

## **GIVING UP IS NOT AN OPTION!**

**Today's Text: Romans 8: 31-39**

### **Extracts:**

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, 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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord [Rom. 8: 35, 37-39].*

*On May 24, 2010, Rachele Friedman Chapman was enjoying herself at her bachelorette party in Virginia Beach, Virginia (USA) in preparation for her wedding the following day.<sup>1</sup> One of her bridesmaids playfully pushed her into a shallow swimming pool. Unexpectedly, she fractured the C6 vertebra in her neck, leaving her unable to walk for the rest of her life. The wedding and honeymoon went on as planned but now 27-year-old Rachele and her husband, Chris, are facing serious financial hardships. Without federal assistance, they are depending on his teacher's salary and a monthly insurance stipend from her former job which can barely pay their bills. Yet, they have not given up on big things for their future, including even having a baby. As Rachele put it, "It can be tough, but we are doing the best we can."*

*Rachele and Chris are not ready to give up, in spite of the odds that they are facing. Everything and everybody around them may look discouraging. Some good people are helping them. But the buck falls on them to take themselves out of their situation. After all, who wants to help people who do not want to be helped? In a way, most believers are in the same predicament. By merely choosing to live godly lives, they are facing overwhelming odds in various aspects of their lives, physical, psychological and/or spiritual. Yet, as believers, they are expected to hang in there, not to give up, that giving up is not an option! I have good news for them. In this week's Bible verses, Paul assures us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus; that we are to hang in there because we are more than conquerors through Christ who strengthens us. For more on this great promise, read this week's exciting study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story based on: Scott Stump, "Paralyzed bride remains positive in face of financial hardships," *TODAY*, Feb. 28, 2013; <http://todaynews.today.com/news/2013/02/28/17133252-paralyzed-bride-remains-positive-in-face-of-financial-hardships>

## 1. Background: Our separation anxiety persists!

The word of God says, “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small” [Prov. 24: 10]. That is blunt! In reality, it is at the point of adversity that most of us panick and want to give up. For example, when the children of Israel found themselves trapped between Egyptian troops and the Red Sea, they cried out to Moses, saying, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? ... Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians?’ For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness” [Ex. 14: 10-12]. *Our desire to give up and retreat to familiar territory can in part be traced to what psychologists call separation anxiety.*

As children, we were used to the doting attention of our parents, especially mummy. So, when the time came for us to leave home, such as to go to school or college or move out for work or to get married, we felt a kind of home-sickness, an attachment that we found hard to let go. In fact, separation anxiety gets triggered when we encounter unanticipated hardships or obstacles in the new environment that we have moved to. For example, it was when the prodigal son began to suffer hunger and lack that he remembered how many of his father’s servants had bread enough and to spare while he perished with hunger. That was when he decided to return home [Lk 15: 17-18]! Believers are also children, the children of God. As “newborn babes” in Christ, they have been fed on “the pure milk of the word” [1 Pet. 2: 2], but they need to move on to solid food so as not to remain carnal [1 Cor. 3: 2-3]. That is where a form of spiritual separation anxiety begins! *Most believers fear they could be separated from the love of Christ by human and spiritual forces beyond their control.*

In this week’s Bible verses, *Paul wants to draw believers’ attention to God’s everlasting love and why they should not chicken out and run back to the world from which they have been ransomed with the blood of Jesus* shed on the cross at Calvary. Paul wrote, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” [Rom. 8: 35]. Let us try to unravel the numerous anxieties covered in that verse as follows:

### a) *Anxiety over man-made causes*

*Tribulation, persecution or sword* are man-made sources of anxiety because, for God’s sake, “we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” [Rom. 8: 35-36]. As we approach end-times, wickedness has been heightened. Christians are being killed in their homes or places of worship by extremist Islamic suicide bombers in previously safe places, especially in Africa. Subtle religious persecutions are taking place in so-called free societies where evil rights are now equated with civil rights.

Speaking of the sign of His return, Jesus told His disciples, “You will hear of wars and rumours of wars... For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom... Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My sake, and then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another... and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” [Matt. 24: 3-14]. Such pressures can make weak believers stumble and want to return to the comfort of their sinful past.

Economic pressures, such as unemployment, are compounding the situation. The world is yet to recover from a global recession and in many developing countries of Africa, young people who have completed their university education have not had the privilege to have the first job because governments are not hiring and the private sector is not big enough to absorb them. Consequently, cyber crimes, kidnappings and armed robberies are becoming attractive to youths.

*b) Anxiety over natural causes*

**Famine** is one natural cause mentioned in Paul’s list [Rom. 8: 35] to which Jesus adds **pestilences and earthquakes in various places** [Matt. 24: 7]. The effects of global warming are felt everywhere, such that seasons are becoming erratic. **Storms, rains and floods** are devastating many lands. **Droughts** are taking over elsewhere. The total impact is felt in the form of hunger and **inter-ethnic battles over land**, as is now common in various parts of Africa. Hungry and desperate parents are drawn into child labour trade and prostitution now being noticed between Africa and Europe.

A good example of what famine can do can be found during the days when judges ruled in Israel. It was famine that drove Naomi and her family to relocate from Bethlehem [meaning the home of bread] to Moab. After ten years there, both her husband and two sons died, leaving Naomi with two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, that she could hardly take care of. You can imagine the anxiety that that created for her. In the end, she had to return home [Ruth 1: 1-6].

*c) Fear of the unknown, including demonic forces*

Paul listed death or life, angels, principalities and powers, things present or things to come, height or depth among the things threatening to separate us from God’s love [Rom. 8: 38-39]. Indeed, the “Phobia List” is growing by the day.<sup>2</sup> Fear of demons and principalities is called **daemanophobia**. Fear of heights is acrophobia or **altophobia**. Fear of depths is

<sup>2</sup> “The Phobia List,” <http://phobialist.com/#A>

***bathophobia***. Fear is driving people into a kind of new age witchcraft and occultism. People want to get rich by all means to cushion themselves against economic and other hardships. Students want to get good grades without studying. So, they join gangs and cults with a great deal of satanic practices. So, those who strive to remain faithful to their faith in God by Christ Jesus find themselves under serious pressures and threats. To beat them is to face more persecution. To join them is no guarantee of a better way out. It becomes a catch-22 (a no-win situation)!

***In spite of the numerous pressures and anxieties that believers face, as we have shown above, Paul is persuaded that God's everlasting love is a safe and firm anchor for us to hold on to.*** What makes him so confident? Why should we not give up and go back to our "safe" past?

## 2. Why you should not go back by giving up

Paul is quite certain that giving up is not an option. I believe him for the following reasons, among others:

### a) *Your status quo ante is worse than you left it*

The believer that wants to give up and return to a life of sin and easy street may find that the *status quo ante* (the way things were before) no longer exists or may have got worse. For example, the children of Israel remembered the fish that they ate freely in Egypt, "the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic" compared to "nothing at all except this manna before [their] eyes" in the wilderness [Num. 11: 4-6]. But, even if Moses were to allow them to go back, they could not reach Egypt because they would have to cross the Red Sea on their own! Peter and his fishermen colleagues went back to fishing after the death and resurrection of Jesus but they caught nothing after wasting a whole night [Jn 21: 1-3].

Your past may be full of relics of your failures and regrets, of things that you are ashamed to remember. ***So, forget where you are coming from. From now on, it is backward never, forward ever!***

### b) *If God is now for you who can be against you?*

Paul said, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?... Who is he who condemns?" [Rom. 8: 31-34]. Truly, if God is now on your side, who can defeat you? So, there is no need to fear what people can do to you [Ps. 118: 6].

Recall the story of Balak, the king of Moab, who hired Balaam, a diviner, to curse the children of Israel who were passing through his territory on their way to the Promised Land. Balaam had a reputation (or notoriety) that whomever he cursed was cursed [Num. 23: 1-6]. But the power of God overwhelmed him and he said to Balak, “How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?” [Num. 23: 1-8]. Indeed, “a curse without cause shall not alight” [Prov. 26: 2]. You are safe in God’s hands and there is no cause for alarm!

c) *Therefore, you are now more than a conqueror through Christ*

Paul concludes, “Yet *in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us*. 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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” [Rom. 8; 37-39]. Look at those words: “**in all things**” and “**more than conquerors.**” The conqueror is the person who does the hard work of fighting and winning. Bruised and battered, s(he) hands the prize over to somebody else who did nothing. That second person is the one who is more than conquerors. But *a conqueror will not give the prize to just anybody but someone that s(he) loves and cares about.*

*Jesus was the one who died on the cross for our sins* and “having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” [Col. 2: 15]. *By His victory, He has opened you and me to the following privileges, provided we have loved Him back:*

i. Your earthly needs are being met

Jesus says you should no longer worry about your life, what you will eat, drink or wear because your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. So, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all your earthly needs shall be added to you [Matt. 6: 25-34]. You can take that to the bank!

ii. God’s protective shield is over you!

As Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, He said to His disciples, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” [Matt. 28: 20]. That promise has been extended to us all. Therefore, He will never leave you nor forsake you [Heb. 13: 5]. When your enemy comes at you like a flood, the Lord will lift up a standard against him [Is. 59:19]. The Lord is your keeper, your shade at your right

hand. He will not allow the sun to strike you by day nor the moon by night. He will preserve your going out and coming in from this time forth and even forevermore [Ps. 121: 5-8].

iii. Jesus is your Advocate before His Father

When Satan, the accuser of our brethren [Zech. 3: 1-2; Rev. 12:10] brings charges against you before God, you have an Advocate with the Father, “Jesus Christ the righteous [who Himself is] the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” [1 Jn 2: 1-2].

iv. Finally, your salvation is assured

Finally, your faith in Jesus has sealed your fate for good. You now know that no matter what happens, whether you live for long or for a short period, it is sudden death, sudden glory. What else do you need to fear?

Talking about his experience during his missionary journeys, Paul wrote, “I am extremely joyful in all our tribulation. For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus” [2 Cor. 7: 4-6]. *Your pocket may be lean but it is not empty; your head may be bloody but it is not bowed; your eyes may be teary but you can still see. Hang in there! Help is on the way. That is the message of today’s lesson.*

### 3. Conclusion: Only you can separate yourself from the love of God!

God’s hand is not too short that it cannot save; nor His ear too heavy that it cannot hear. Rather, *it may be your iniquities* that have separated you from your God, *and your sins that have hidden His face from you* so that He will not hear [Is. 59: 1-2]. *Therefore, only you can separate yourself from God’s love.*

So, get up from your weeping low point because you can never fill a small glass with your tears! Confess your sins, especially those of doubts about your God and His Christ. *Focus on the size of your God, not that of your problems and tribulations. Sooner, very soon, the love of God by Christ Jesus our Lord will take you through.*

Giving up is not an option. All shall be well. All is *already* well.