) is so certain and changeless that, with absolute confidence and conviction, Paul can say **I am persuaded that nothing can separate us.**

*“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,  
He will not, he cannot desert to its foes”*

One who gave his most precious gift for us on Calvary is not going to abandon us in midst of calamities and distresses of life. Love abides, because he does.

A Christian once complained that he saw, on weather-cock, the words “God is love”. He did not think it was very appropriate on such a changeable thing. He met with answer that he had misinterpreted it because it really meant “God is love, whichever way the wind blows”.

Difficult to believe and accept. Feel like little boy in strange room in darkness to daddy “Is your face turned this way?” Hard to believe that God's love is trustworthy. Yet the Cross, and the word of God, assure us that nothing can drive a wedge between us and God's love.

So men of God have proved down the centuries. During the Marion persecution in Essex, believers secretly and tremblingly said to one who was about to be burnt: “Will you assure us by some sign that Lord is with you in the flame, so that if we suffer we can go more bravely to the door?” Made arrangement that he was to lift up hand if he realized Lord's presence. But at stake, enemies chained hands fast so that he could not lift them up. The fire was lit. Believers waited. No sign. Hearts sank. But when his hands were charred, he lifted up the burnt stumps before he passed out.

W.Fullerton knew lady in midst of Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900. Her head was on the block, and she expected it was about to be cut off. Sword was raised, about to

descend, when attention of Chinese was diverted, and they fled. To all intents and purposes the sword had fallen but she escaped. Fullerton said he believed she was raised up for specific purpose of telling us that she never could have thought the peace of God could have filled human heart as it filled her at that time. Her experience should assure us that those who actually were martyred were equally helped.

A.MacLaren said “We know of earthly loves which cannot die...but we know too of love that can change and we know too that all love must part... How blessed, then, to know of love which cannot change or die. Past, present and future are all the same to him”.

### Promise made

With especial reference to list of adversities, though of general application – **We are more than conquerors** (8:39). Five words in English translation for the one word in Greek that Paul used, υπερνικωμεν. We are hyper-conquerors or super-conquerors. Far from separating us in (not “out of”) all (not “some”) these things – in experience of all those awful things – we are super-conquerors. Not just get there by skin of teeth. Not just a close shave. No, we come out of the fray swinging Goliath’s head in our hand. “Not somehow, but triumphantly” – wrote a Christian man over his mantelpiece – not exactly Scripture, but scriptural.

Not just to endure but to gain and grow through experience. Adversities meant to be blessing to us – to bring us nearer him, deepen our confidence, show us more of his love. On a still day, a glider never climbs into the heavens. Only climbs when wind is strong. By adversity and opposition we are meant to climb higher and make progress. Enemies to be turned into allies.

Note present tense. This promise is not meant to be vain wish or vague hope of future. Webb Peplow’s bereavement of small daughter. Could not preach to 1800 congregation. Opened eyes to see on wall motto card in difficult letter “My grace IS sufficient”. He said “That IS changed my life”. How? **Through him that loved us** (8:37) – that’s the key to the situation.

Battle of the Nile (Report said “victory was not the name for it”) – one of Nelson’s officers described the way the ships were placed, said that by all rules of naval warfare, they ought to have been beaten. Why were they not beaten? Because Nelson was there. And by all rules of campaign between us and the powers that oppose us, we weak creatures ought to be beaten every time. Why, then, are we not? Because our Nelson is there. His presence is the deciding factor in battle. Therefore enjoy present and here and now victory.

Feel in grip of circumstances, exerting pressure on us? No escape? Have tried but door is shut? In all these present circumstances we are meant to triumph. Not just to endure but turn enemies into allies for growth and spiritual development. Preacher had to give up car because of expense of running family. Church member offered use of her beautiful car. He feared he would never take up her offer because of the cost of petrol for big car. Then she said “I want you to run it at no expense to yourself – every account to come to me”. For next few months, out of all years he had a car, he ran one with no anxiety.

## Conclusion

D.L.Moody's favourite text was Isaiah 50:7 **For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint and I know that I shall not be ashamed.** He fixed his life on that text. So may we, for this New Year. Come what may, set face like a flint and go through the year with courage and utter confidence. Sure of two things: nothing can separate us from God's love; not just sit down under circumstances but can use them, even bad ones, as a super-conqueror, for spiritual development and advance.

But depends on relationship with him, not just New Year's Day, but every day. If make sure adverse circumstances and the world helps me to lay hold of Christ – then I have conquered it. If I allow world to loosen my grasp on him, then it has conquered me. The issue is how we relate Christ to changes of outward lives. The way the sails are set, and the way we grasp the tiller, determines whether wind will carry us to safe haven or cause us to drift on shoreless sea.

We can either to cringe and cower, or we can step out briskly and with much assurance in to unknown future, knowing we cannot be anywhere where his presence is not found. In his great love **we live and move and have our being** (Acts 17:28). Able to walk all day long in light of his countenance till see him face to face. Set free from dread of death, unseen world, craven fear of men, anxiety about the future. At home everywhere in vast universe because it all belongs to our Father. Put our feeble hand into living hand. It grasps us more tightly that we can ever grasp it.

*“Let me no more my comfort draw  
From my fail grasp of thee.  
Let me henceforth rejoice with awe  
In thy strong grasp of me”*