

“Who Shall Separate Us?”

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

THE LOVE OF CHRIST BY which every true Christian is encircled, is described as being “the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:39) Failing to realize this, many have erroneously supposed that Christ is more loving than God—that God is severe and unloving, ready to visit wrath upon his creatures at the slightest provocation. However, this is not the correct view. The Scriptures reveal that it was God’s love which provided the way of salvation through Christ, and that everything Christ has done and will continue to do for us and for the human race as a whole is by the Heavenly Father’s design and, therefore, an expression of his love.—John 3:16

This does not mean that Jesus is not also loving, nor that he does not personally have our interests at heart. Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9) All the glorious characteristics of the Creator are revealed through Christ, including his love, so we find in our study of the Bible that divine love is referred to interchangeably as being the love of God and the love of Christ. Thus,

the Scriptures are not out of harmony when they speak of the “love which is in Christ Jesus,” because all of the love found in him is equally embodied in his Father.—I Tim. 1:14

It would not be proper to raise the question of being separated from the love of Christ unless we had first been brought within the circle of that love. Thus we are confronted with the necessity of determining whether or not we have actually been enfolded by his love. Indeed, both God and Christ love all mankind. Paul states, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—Rom. 5:8

However, when the apostle raises the question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” he implies that divine love has brought us into a close relationship with God. We are as children in his family, and his love serves as a powerful tie to hold us in this position of special favor. God’s love to us, in Christ Jesus, is so great that nothing shall be able to separate us from it if we continue to trust and obey his will.

We ask then: Have we come into this position of special favor with the Lord in which he claims us for his own, and which will protect us from all the forces of evil that may strive to sever our relationship with him? This question might give rise to many anxious thoughts on the part of those who do not clearly understand the steps of progress by which one is begotten into the divine family. In a matter of this kind, it is quite unsatisfactory to depend simply upon feelings, without understanding.

At the beginning of our Christian’s experience, we might feel very happy and close to the Lord because

of this new relationship. Later, when trials come, and the winds of opposition blow, we may wonder what has happened, and inquire, "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I found the Lord?" On the other hand, to be properly informed on this question gives us a firm foundation of faith, and a conviction which will remain unshaken regardless of how high may be the waves of opposition which surge boisterously around us.

CONSTRAINED BY LOVE

As already noted, divine love has been manifested toward us "while we were yet sinners." We learned about it and began to respond. Have we been brought within the circle of that love? Paul wrote: "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead." (II Cor. 5:14) The love of Christ could not constrain us until we learned about that love, and in order to receive this knowledge it was necessary that messengers and teachers be sent to tell us about it. "How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?"—Rom. 10:14,15

The "witnesses" of Jesus were sent into all the world to proclaim the Gospel of divine love, as manifested through the redemptive work of Christ. (Acts 1:8) All his faithful disciples, as opportunities have afforded each one, have been willing to sacrifice everything, even life itself, in obedience to this commission. In this way the Gospel has been carried from one part of the world to another, by word of mouth, by the printed page, and in these closing years of the age, by radio, television, and many forms of electronic media.

This does not mean that there has been anything haphazard as to who have been reached and quickened by the power of the Gospel. God's providences have overseen this work of proclaiming the Gospel insofar as the individual responses to the message are concerned. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44) This means that if we have heard the Gospel of divine love, and by it have been drawn to Christ, it has been by God's appointment, regardless of the source. This is not the work of man, but of God.

Paul writes in the Scripture quoted above that we "judge"—that is, we reason—that "if one died for all, then were all dead." If this be true, and it is, it means that we, too, were "dead" and under condemnation to death because of Adamic sin. (Rom. 5:12; I Cor. 15:22) If we are truly being drawn to God by the power of the Gospel of Christ, this is one of the first important facts we will realize. It is a touchstone by which we can determine definitely whether or not we have been led of the Lord, or whether our desire to serve him results merely from feelings of emotion. Has the Lord, through the truth of the Gospel, revealed to us our true status as sinners, members of a condemned and dying race?

In the recognition of our undone condition and that Christ died in order that we might be reconciled to God, there results a further constraining power of divine love. First we recognize ourselves as sinners needing God's mercy through Christ; we repent of our sins, and then, in the name of Christ, we present ourselves in full devotion to God, to do and be whatever he indicates as his will for us. In Romans 12:1, Paul describes this as presenting ourselves as

a “living sacrifice,” and he assures us that in so doing our offering will be “holy, acceptable unto God.” The apostle declares also that such a dedication of ourselves is but our “reasonable service.”

To make this full consecration, and then faithfully devote our lives to him day by day until our sacrifice is wholly consumed and we have been faithful even unto death, is our part of a wonderful arrangement whereby we become sons of God, that we may live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4) We can thus have assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—nothing, that is, except unfaithfulness to the terms of our consecration.

The reason that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ is because he, and the Heavenly Father, are far greater than all who are against us. The world, the flesh, and the devil will do all they can to discourage us, and tempt us to give up the fight. In every time of attack, however, let us claim the promises of the Scriptures and renew our strength to continue on in the narrow way. We know that those whom God has honored with his Truth, and drawn to Christ in the spirit of full consecration to do his will, are precious to him. The Heavenly Father will hold them in his own right hand, secure against all the assaults of the Adversary. Knowing this, we can say with the apostle: “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.”—Rom. 8:38,39 ■