

THE BAPTIST HOUR

January 31, 1960

The Indissoluble Bond

By Herschel H. Hobbs

Pastor, First Baptist Church
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Produced by

The Radio and Television
Commission of the
Southern Baptist Convention
Box 12157
Fort Worth 16, Texas

THE INDISSOLUBLE BOND

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ ?” — Romans 8:35

In these closing words of Romans 8 (vv. 35–39) Paul reaches the climax of his letter. Henceforth he will apply the doctrines set forth to special problems. His theme has been the God-kind of righteousness whereby God picks a lost man up out of the wrong and places him down in the right as though he had never been in the wrong. His argument has been that we are completely justified by grace through faith apart from works. From justification on through sanctification he has shown that God not only saves us from sin, but that He works in all of life's problems to make us to conform in our inner natures to the exact likeness of God which is in Christ Jesus. He has seemingly exhausted his vocabulary to set forth the security of the believer in Christ.

Now he rises to one new and final height to declare it. In his usual manner he asks a question, and then gives to it the most exhaustive answer possible. So let us examine this declaration about the indissoluble bond between Christ and your soul as we consider, first, the question; second, the answer; third, the conviction.

First, note the question. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The word “separate” implies space. In short, can anyone put a distance between Christ's love and us? The word “who” implies a person. We may assume that that person is Satan as he works through various means at his disposal. Satan does all that he can to keep you from trusting in Christ as your Saviour. But once you have done so, he then endeavors to destroy the joy and usefulness of your Christian life.

Satan's most effective method in this regard is to convince you that the bond between you and Christ is dissoluble. Though he knows better, if he can convince you then his purpose has succeeded. This he does by suggesting that your salvation is due not to the love of Christ by the grace of God, but that it is achieved by your good works apart from God's grace in Christ. Thus your salvation is not a gift but is your due on the basis of your keeping God's law. It naturally follows that your bond with Christ is only as strong as your continued good works.

The result is twofold. In the first place, you lose the joy of liberty in Christ and become a slave to rites and ceremonies designed, so Satan says, to keep you bound to Christ in salvation. In the second place, all of your spiritual energy is engaged in your keeping saved rather than in declaring God's saving grace to others. So Paul's question is of the most vital importance.

Now having asked the question as to "who shall separate us from the love of Christ," he proceeds to list the "what," or the things which, according to Satan, may effect such a separation. "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" These things suggest the trying experiences which you encounter as you endeavor to follow Christ and His will (cf.v.36).

So often as a Christian you are disposed to interpret these outward difficulties as evidence of the displeasure of God. Instead they more likely may come to you as the result of your faithfulness to Christ. In our Lord's own experience Satan offered Him a supposedly easy way toward the achievement of His life's purpose. Instead He chose to walk in the path which

God had marked out for Him. Across that path Satan threw every one of the above-mentioned trials. But repeatedly God evidenced His good pleasure in His Son. So it may be with you. Jesus never promised His followers an easy road. Instead He said, "In this world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). So

Second, consider the answer. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (v.37). Thus Paul says that on the contrary we shall not be separated from the love of Christ. The words "more than conquerors" render one compound Greek word. Its basic element is a word meaning to conquer or to be victorious. To this is prefixed a preposition meaning "above" or "over." Thus the word means to be more than victorious. In your trials with Satan you do not fight a stalemate. Nor do you barely win the battle. Paul says that you win by a wide, a surpassing margin. You not only defeat the enemy of souls, but you prove again and again the power and love of God in Christ.

Now this surpassing victory is not won in your own strength. To be sure you must, as Paul says in Romans 6:13, surrender the members of your body as instruments of war to Christ that His loving power may be brought to bear upon your trials. But woe betide you if you challenge the enemy of souls apart from Christ! The Epistle of James has been called the most practical writing in the New Testament. In Chapter 4, verse 7, is an oft-quoted sentence. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." But this is only a part of the verse. By getting you to quote and live by this latter part of it, the devil can defeat you every time. But note what the Bible actually says, "Submit yourselves

therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Now that makes all the difference in the world. You are more than a conqueror "through him that loved us." You may lose a skirmish with Satan now and then. But that is due to your weakness, not the Lord's. Strive on in His strength, and ultimate and complete victory is assured!

Instead of Satan's trials separating you from the love of Christ, it is "through him that loved us" that you win the victory. The very things by which Satan would separate us from the love of Christ, God works through them to make that love more real and indissoluble as it binds us to Christ. Paul proved this times without number (Acts 23:11; 27:33). When he stood before the Roman emperor he said, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (II Tim. 4:16ff.). Your friends may forsake you, but the Lord says, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5; cf. Joshua 1:5).

Jesus knew what it was to be forsaken by His friends so that He had to stand alone with God. For that reason the author of Hebrews says, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (4:15ff.). Dare to stand alone with God if necessary. The ultimate victory is yours, for you plus God is a majority. Now

Third, note the conviction. Here Paul reaches the mountain top indeed! From the summit of surpassing victory he surveys the path over which he has

struggled. Then he declares, "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38ff).

The word "persuaded" is a perfect passive participle of the word meaning to persuade or convince. The passive voice means that by his past experiences he has been convinced. The perfect tense means that his conviction is a permanent one. Paul then runs the gamut of all the experiences of life which cause us to stand in dread. Death itself cannot separate us from God's love in Christ. Neither can the trials endured in this life. "Angels" can only mean fallen angels of whom Satan is the chief. "Principalities" refer to demons inhabiting the atmosphere of the earth (Eph. 2:2; 6:12). "Powers" mean all kinds of power, whether spiritual or temporal, which opposes the will of God (I Cor. 15:24; I Pet. 3:22). Then in a wide sweep Paul includes present and future events, anything above the earth or underneath the earth (cf. Phil. 2:10). And lest he has omitted anything he adds "nor any creature" (created things). None of these "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What a promise! What a conviction! Now Paul did not arrive at this conviction by logic. It was the product of that which was wrought out in the crucible of experience. It came after years of testing the love of Christ in every conceivable trial. He dared to do for God. He had defied the powers of Satan to do their worst. And in every encounter with Satan he had come out of it more than a conqueror. Not by the strength of his own body

or will, but by the power of Christ's mighty victory over Satan.

I covet this conviction for you. Those of you who have never trusted in Jesus as your Saviour, I challenge you to submit yourselves unto the Lord. Then resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Those of you who have already given your hearts to the Saviour, I challenge you to stand in His might against the repeated onslaughts of Satan. Thus you will be more than conquerors. You will come to know the fullness of the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Can "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword" separate you from the love of Christ? Nay! They will only serve as the hot fires by which your bond of love in Christ shall be welded and tempered to prove that indissoluble bond which neither time nor eternity can break. Thus you can cry both now and evermore, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15:57ff.).



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**P. O. Box 12157
Fort Worth 16, Texas
REV. PAUL M. STEVENS, Director**

