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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday
Evening 20th, March, 1938 38/C

Text Romans 8.35 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Have you ever noticed how this remarkable chapter opens and closes? The Apostle strikes forth with a remarkable note of divine certainty, "There is therefore now no condemnation", and he closes it with the same note of blessed certainty, "no separation". "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "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." So we have in the opening "no condemnation", and in the closing "no separation", and this embraces the whole of the gospel, and every vessel of mercy interested in it from all eternity. The feeblest lambs in Jesus' fold are bound within these glorious ties of eternal union, "no condemnation", "no separation". O, poor sinner, what a fulness there is, what a glory there is in the revelation of divine truth. It hangs upon no uncertainty, upon no condition in a changeable creature; but it anchors in an unchanging, immutable Jehovah, who has said, "I am the Lord; I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed". No condemnation! This is true of every believer in the blessed Son of God; he is delivered from it, though he may feel much condemnation; he may have many, many fears; he may have a terrible fear of being lost. He may often doubt his own standing, may often cry "Lord, have mercy upon me", but there is "no condemnation". The word covers the case, and there is no separation!

"Once in Him, in Him for ever,
Thus the eternal covenant stands."

Will not that do for you? No adversary, no enemy has power to deliver final sentence against a vessel of mercy. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again". A thousand devils may try to condemn a poor, struggling, crying sinner, but they can never do it. No, blessed be God, the

keys of hell and of death are in the hands of a risen Mediator.

"I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Should not this be a great comfort to the Lord's people? I believe it is; it is their sweet consolation, their strength, their hope, their life.

Sin has brought trouble; it has brought trouble upon the whole creation without exception. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only they but we also", the Lord's creatures, His children; but they have a hope of a glorious deliverance. Every vessel of mercy, according to this chapter, is an heir of eternal life; he has an inheritance awaiting him which is undefiled, and that fadeth not away. "Heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him that we may be also glorified together." These poor creatures in their ignorance, infirmity and weakness, are promised the Holy Spirit to assist them in crying, in praying. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit Itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." The Holy Spirit knows what the will of God concerning us is, for He searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God, and when prayer is indited in the heart, if it be but "this poor man" crying, the Lord will surely hear. Every feeble and yet earnest cry wrung out of the heart will receive an answer according to the will of God. There is a golden chain, an eternal chain which binds the whole family together, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified". The Lord does not do things by halves; He does not call a poor sinner and change His mind and drop him again, and say, 'I wish I had had nothing to do with him!';

but all was decreed, planned in the divine fore-knowledge, an eternal chain, a golden chain of electing love. "Whom He did fore-know them He also called." The Apostle, gaining strength in his soul under the holy influence of such blessed truths which filled his heart, was, so to speak, filled with holy admiration and animation, which causes him to break forth thus, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "Who shall separate us?" The more we look into time things the less we wonder; they become usually more plain and simple to us; but the more we look into divine things, the more we are filled with wonder, the more amazed we are at the wonderful mystery and glory of the Gospel. We can never fathom the riches of divine love, never. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" There are plenty of people who would if they could; devils would, and men would; the world would; but they have no authority, no power over the feeblest lamb in Jesus' fold. No, they have no power to utter the final sentence; they may condemn you in your feelings; your own heart may condemn you too; but "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts". Thus he breaks forth with this wonderful challenge; not presumptuously but in the boldness of faith. "Who shall separate us?"

The Apostle is not preaching creature strength here; no, he is exalting the riches of divine love, the love of Christ. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" By the love of Christ here, I understand the love of Christ to His Church, rather than the love of His people to Him. Nothing could separate from that. Nothing could separate the love of a child of God from his Redeemer; but the strength of this union lies in the root, not in the branch it is the love of Christ to sinners saved by grace that can never, never be severed, never. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" What do we understand by the love of Christ? Why, that glorious, wonderful perfection of His nature; it is the love, not of one Person but of the three Persons in the Trinity, all centring in the gospel, in the Lord Jesus, who is the fulness of the blessed gospel. The love of Christ is a blessed subject for a sinner to contemplate. I know it is immeasurably beyond us,

infinitely beyond us, and yet at the same time it is a glorious subject. Sometimes when a sinner's heart is touched a little in his troubles, darkness, bondage and fears, he can exult and sing; his spirit rises, and he can praise God from whom all blessings flow. The love of Christ, my friends, is eternal love. It never had a beginning, never. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." "Having loved His own He loved them unto the end." Ah! it was in His heart in eternity, everlasting love; not something that began in time. We cannot grasp anything that is eternal, we cannot understand something which never had a beginning; we cannot understand the glorious perfections of Deity; but we believe them, we receive them, we love them, and we rejoice in them. Everlasting love! It was in the covenant of grace; it was in the heart of the blessed Surety before the worlds were formed, when the Son of God undertook the cause of His Church.

"He saw her ruined in the fall
Yet loved her notwithstanding all."

This is the love of Christ. It was a love that caused Him wounds and agony and blood, but all that He suffered did not sever the tie. His groanings in Gethsemane, those drops of blood that fell from His sacred brow did not sever the tie. He ever loves, and not only is His love eternal, it is immutable, the two go together; if it is everlasting it is immutable, it can never know a change. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." This means that He is the same in His love; O, what a mercy.

"Shall one today in Thy embrace,
Before tomorrow fall from grace?
Be doomed to Tophet's endless flame
Where hope and mercy never came?"

Never. Why? Because the love of Christ is immutable. "Who can separate us?"

Not only is this love immutable, my friends, but it is sovereign. "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." There is a separating line; the love of Christ is not universal to every living man to accept or refuse at will. If it were, who would ever

love a precious Redeemer? It is all of grace from first to last; it is sovereign love, and upon this ground we stand. "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated", but while the love of Christ is sovereign it does not close the door of mercy to a penitent sinner; no, there is a glory in the love of Christ in this, because if a poor sinner is brought to the footstool of divine mercy with his sins laid upon his conscience, his deep need felt, there is an evidence of sovereign love, or he would never have been found there. It is the exercise of divine power that brings a person to such a place, "For we are saved by grace, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." Sovereign love; but it is as free as it is sovereign; freely given, the love of Christ is rich and free. "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely." And what does this freeness of the love of Jesus mean? It means it is given without any purchase price.

"Mercy never can be bought,
Grace is free and all's the Lamb's"

It must come freely if you have it; the Lord will not allow you to take something in part exchange, He will not allow that; you may have to make a sacrifice for it, but it must be freely given. Poor beggars come without a penny to come with, and yet buy wine and milk without money and without price. O, what a little we know of the love of Jesus! Here is infinity, a glory that we can never penetrate, a mystery that we can never fathom, a height to which we can never reach, a depth to which we can never descend.

"O love of unexampled kind!
That leaves all thought so far behind;
Where length, and breadth, and depth, and height
Are lost to my astonished sight."

But how many of us can enter into the next verse?

"For love of me, the Son of God
Drained every drop of vital blood.
Long time I after idols ran;
But now my God's a martyred Man."

O, brethren, a religion like this will land you in heaven I feel sure; I am positive of it. The love of Christ! He came for love; love brought Him from heaven to earth, to this poor sinful, miserable

world; love brought Him down.

"On wings of love the Saviour flies,
And freely left His native skies,
To take a human birth."

His love is seen in His great condescension. He stooped to sinners; came down in honour to His covenant engagements. Thus we find Him saying, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O, My God, Thy law is within My heart." He came for love.

"For love of whom? Of sinners base."

Not the best of people with the best dispositions and temperaments that could be found, nor for anything the Lord foresaw they would be in His eternal view of things. No, but He chose for love some of the most crooked sticks; He loves the worst of sinners, wretched sinners; He came for love, love brought Him, He died for love.

"Greater love hath no Man than this that a Man lay down His life for His friends." He lives for love. He lives to carry on His people's cause above, and this is for love, therefore,

"Awake, sweet gratitude, and sing
The ascended Saviour's love."

Have you ever had a touch of that love in your soul? This is a poor word, a poor word about the love of Jesus. I can but pass on to the next point by just quoting a verse of one hymnwriter where he says concerning this,

"On such love, my soul still ponder,
Love so great, so rich, so free;
Say whilst lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such love to me?"

I do not know that we shall ever answer that question until we see Him as He is.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" There is then, the challenge issued by the Apostle here and as I have stated before, I understand him to mean the love of Christ to His Church, rather than the love of His people to Him. The strength lies here because of His immutability and His power, and yet it is true in the subject as well it must be; if it is true in the Head, it is true in the body. If nothing can separate Christ from His people, nothing can separate His people from Him; nothing. Therefore may not

a believer thus exult and say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The Apostle Paul knew as much as most men about those things which would separate if it were possible, because he enumerates them here, and brings forth a number of things and says, 'Shall this thing do it, shall that separate?' "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "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." He sums up all these things and says, 'Shall they separate us, will they separate Christ from us, or us from Christ?' The answer is in the negative. "I am persuaded", he says, "that nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". Nothing can separate, nothing. But from an experimental point of view, some of these things would be enough to separate if we had to stand in our own strength. It is the bond of union subsisting which holds the child of God to his Lord. It is that covenant bond that can never break that the Lord Jesus speaks of in the Gospel according to John. "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one." Here is an indissoluble tie, a bond that all these things here enumerated can never sever, never.

Take it for a moment as it has respect to the Lord Jesus and see how the challenge stands there. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" considering all these things. Now when the Lord Jesus came into the depth of His sufferings, He had tribulation, He had persecution, He had distress, and many, many things, and yet did they separate Him from His love to His people? No, if such a thing were possible they strengthened the tie, they confirmed the bond rather than to separate it, for His love to His chosen seed was never more manifest than when He came into the depth of suffering. But now just view it on the other side for a moment as it has respect to the family of God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Now if this rested in the creature to stand in his own strength, the first thing would separate him, the first thing. A little tribulation

and he would soon away with his religion if it were going to cost him anything. These things have separated many professors, many of them, but they have never separated a true child of God, never. We have seen plenty of people take up religion and have a great deal of it, and put many a poor, trembling child of God to shame because of what he felt within himself, but how have they stood? Something has come and separated them, and what does that mean? That they were never really in Him, only by an external profession that they had made themselves. Tribulation, persecution, the sword, would soon separate a professor, but never a possessor, never. Take tribulation. It tries us, does it not? It tries our religion and brings us into deep waters; but, my friends, what has tribulation done for you? Why, it has been the means of driving you to the Lord Jesus. "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee". The tribulative path you have had to walk in has often taken you to the Lord Jesus, saying 'Lord, help me, bring me through this trouble, deliver me from it, confirm Thy promise to my soul, be my God'. Therefore, shall tribulation separate? Why, it confirms the tie, strengthens the bond, unites the afflicted believer to his Lord, brings them together. Therefore the Apostle could say in this challenge, 'Shall tribulation or distress separate us?' The Lord's people are not immune from this, are they? Distress in body and soul, sometimes circumstances and business too, who does not know what it is? Distress of mind too; but does that separate, has that severed the tie, has that wiped out your religion and brought everthing to an end with you? No, instead of that it has deepened the work; it has discovered perhaps somethings new, but it has brought you more closely to Him.

Persecution! Persecution! O, that has put a very sudden end to some people's profession. Doubtless there were many in the early days of christianity who professed the Christian faith but never possessed the saving grace of God. When Constantine became Emperor of Rome and the Roman Empire, and liberty and advantages were given to Christians, and they were placed in positions of honour, Christianity began to fall; it was, so to speak, the downfall of Christianity. When the people of God were under persecution they were in a safer

position; that is, they that suffered for Christ's sake were real Christians then; but when the tide turned and persecution returned, it severed many professing Christians. Some people have been able to take up religion when it suited their purpose, but that is not the saving grace of God. Some of you know more about persecution than I do, I know; you have it yourselves; but may I not put this question, Has it separated you from your Lord? Has it separated you? You say, 'It has tried me at times, and made me feel I shall never stand', that may be so, but that is not separation. No, it has exercised you; it has been a fire wherein your dross has been consumed; it has purified your gold; but it has not separated you, has it? Therefore the challenge holds good, "Who shall separate us from the love of God?"

We might go through these other points, but for a moment in conclusion, I would like to say just this. Some of you may say, 'That is all very well concerning the Lord's people, and I believe that nothing will separate them; they were chosen in Him from all eternity, and every one is firmly embraced in the bonds of covenant love; but that is no comfort to me, that does not help me, because I do not feel that I am there; I do not feel that warm embrace in my soul, I have no inward comfort in relation to my personal standing in the love of Christ.' Could you come in with Newton? He was a good man; he said,

"'Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought."

So if there is any exercise in your heart, it causes anxious thought,

"Do I love the Lord or no,
Am I His or am I not?"

That is the question, and some of you could say, 'If that could be settled in my soul, I should be happy, as happy as I could be in this world, notwithstanding the difficulties of the path.' But I would just name this, that a lover of the Lord Jesus is one who is truly hungry for Him, one who has a real desire for Him, though he could not say and would not dare to say that he did love Him. What about the Church in the Canticles where she says to the Lord, "Tell me, O Thou Whom my soul loveth where Thou feedest"? She was hungry and enquiring after living Bread. "Tell me, O Thou Whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest." If you have a love to the precious Redeemer,

you will want to get to Him sometimes, to hear His voice sometimes, to break bread with Him. "Tell me where Thou feedest." Does not that come your way sometimes a little? You see other people of God favoured perhaps and you say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me, look upon me, tell me where Thou feedest'. You are not satisfied to be outside. "Why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" One that is veiled, hidden, apparently unnoticed, as one that turneth aside from them? You feel unlike them, but you would gladly be among them. Well there is love there, you know. Then again, love to the Lord Jesus Christ is proved by obedience in the subject. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." If the ways and ordinances of God are attractive to your soul, O there is a spark somewhere, although perhaps you would not feel you could walk in them just now; but there is a sweet attraction in a gracious obedience to the commands of the Lord Jesus; O, yes there is. An affectionate child will obey the instructions of a fond parent, it will be a delight to do it, and that will evidence the relationship,. Love to the Lord Jesus Christ is proved by love to His people; not a mere sentiment, not just to a person, but a real love to the children of God because of the grace that is in them, because they are the Lord's people. You feel at home with them. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren". That love must have as its root love to the Lord Jesus Christ; it must do. Then again love is proved by the sacrifice that one may be willing to make. Paul was willing to renounce all for Christ's sake; that was the one thing with him, he must have Christ; and some of you have probably made sacrifices for Christ's sake. You would not do that unless you had a spark of love to Him. 'But all these evidences do not satisfy me', you say; no, perhaps not, but if the Lord comes and says to you, "I love thee well, My child", you will know then; that will settle the point. But whether your felt interest is clear to your soul's satisfaction or not, yet if you are hungry, thirsty, waiting upon God, longing for Him in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, you do love Him. You have loved Him for what He has done, especially when there has been a spark of hope in your soul that it might have been for you.

Well, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Amen.