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## Romans 8:31-39      “Secure in the Love of God”

Intro. My text today is one of the greatest passages of Scripture about the love of God. I trust that you will be comforted and encouraged by the message of my text. It is also one of the great Scripture texts relating to the eternal security of the believer. That doctrine states that the salvation of a *true* believer in Christ is secure for eternity. Yet the doctrines of the love of God and eternal security go hand in hand. You see, God’s love gives security because it is unconditional and eternal.

Yet there are times when we may question God’s love for us. For example, vv.17-26 speak about our various sufferings that we endure, even as Christians. Our text today also speaks of various sufferings we may endure. Trouble can overwhelm us. At such times we may wonder why a loving God would allow such things to happen. You may be going through a time of suffering or loss right now.

Others have trouble believing that God would love them when they recall how many times they have sinned against God. We tend to project on others our own feelings and character. We know how difficult it is to love and forgive someone who has sinned against us greatly or many times. We assume that God is the same way and He could stop loving us under such conditions.

So in this text of Scripture Paul reviews for us some possible fears that we might have; things that might work against us in our relationship with Christ. He asks and answers a series of questions with rhetorical excellence. Can any of these things cause us to lose our salvation? Can they separate us from the love of Christ? Could certain conditions cause God to stop loving us? Too often human relationships are severed by divorce, separation or abandonment. I would imagine that all of us have experienced rejection to some degree by people we had a relationship with. It is increasingly difficult to find a secure and permanent relationship. Yet regardless of what others do, we are going to see this morning that *nothing* will separate us from the love of Christ, and I will also tell you why.

Notice with me first of all:

### I. OUR SINS CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Even though we are Christians, we will fail and sin against the Lord. At times we may even mess up big time. Does that mean that God no longer loves us? Could we even lose our salvation because of such sin? Well, the Bible calls Satan “the accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10; NKJV). When you sin, he will try to accuse you before God, and attack your conscience. He will remind you of past sins. He wants to beat you down, and make you doubt your salvation and try to cause you to give up on the Christian life.

But notice how Paul responds in vv.33-34. He says, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?” (See Isa. 50:8-9). Since God Himself has justified us and declared us “not guilty,” how can anyone now bring charges against us to condemn us? No one can! Every accusation against us is silenced. No one can reverse God’s decree of our justification.

Our sins and mistakes cannot separate us from the love of God for the following reasons:

A. Because of the Work of Christ - Paul says in v.34, “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Because of the past and present work of Christ on our behalf, we cannot be transferred from a state of being justified to being condemned. Notice in particular what Christ has done and is doing to ensure that we will never be condemned.

1. He Died for our Sins on the Cross – Paul says in v.34, “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died....” Jesus loves you so much that He went to the cross to die for your sins, past, present, and future. We can also see this truth in the last of v.31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” When Paul said that God is “for” (*huper*) us, that is a word of substitution. The Son of God substituted Himself for the believer and died for our sins and in our place. God knows that His righteousness judgment was satisfied in the death of the Savior so that He, Himself, will never think of bringing a charge against you or me.

2. He Rose from the Dead – Not only has Christ died, but Paul goes on to say in v.34, “more than that, who was raised....” The words translated “more than that” (*mallon de*) are significant. They indicate an important amendment to what Paul has said. Paul stresses the fact that Jesus’ death would have been of no avail apart from the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ proves that He was not a sinner. He was not guilty of blasphemy or any other sin. So He did not die for His sins but for our sins. The resurrection also proves the validity of all His claims (Rom. 1:4). It proves that God the Father accepted the sacrifice of His Son.

3. He Sits on the Right Hand of God – V.34 also says that Christ “is at the right hand of God....” Paul does not specifically mention it here, but we know from other Scriptures that He *sits* at the right hand of God.<sup>1</sup> He never would sit if the work were not fully done. In the tabernacle there were no seats for the priests. That’s because their work was never finished. They kept offering sacrifices year after year. But Jesus is seating because His work of atonement for our sins was accomplished once and for all. He knew this blessed truth, for just before He died, He cried out, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30).

Still another blessed truth of the fact that He is on the *right* hand of God is that Christ is thus exalted as the supreme authority. In Ps. 110:1 the Lord God says to His anointed, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” After His resurrection, Jesus said in Mt. 28:18b, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”<sup>2</sup> Our Savior is seated upon the throne of the universe and has the power and authority to bring about our final salvation, and defeat every enemy against us!

4. He Makes Intercession for Us – That’s what Paul says in the last of v.34. He acts as our advocate and pleads our cause before God. Likewise, the apostle John said in 1 Jn. 2:1, “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (NKJV). He knows we have sinned, but He intercedes for us, not pleading *our* innocence, but pleading His own blood that was shed to atone for our sins. The evidence of His redeeming work is constantly before God. Heb. 7:25 says, “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

There are times when we do not *feel* like God loves us. At such times we need to get our attention off our feelings, and begin to focus on what Christ has done, and is doing to secure our final salvation. We should not live by feelings but by faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 22:44; 26:64; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12.

<sup>2</sup> See also 1 Peter 3:22; Gen. 48:13-18; Ex. 15:6; Deut. 33:2; Ps. 80:17; 110:5.

There's another reason why we believe that our sins will never separate us from the love of God:

B. Because of God's Gracious Disposition Toward Us – We have seen what Christ did to demonstrate His love for us. Now in v.32 we see the heart of God the Father. Paul says, "He who<sup>3</sup> did not spare his own Son but gave him up<sup>4</sup> for us all..." We read here that God did not "spare" His Son, even when Jesus pleaded in the Garden of Gethsemane that the cup pass from Him. God delivered Him over to be tried, mocked, and beaten. And as Jesus endured the suffering of the cross, God the Father did not withhold one drop of the cup of judgment from His only begotten Son. This is an echo of Genesis 22:12, 16, where God says to Abraham regarding Isaac: "you have not withheld (LXX "spared", Gk. *pheidomai*, as here) your son, your only son, from Me."

How difficult it must have been for God the Father not to spare His Son! In 1937, John Griffith had a job in Mississippi, tending a drawbridge for a railroad. One day his 8-year-old son, Greg, spent the day with his dad at work. He played in the office that morning and asked many questions. Then a ship came through and so John opened the drawbridge. Suddenly, he realized his son was not in the office. Frantically he looked around, and to his horror saw him climbing on the gears of the draw bridge. He hurried outside to rescue his son but just then heard what he knew was a fast-approaching passenger train, the Memphis Express, filled with people. He yelled to his son, but the noise of the ship and the oncoming train made it impossible for the boy to hear him. John Griffith realized his horrible dilemma. If he took the time to rescue his son the train would crash and probably kill all aboard. If he closed the bridge, he would probably sacrifice his son. He made the decision he would relive ten thousand times and pulled the lever to close the bridge. As the train went by, he could see some passengers' faces. Some were reading, some waved, and all were oblivious to the great sacrifice that had just been made on their behalf.<sup>5</sup>

Even so, God the Father made the difficult decision not to spare His Son, for only through His sacrifice could millions, and even billions, be saved. What great love God had for sinners, many of whom are oblivious of the love of the Father, and the great sacrifice of the Son!

Now in the last part of v.32 the argument is from the greater to the lesser. Paul says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" Since God has made such a great sacrifice; since He has done so much to purchase our salvation; shall He not also secure our *final* salvation? Since He has given such a great gift, His Son, shall He not also freely give us other gifts, including the forgiveness of sins and eternal life by His grace? God gave *His Son* for you; how is it possible that he could withhold any lesser blessing? If when we were sinners, God gave us His best, now that we are God's children, will He not give us all that we need? Shall He not complete the work of salvation He has begun in us?

So we should agree with what Paul says in v.33, "It is God who justifies." Jesus has already paid the penalty of our sin. And when God pronounces us just, how can anyone argue with God to condemn us? Since God is the being against whom we have sinned, if *He* does not accuse, there can be no accuser. This ought to bring peace to our hearts. This ought to bring assurance to our hearts that no sin or failure will ever cause God to withdraw His love or saving grace.

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<sup>3</sup> "Who" is translated from *hos ge*, and *ge* intensifies the thought expressed (Robertson, p.148).

<sup>4</sup> This translation is a little weak in giving the full nuance of the verb. It is from *paradidomi*, "to deliver over" for imprisonment and to face charges.

<sup>5</sup> Allen Webster, *Glad Tidings of Good Things*, Via Pecan Grove Church in Pulpit Helps, August 2006, page 28 [Illus.#C-1596].

I find it interesting that this great chapter begins with “no condemnation” and ends with “no separation.” So we have seen that our sins cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Now let’s consider another truth from this text of Scripture:

## II. OUR ENEMIES CANNOT SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

In v.31 Paul asks, “Who can be against us?” Satan will certainly oppose you. Ungodly people will be against you as you follow Christ, and that is becoming more common. Then v.35 asks another question. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” Can any of these enemies separate us from God’s love?

Then he moves to consider the ways our enemies attack us. Can any of their attacks upon us separate us from the love of Christ? So in v.35 Paul asks, “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” By the end of his life the apostle Paul would experience all of these (2 Cor. 11:26-27; 12:10). He had already learned by experience that they cannot disrupt his relationship with Christ. So let’s briefly examine the significant actions of our enemies that can inflict suffering:

“Tribulation” originally meant “pressure.” Have you ever felt like you were under great pressure, such as peer pressures, work pressures, and financial pressures? Then he mentions “distress,” which is a similar word. The Gk. word is a combination of 2 words, the one meaning “narrow” and the other meaning “space.” It conveys the thought of being hemmed in. Some people feel they are hemmed in with no escape. But even in such a situation we are assured that Christ’s love is still with us.

At times we may face “persecution,” which literally refers to chasing after someone to harass or harm them. Many persons have suffered persecution at the hands of the enemies of Christ. In North Korea, China, India, and Nigeria, and Islamic countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran Christians are facing significant persecution. People have even given up their lives for their faith in Christ. There are over 300 million believers who are being persecuted for their faith worldwide.

Then Paul gives some of the common results of persecution and other factors. Some have faced famine, resulting in hunger. In fact, Christians in Judea had already suffered famine about 10 years before Paul wrote this. The Bible predicts that wide-spread famine will take place in the last days (Mark 13:8; Rev. 6:6; 18:8). “Nakedness” is mentioned next. In 2 Cor. 11:27 Paul recounts what he suffered for the cause of Christ, including “hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (NKJV). Thus, Paul is especially referring to not having enough clothes to keep warm, such as in a cold prison cell. Next Paul mentioned the threat of “danger.” This refers to the times when we may face danger, risking our lives. Paul faced danger from ambush on several occasions. Finally, Paul mentioned the possibility of facing the “sword.” That could refer both to the sword of war and the sword of execution. Indeed, Paul later died as a martyr from the sword.

If we experience such things, does that mean that God no longer loves us? There are times when it may *seem* that your enemies or your trials have separated you from God. Yet Paul affirms that such things will never separate us from the love of God for at least 2 reasons:

A. We Understand that We Suffer *for Jesus’ Sake* – Suffering is not inconsistent with the Christian life, nor does it contradict the truth of God’s love for us, for Paul quotes from one of the Psalms (44:22) in v.36, “As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are

regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” The adversity of which the apostle had given examples was the lot of the people of God in all generations.

There are those who teach that God wants you to be happy, prosperous, and comfortable. Yet that kind of theology would lead one to believe that if you are *not* happy, prosperous, and comfortable, God must not love you, or that God has forsaken you. But the Bible does not teach that. Though God *may* bless us with good health, prosperity, and comfort, He does not *promise* such things. As we have seen, you may be called upon to suffer as a Christian. You may suffer in body because your bodily redemption has not yet been accomplished (v.23). God’s love is not revealed in material blessings or comfort, nor does affliction denote the absence of His love; but the cross is the real proof of His love for us. Besides, these trials not only do not cut us off from Christ’s love; they actually give us more intimate and thrilling experience of it. Be careful about your expectations of what the Christian life is supposed to be like.

Furthermore, our sufferings do not separate us from the love of God because:

B. We Conquer Adversity Through Jesus - Our text contains what seems at first to be an absurd contradiction. We are first told that we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Then Paul says in v.37, “No (Gk. *alla*, a strong adversative), in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” How can sheep counted for slaughter become conquerors? How can Christian martyrs executed by the sword be more than conquerors? To answer that question, we must understand the purposes of God and the ways of God. Remember that with God, the way up is down. Because Jesus was willing to humble Himself, even to the point of suffering and death, He was highly exalted (cf. Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Pet. 5:6). In Hebrews 11 there is a summary of the struggles of God’s people in old times. The list is carefully balanced with one section given to those who faced hostility and were delivered and others who faced hostility and suffered but were not delivered. Instead, they died as martyrs. But all, whether victors or vanquished on this earth, were victors in Christ. Nothing could separate them from His love (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-11). If God does not grant deliverance from suffering, He will grant the grace to bear with it until final deliverance does come.

Now let’s examine more closely the truth of this victory over suffering that we can have. Notice:

1. The Assurance of this Victory – Paul says in v.31, “What then shall we say to these things?” Based on the context (vv.17-28) he is talking about how adversity and suffering cannot defeat us or interfere with our ultimate good (v.28) and glorification (v.30).<sup>6</sup> So shall we question God’s love for us when we go through times of suffering? No! Instead, we should say with Paul, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Suppose we wanted to play a football game, and on one team was a group of guys about my size and my age. And on the other side was a group of guys who were much younger, larger, faster, and more athletic. Who would win? But suppose a vanload of professional football players drove up, and looked the teams over, and decided to play on my team to help out the underdogs. I would say if the professionals are for us, who can be against us! And the word translated “for” is a word that carries the meaning of “on behalf of” or “in place of.” In my illustration, the professionals would not be on the sideline cheering for us to win; I would put them in the game to play *for* us.

Even so, in life and as we face trials and opposition, God is not just cheering us on in heaven; He is working in us and through us and working providentially for us! And if God be for

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<sup>6</sup> Douglas Moo believes “these things” points all the way back to chapter 5 (p.282).

us, who can be against us? The “if” (*ei*) is the conditional particle of a fulfilled condition. His thought is, “Since God is for us, who is or could be against us, so as to do us any lasting harm?”

Furthermore, notice:

2. The Greatness of this Victory – Paul says in v.37 that “we are more than conquerors.” In the original Greek “more than conquerors” is actually a verb, found only here in the New Testament. Thus, it literally means we conquer super abundantly.

How can that be true when at times it appears that we are defeated? First of all, we are more than conquerors because *our* victory is eternal. Secondly, we are more than conquerors because we receive rewards that far surpass anything given to earthly conquerors. The latter fight for earthly possessions, power, and glory, but we for a crown that is incorruptible and an inheritance that fades not away (cf. v.18). Our troubles do not ultimately harm us, but they minister to our good (8:28) and swell the glory of our victory. Finally, our victory will be fully manifest some day. Someday Jesus is going to come again, and we will return with Him in great victory and glory. Just as Roman generals would often ride in victory parades upon white horses, even so Revelation 19:14 says that when Christ returns, we will also ride upon white horses in great victory. The book of Revelation describes the persecution and martyrdom of believers, yet repeatedly it says that we will overcome! (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7).

How is such a victory possible? How can persecuted believers possibly be described as “more than conquerors?” Here is the explanation. It is only “through Him who loved us.” Our victory is tied to *His* victory. Death cannot defeat us for Christ has conquered death and gives us eternal life. Persecution cannot defeat us, for in times of persecution, we experience His presence and power even more. The world’s hatred cannot defeat us, for the love of Christ is all we need. Yes, we are super conquerors “through Him who loved us” enough to die for us upon the cross. If you ever question the love of God, then turn your attention once again to the cross.

So if you face enemies in life, who persecute you, and try to harm you, don’t feel that God has forsaken you. Instead, just remember that Christ suffered for you, and Christians should not expect to be exempt from suffering. Furthermore, remember that no enemy shall prevail against the children of God. Many times in this life God will intervene on your behalf. But if not, He will give you the grace you need to bear it. And in the end, death will be turned into total victory!

We have seen that our sins cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Our enemies cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Finally, we see that:

### III. NOTHING ELSE CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Paul says in vv.38-39, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Paul has come to an absolute conviction that nothing else will separate us from the love of Christ. I say that because “I am sure” (*peitho*; actually “persuaded”) is a perfect tense in Greek, which refers to a settled conclusion.

Notice with me the particulars that Paul mentions:

A. Death - We should not fear death, for death cannot separate us from the love of God. Death separates us from our loved ones but death cannot separate us from Christ. Some believe your soul sleeps at death, but Paul says that death cannot separate you from Christ. Instead, he said in 2 Cor. 5:8 that “to be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord” (NKJV).

B. Life - Here we see that no aspect of life will separate us from the love of Christ. You can't get too busy. You can't get lost in the crowd. You can't get so isolated and lonely that no one cares, for Jesus cares! No troubles in life can separate you from Christ's love.

Life is like living in a darkened room. You get glimpses of a sunlit garden outside, but you are living in the shadow. Death is the door that takes you out of the shadowy room of life into the sunlit presence of the Lord Jesus.

C. Any Order of Angelic Beings – In v.38 Paul says, “nor angels nor rulers... nor powers.” “Angels” most likely means fallen angels in this context, of whom Satan is leading one (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).<sup>7</sup> Rulers [lit. that which takes first place] refers to the fact that there is a chain of command among the hosts of darkness (cf. Eph. 1:21; Eph 6:12; Col 2:15; Jude 1:6). Although most people do not realize it, Satan has a most elaborate organization. Demons also influence many of the human rulers of this world. The fact that Paul next calls them “powers” (*dunamis*; Eph. 1:21) indicates that they are indeed powerful.<sup>8</sup> But why should we care if Satan's organization is widespread and powerful? As the apostle John says in 1 John 4:4, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (NKJV). The Holy Spirit is greater and more powerful than Satan, and all his demons. Satan, his demons, and those working for him cannot prevail against us!

D. Anything Else – With broad sweeps Paul is including anything we could possibly worry about. In v.38 Paul also mentions “things present nor things to come.” Do you fear or worry about what the future may bring? A nuclear holocaust is possible. A worldwide economic depression is possible. Many thought that advances in science and education would bring in a much better future, yet we are confronted with the fact that science and education cannot save us from our sin, greed, and self-centeredness. Yet, we need not worry about the future. As long as God is in our future, nothing that is yet to come will separate us from His love.

Then he says in v.39, “nor height nor depth.” This is probably a reference to the heavens above and the earth below, including the depths of the seas. Many believe in astrology, that the alignment of the stars under which you were born can affect your life now. Well, we can say as believers that the heights of the stars in the galaxies cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Finally, lest you think he left something out, he closes any loophole that may exist in our minds. He says in the last of v.39, “nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” No being or thing in the whole realm of created reality is excluded. Jesus said in John 10:28, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” A true Christian would never want to be separated from the love of Christ, but even you cannot separate yourself from the love of God.

Conclusion: Paul has made it clear in this text of Scripture that nothing can separate you from the love of God! You may lose the love of a spouse, a parent, or a friend, but you will never be separated from the love of God. Believe it. Be persuaded of this truth just like Paul. Then rejoice in it!

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<sup>7</sup> Barclay takes the rabbinic view that even the good angels begrudge the high standing of man in the plan of God. Douglas Moo says that Paul has in mind good angels, but the fault is not with them, but with those who worship them or make too much of them (Col. 2:8). We could think that our own fascination with angels could separate us from the love of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> In 2 Thess. 1:7 Paul says the angels are “mighty” (*dunamis*).

What security we have! What would you pay for such security? Do you seek for security in insurance? Do you seek for security in the government? Do you seek for security in your savings? Real eternal security can only be found in Christ. Believe it, and you can experience peace in the midst of troubles!

I would like to make an application regarding God's unconditional love for us. The Bible teaches that we should imitate God, as dear children (Eph. 5:1). We ought to have the kind of love that God has for us. I want Cheryl to know that she is secure in my love. Nothing will separate her from my love, such as sickness or any other trial. I want my sons to know that nothing will separate them from my love, though such love has been tested. And I challenge you to imitate God in the kind of love you have for others, especially your family and church family.

When death comes, you will be separated from your loved ones, at least for a while. Will you also be separated from Christ? You will if you have never trusted in Him as Savior. Then after you die, you will hear Christ say, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Mt. 7:23 NKJV; cf. 25:41). It doesn't have to be that way. Christ died for your sins. You can be forgiven. Today, why not repent of your sins, and trust in Him as your Savior. Then, nothing will ever be able to separate you from His love!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, "God's Heirs" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); H.A. Ironside, *Lectures on Romans* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers 1928); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Theology of the Text: God is gracious in His giving (31). God loves with an unending love (35-39). God is the only One who can give us victory over our enemies (31b; 37).

Human Need of the Text: We face enemies who are against us (31, 33-36, 38-39).

God's Redemptive Work of the Text: God did all that was necessary to make us right with Him, including the saving acts of His Son (32-34).

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