

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 8:31-39

Lesson #24

Introduction

With this lesson we're about to conclude chapter eight. There is so much that could be said about this chapter that it might be possible to make a career of it, but I want to proceed on and finish this epistle. I'm particularly anxious to move into chapter nine, and I anticipate that it will be very interesting and very challenging. But before we do that we have to finish this chapter to complete our preparation process. These concluding verses of chapter eight are a kind of summation by Paul of all that he's said before, and they offer very much comfort and confidence to those who love God and yet still have to live here in a fallen society. I've titled this lesson:

If God is for Us, Who is Against Us?

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:31-39 (NASB)

Verse 31:

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

It's difficult to begin a lesson on a verse such as this, because it's not a beginning verse but a concluding one. It's a verse that draws on the things that were just said before and then summarizes them into a rational conclusion. A single statement of response. So, to make any sense of it, we must be clear on the meaning of the words "these things" as they relate to Paul's statement. When he says what shall we say to *these things*, we have to know what *things* he's talking about. Well certainly he's talking about the words that immediately preceded this statement, but much more likely he's referring to everything concerning the major points of the preceding discussion. So where do we start? He's already at the end of the eighth chapter, so he's said a great many things by now.

Well, In the very broadest perspective it might be argued that the context could reach back all the way to chapter 3, verse 21 where Paul begins his explanation of justification by faith, and then proceeds with all the tenets and characteristics of it. Certainly everything from that specific point to where he is in his epistle when he makes this statement that we're examining now is directly related. He's spoken of our regeneration of spirit, and our adoption into the family of God, and our continued struggles with sin as long as we're still living in these bodies of corruption. He's also spoken of persecutions and difficulties that accompany the followers of Jesus Christ, as he said in verse 18 of this chapter. But the most immediate things he said, those things that directly preceded this verse, is that regardless of the situations or persecutions or trials, nevertheless all these things work together for the ultimate good of those who love God, those who are called according to God's own purpose. According to Paul the predetermined purpose of God involves intentional trials and tribulations that have been designed to work out for our good. And, that this predetermined curriculum is for a specific and foreknown group that God has chosen from before creation. (Eph 1:4; 1Pet 1:1-2; Rev 13:8, 17:8) And the intended purpose of God for these things is to conform all of His elect into the image of His Son, so that His Son would be the first of many like brethren. And the driving purpose behind all of this is that God will have His acceptable eternal worshipers.

Those verses make it clear that there is nothing whatsoever random or undetermined in the eternal plan of God, even from before creation. Those who belong to God at the end of time, are exactly the same, in name and number, as those who were predestined, called, justified, and glorified before time was ever even created. (Rom 8:29-30) Nothing concerning the final dissolution (meaning final outcome) of mankind is being determined in the here and now, including salvation, all

of that has already been established by God from the very beginning. (Isa 46:8-10) The only thing happening now is the physical and visible implementation, in linear time, of that which God has already predetermined by His own sovereign choice. When we thoroughly understand this, then we can also understand Paul's summation statement: *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?*

The second half of this sentence: *If God is for us, who is against us?* is referring specifically to the first half. Paul is making a contrast, in that he's rhetorically asking who is of equal status and power as God? Is there a life, or a power existing anywhere that equals God's? God himself says repeatedly that there is not. So, If God is for us, and He is omnipotent, then who or what can possibly destroy us? We know that we do have an enemy, and we know that he's far more powerful than we are, but we also know that we have an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for us, who are being protected by the power of God, through faith, for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Pet 1:4-5) It's not that there isn't anyone or any thing in the world who is against us, it's that any and all who are against us are far inferior to God in power and ability, so, on the grand eternal scale where is the threat? Our bodies might be killed, but our eternal soul's belong to Almighty God. And it's on this understanding that Paul builds the beautiful conclusion that he provides in the next 8 verses that complete this chapter. So, let's look at those verses:

Verse 32:

32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Paul speaks of God the Father, who did not spare the life of His own Son, but rather delivered Him over to death and humiliation for the sake of us, all of us who were foreknown and predestined to become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. For these and these alone God gave over His beloved Son unto death on a cross. The *for us all* is referring specifically to all of that predestined group foreknown to God from before creation. It is not referring to the entire world as many believe, and as I myself was taught for two decades. The Father sacrificed His Son for a specific group of individuals that He had chosen from before creation to be His eternal family of worshipers. Every single one for whom Christ died will, in God's predetermined time, come to Christ and be saved and preserved, on that we have the direct pledge of Jesus Christ himself:

37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. 40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

John 6:37-40 (NASB)

I'm sure we've all read these verses many times, but have we stopped and carefully considered what they actually mean? Jesus said: *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me*. How does He know that? How can He be sure that every single individual who was foreknown and predestined by God will eventually come to Him? Paul answered that question back in verse 30 where he said that those whom God predestined He also called. We are told that God does the predestination and God does the effectual calling, so salvation doesn't depend on him who wills or him who runs, but on God who has mercy. (Rom 9:16) Meaning that those who believe are those who were chosen, and predestined, and eventually called by God to receive the gift of saving faith by the grace of God alone. (Eph 2:8-9)

In these reference verses Jesus says that He didn't come to do His own will but the will of His Father that sent Him. He is speaking of that very same predetermined will of God that Paul spoke of when he said that those who God foreknew He also called and justified and glorified. There is now, and was before, a predetermined plan made by God, and Jesus was aware of it and acknowledged that even He was subject to that predetermined will of God the Father as He walked this earth and fulfilled His essential part of it. The work of Jesus while He was on this earth was not spontaneous, it was predetermined before creation, as was the results it would have and the one's it would affect and the one's that it would not. All major decisions (including salvation) were made in the planning stage that preceded creation, now we are in the implementation stage of God's eternal plan, where those decisions will come to pass by the power of God in their appointed time, just as it did for Jesus Christ. God is sovereign and He freely exercises that sovereignty. So say the holy scriptures, here in these verses and everywhere else.

Our verse from Romans says *how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?* The first and foremost of which is justification. Without this nothing else good can come. So the first gift is justification which comes through a faith that is itself a gift of God and not by our own doings (works) so that no one can fall into the trap of Satan and think more of themselves than they should. Apart from Him we can do nothing, and this certainly includes believing in Him for salvation as well. (Jn 15:5) The predestination is by God, the calling is by God, the faith is by God and the justification is by God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And then this verse says that after all that, how will He (God) not, with Him (Jesus) give us all things that Jesus himself possesses?

Please take note that everything we've mentioned is entirely and exclusively by our direct association with Jesus Christ. It starts (justification) and continues (sanctification and conformation to Christlikeness) and eventual eternal glorification, as we are finally and fully made to be like Him in every way. (Phi 3:20-21; 1Jn 3:2) Our existence starts with Jesus Christ (Col 1:16) and matures with Jesus Christ, (Eph 4:13) and eventually results in our glorification with Jesus Christ. (Rom 8:30) All life, now and eternally, is connected to Jesus Christ directly. (Jn 1:4) Those who are chosen by God are predestined to be with Jesus eternally, and be made like Jesus eternally, so that God the Father has the family of worshipers that He set out to create before time and space and matter ever existed. Jesus told His disciples that all things that the Father has are also His, and He discloses (shares) them with whomever He wills. (Jn 16:15) This verse (8:32) essentially says the very same thing. The chosen of God are eventually afforded all the riches of God, for eternity, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Now, In the next verse, Paul returns to the issue of justification where he says:

Verse 33:

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

Paul makes an interesting point here. Essentially how can anyone bring a charge against those whom God himself has declared justified. After all, it's before that same God that someone would have to present such a charge, the God that just declared them justified. There is no one else existent with whom to file that charge. In effect, to bring a charge against any whom God has declared justified is to challenge the authority of God to justify. I can't imagine anyone wanting to argue that case! God has the authority to justify, and God does justify, all those whom He has foreknown and predestined from before creation, because this was intentionally part of the teaching curriculum of life which God designed for those whom He has chosen. Not one person in history has been, or ever will be, allowed to approach God standing up face to face as equals, every human comes to God as confessing sinners on their knees in thankful appreciation for His forgiving mercy and imputed justification and righteousness. God did not set out to make a kingdom of equals, but a kingdom of worshipers, we must understand this and embrace it or we'll never be there at all. God justifies because God himself set into motion, through man's own frailties and weaknesses, the fall for which that justification is required. God justifies because He planned from before creation to justify His elect. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not an afterthought, or plan "B", but fully intended from the very beginning. It was God's eternal method to separate the sheep from the goats, the guilty from the justified, the children of God from the children of Satan, the elect from the non-elect. Now continuing:

Verse 34:

34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

Following the same thought, Paul reinforces his point with the rhetorical question: *who is the one who condemns?* And provides the rebuttal with *Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.* In other words, the One who secured our justification, and declares us righteous is now Himself sitting at the right hand of God the Father, from where He continually and eternally argues our defense on our behalf. Jesus didn't just die and go away to provide our justification, He was raised again to eternal life, and now He constantly stands and defends His own work, and our benefit from it, from His eternal position at the right hand of God. He is our 24/7 advocate before the Father, always interceding on our behalf, no matter what the charges of Satan against us might be. He doesn't have to argue our righteousness, He argues His righteousness imputed to us, so He never loses the case, ever. Surely the wisdom of God transcends anything imaginable by mankind. In our current vernacular, He has stacked the eternal deck of creation and time so that He cannot possibly lose. The outcome is not as the Open Theists perceive, still awaiting determination on a day to day basis, but has been preplanned and totally and inescapably assured from before creation ever took place, by the use of pre-designed means that were built right into that creation plan. (Isa 46:8-10)

And the intercession of Jesus Christ on behalf of His own, forevermore, is at the very core of that eternal plan, and forms the majority part of our very reason for worship. Again I say, the wisdom of God in achieving His goal is astounding. How blessed we are to even be allowed to understand it, let alone be a functioning member of it. To Him be the glory. Amen. Now let's move on to the next verses, which build on what we've just discussed:

Verses 35-36:

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

After explaining the indisputable certainty of our justification, and the continuing intercession of Jesus Christ on our behalf, Paul then turns to the more personal side. Meaning the attitude of God and Christ Jesus toward those who are the chosen. Since our justification cannot be disputed, then perhaps God's love for us might wane away with time. Paul puts this worry to rest also in this verse, where he asks *Who will separate us from the love of Christ?* In the previous sentence he had asked *Who will bring a charge against God's elect?* The answer to both of these questions is the same, it's "nobody" because there is no one or no thing that can ever do either. And Paul provides some examples: *Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* Again, the answer to all of these is "absolutely not." And so that we don't misunderstand, he pulls a quotation from the Old Testament that says: *"For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."* Assuming that this is from Psalm 44, if we pay attention to the context of this quotation it is a cry from Israel that the Lord has abandoned them to their enemies and allowed them to be overpowered and killed and humiliated, even when they had not abandoned Him, and they didn't understand why He was failing to intercede on their behalf. Knowing the context of this reference verse makes Paul's statement in this verse crystal clear. No matter what befalls the chosen of God, He does not remove our justification, nor abandon His love for us. We must not let our present day situations influence our understanding of God's love for us. The early martyrs of Christianity learned this very quickly. Which brings us to the next sentence:

Verse 37:

37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

It's so easy to misinterpret the intent of this verse when it speaks of conquering. But conquering **how** is the significant question we must consider and understand. For instance, did Jesus overcome and conquer the world as He claimed He had? (Jn 16:33; 1Jn 5:4) How in the world could He say that, didn't the world reject Him, and beat Him, and humiliate Him, and then kill Him on a brutal cross? How in heaven's name can this be called overcoming and conquering the world? Is this any part your definition of overwhelmingly conquering, I don't know, but it was surely a part of Christ's definition. The prosperity crowd seems to completely miss this whole concept. Do they think Jesus escaped the crucifixion and became the reigning king of Israel while He was here? Jesus' concept of conquering was not the world's concept, in fact pretty much the opposite. Remember Mark's description of a certain occasion where Jesus said:

34 And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 35 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. (Mk 8:34-35) From these things it becomes obvious that the term conquering has a meaning to Jesus that's different from the general concept.

And in this verse we're examining we must understand this or it will be wrongly interpreted. What Jesus overwhelmingly conquered was the sin and corruption that fills the whole world. These things did not defile Him whatsoever, and He never once succumbed to their temptations. He lived His whole life in sinless perfection and then voluntarily laid down that perfect sinless life on behalf of those whom He loves with an everlasting love. And so was the eternal will of God the Father. This is the conquering being spoken of by Paul in this verse. It's not about tangible things or even earthly things, but eternal heavenly things. For Jesus it was perfect sinlessness, but for us it is a faith in Jesus and His imputed righteousness that endures to the end of our lives, however that end comes about, and thus proves our salvation. Neither is it about the difficulties and tribulations encountered along the way. We conquer by our enduring faith even as we are sheep to be slaughtered, and can't figure out why, but we still hold firmly to our faith and belief in the eternal promises of God. This is *overwhelmingly conquering*; it is not giving up because of the difficulties encountered, but winning the prize of eternal life and righteousness through an unyielding faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Because nothing in the universe or beyond, neither any person or circumstances or *tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword* can ever separate us from His eternal love for us.

It's very easy to stop right here and go to the next verse, but there's still more in this one that's often overlooked. The love of God is a popular theme, and it's applied with a very wide brush, often too wide I'm afraid. The love of God for any and all is channeled through an exclusive conduit or pipeline. God's love can only be accessed through Jesus Christ, because God's forgiveness and the appeasement of His wrath for sin is only by way of Jesus Christ. (Jn 14:6) Everybody and their brother speaks of the love of God, as if it were a common commodity available to everybody for the taking, but that's not what the scriptures teach. The love of God requires the intercession of the Son of God to be the mediator between God and men. (1Tim 2:5) The love of God demands the recipient of that love to acknowledge and love the Son of God. And when we love God, and love His Son, the love of God is applied to us, but not apart from our acceptance of Jesus Christ. This verse ends with the statement that through every trial and tribulation we overwhelmingly conquer the world of sin by our undying faith in Jesus Christ, and by this faith alone we are qualified to experience the eternal love of God. This all comes about *through Him who loves us*. Jesus Christ is the critical, and exclusive, and absolutely indispensable component in all of this conquering, and overcoming, and love of God. Paul expands on this in the next verse:

Verses 38-39:

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These two verses are pretty much a repeat of the same thing he just said in verses 35 and 36, except using different examples. When taken in their entirety these verses form a powerful and conclusive declaration that there is nothing whatsoever in existence that can separate us from the love of God, or threaten the loss of status and benefits that accompany being among His foreknown and predestined children. As humans, we have difficulty seeing beyond the here and now, and we've never seen or heard the voice of God or Jesus Christ, so we can easily be bewildered or confused when we meet with hardships or persecutions that we don't understand. But the life of Jesus Christ, and the words that He spoke answer all these fears if we're listening. Once we understand that conquering, by God's definition, is not overpowering the world, but overcoming its sinful temptations, then we begin to understand the nature of this battle we've been dropped into, and the true rules of engagement that apply, as well as the true ultimate goal we're striving to achieve.

We won't be easily fooled and drawn away by worldly temptations, nor will we be disheartened by tribulations, when we rightly understand what's actually happening and our intended part within it. We can't overcome the world ourselves, so our part is to believe in Him who did so on our behalf, regardless of the circumstances or cost of doing so. By this unwavering faith in Christ Jesus we do overcome the world, though not by our own doings, but *in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Now, I'm going to start preparing us a little bit for chapter nine by the last few words in this present verse (39) that concludes chapter eight. If we're interested in looking deeper into this concluding phrase, so that we capture the essence of its meaning, then we're faced with some very significant ramifications. I'm speaking of the concluding statement: *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*. Exactly what is it that Paul is saying *is in Christ Jesus our Lord*? Without argument it can only be that very thing that he starts the sentence with, *the love of God*. It is the love of God from which Paul has assured us that nothing can ever separate us. If we are in the love of God then we cannot be separated by earthly nor heavenly powers, nor principalities, nor angels, nor situations. But this statement has a very clear qualifier attached. It says that this love of God is *in Christ Jesus our Lord*. Now this statement either means something or it doesn't. If it's just a platitude, or common figure of speech then it could mean nothing specific at all. But that does not fit the situation in this application. In this application it was added because it means something very specific and very intentional. It places very clear boundaries on everything previously said.

And it's these boundaries that create much debate, even among true Christians. What is the point that this verse makes, and does it really mean that? Well the point it makes is that the love of God that makes its way to humanity is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The question is, does this mean that this is the only place that it's available? Maybe the love of God is universal, and available from almost anywhere, and Jesus is just one among many sources.

There are some who claim to believe this. But this concept is contrary to the teaching and direct statement of Jesus Himself, where He publically declared that He and He alone was the way, the truth and the life, and that no one comes to God the Father but by Him. (Jn 14:6) Jesus Christ claims a unique and exclusive place in the connection of God to man. Recognition of this exclusivity is a vital part of the saving faith that accompanies regeneration. So, when we're told that something is available through, or in, Jesus Christ, we understand that it is available exclusively and uniquely in Him and Him alone. This is the point of this phrase. That the love of God, the mercy of God, and the eternal benefits and rewards of God are all uniquely *in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Well then, if this is so what does that, by necessity, imply concerning those who do not believe in Jesus Christ? Does it mean that they are not residing in the love of God? It is precisely at this point that many are divided as to the answer. Not because it's a difficult question to answer, because it isn't, but because of the ramification of that answer. Answering yes, which is the only realistic answer, means accepting that there are some who are not in the love of God, and this troubles some people, because they believe that God loves everyone equally. And anything else would be unfair or unrighteous on God's part. Let me go on record as stating that I myself do not hold this belief. According to scriptures God both has and uses His sovereign right to make decisions and choices over everything that He's created, and this in no way oversteps His authority nor infringes on His fairness or righteousness. We'll really get into this in chapter nine. The only proper interpretation, the one that maintains the sovereignty of God, is that He loves His elect with and everlasting close family type of love that cannot be broken, and that love is reserved for them alone, not for everybody ever born, and is dispensed in and through Jesus Christ the Lord. There is no credible argument that this is not what is being taught by Paul in these verses and throughout all of scriptures.

It seems to run contrary to our human concept that God himself might actually have His own preferences, His own likes and dislikes, and that He actually might love some and not love others the same way. But we ourselves do exactly that. We love some and we don't really love others the same way. We're commanded to treat them with love and compassion, not violence or contempt, but we understand that there is a general love for humanity and there is also a very different love that we have for our spouse and our children, and this family love is restricted and unique. And we don't think it's wrong or unrighteous to feel that way, we feel like it's our duty, our obligation to our family. According to the scriptures God himself does in fact make choices of this kind, and they're recorded in both the Old and New Testaments. For instance, concerning the children, the offspring of Jacob who were renamed Israel, God said:

6 "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deut 7:6) This verse makes it abundantly clear that God himself made a personal choice of His own concerning the specific people who were chosen by Him to be His own possession, and the rest who were not considered by God to be His own possession. God made a sovereign choice that separated some from the others, and with that choice goes all the inherent ramifications of it. Is there a complaint here that God has overstepped His authority or acted unrighteously in any way? If so, it's not from this preacher I assure you. And from the new Testament we could use the example of Jesus in His sermon on the mount, where He said:

22 "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' (Matt 7:22-23) Obviously this doesn't mean that Jesus didn't know who these people were, but that He didn't know them as His own possession, His own flock, His own sheep metaphorically speaking. And again in 2nd Timothy 2:19, Paul declares: *19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."*

The Lord knows those who are His and those who are not because He foreknew His elect and predestined them from before the foundation of the world to be His own possession, and these He also called in the appointed time, and justified by faith, and will be conformed to the image of His beloved Son. (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 1:4) This sovereign choice of God, which He made of His own free will, determines who are His and who are not His, and with that choice all the ramifications attached to it, both for those who are the chosen and for those who are not. Those who are chosen will know the love and mercy of God that is in Christ Jesus, those who are not will know the wrath of God that is coming on the sons of disobedience, who rejected Jesus Christ because they loved and practiced sin and immorality and impurity and idolatry. (Eph 5:5-6) We have to know that the love of God is not as common and plentiful as we seem to think, but is rare, and precious, and valuable beyond comprehension. Otherwise we simply take it for granted.

If we fail to comprehend the rarity and limited availability then we won't appreciate just how incredibly blessed we are, those of us who are truly in Christ Jesus, and therefore in the eternal and unbreakable love of God. This is not something common, this is something God reserved for very few among all the masses of humanity. (Mat 7:14; Lk 13:22-24) Contrary to popular opinion, and popular teaching, God does not love everybody, at least not in that deep and familial way we think He does. This kind of love is reserved, and rightly so, for those who are in Christ Jesus our Lord. Those who are adopted into the family of God. Those whom He has chosen to be His own possession out of all the people on the face of the earth. So say the holy scriptures.

If you are one of these, then you are among a very small minority who the most blessed beings ever created by God. You are chosen by God to be His own possession for all eternity, and He has set His eternal love upon you by placing you in Jesus Christ, which is the only place where His love is made available to you and I and all who are His. To be in Christ Jesus is to be in the love of God, but to not be in Christ is to be in the waiting wrath of God, there is no place in between the two, it is either one or it is the other. Every being ever created will ultimately know either the love of God or the wrath of God, and the singular determination between the two is whether or not they are *in Christ Jesus our Lord* as Paul declares in this closing remark to the whole discussion concerning the everlasting love of God for those who are His.

Now you may be a little bit unsettled by what's just been said, because you've always been told that God loves everybody. And that statement might be kind of true if it's clearly set in the context of God's common grace and care for humanity in general. But that's not how I've commonly heard it used. Yes, the scriptures make reference to a general and common love of God for His creation and the people who are in it, for instance His compassion for the Ninevites to whom He sent Jonah. But it is all too common to simply ignore the distinction between God's love for His chosen and His common love for mankind in general. Ignoring, or worse denying this distinction causes us to overestimate the scope of God's common love and greatly underestimate the scope and value of His close familial love for His own. With the loss of this distinction comes the loss of proper appreciation. To rightly value the love of God it's necessary to understand the rarity of it, and then we can properly appreciate what we have. And from this understanding and deep appreciation comes the real intention, our educated worship of God. We worship that which we know and understand, so full and complete comprehension of God's gifts and understanding of their value are at the very heart of our worship capability. God chooses us from among all the people on the face of the earth, and gives us magnificent gifts, and then shows us the value of those gifts, and from this we become what He desires, those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. (Jn 4:23-24) Your highest priority and mine is to acceptably, and enthusiastically, and understandingly worship God for who and what He is. For this we are in Christ Jesus and in the eternal love of God. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami

Robert Andrews, Pastor

11/18/12