

I would ask you to think about how many people there are in your life whom you would classify as a friend. I would have to assume that you could come up with a large number of people who would fall into that category for you — friends you have made from throughout your whole life. Now, from that circle of friends, think about those whom you would classify as “close” friends. The number of people whom we classify as close friends is going to be much smaller than the number of people whom you would classify as friends. Someone we consider as a “close” friend is one whom we trust enough to let them get to know us better than others know us. For most people, we put up a little bit of a front to try to hide some of our flaws or imperfections. We want people to like us and respect us, so we do not always let them see fully what we are really like. But our close friends often see us warts and all, and they still accept us as friends, because that is what friends do. Those close friends might overlook some of our flaws and imperfections, but there are still things which we could do or say which would ruin even that friendship. There are certain things which they would never put up with. Even close friendships can be broken. In the Word of God before us today, we are told of one who will stand by us at all times, even when He knows our deepest and darkest secrets. That one is our loving Savior, Jesus. As Paul points us to that Savior, he reminds us that **NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS.** 1) He knows all our sins. 2) He still loves us.

In this life, friendships come and friendships go. Sometimes we simply drift apart because of distance. Sometimes we drift apart because our interests change. We may remain friends with those people, but we do not interact as much with them — maybe just sending them a Christmas card each year to catch each other up on our lives. We kind of expect that to happen with our casual friends. Even when we have a close friend, we can still slowly drift apart. We remain friends, but the closeness between us can change over time.

But there are things that can destroy a close friendship. Maybe we do or say something that really hurts the other person. Even when we apologize and ask to be forgiven, there are times when a friend just is not able to get past the hurt to be able to return to the friendship which we enjoyed before that. It is for that reason that we often do not reveal to others some of the deepest, darkest secrets that lie within us. We do not want to jeopardize our friendship. How many times have we heard someone say about a person they were close to, “I never knew that about them?”

When we come to the Lord’s house, we begin our worship service with a call to confess our sins. This is an invitation to do something painful — to open ourselves up to God by admitting each and every sinful thought, word and action which we have ever had. Why would we ever be willing to stand before God and admit to Him things which we may not even want to confess to our closest friend on earth? The answer to that lies in the Word of God which is before us. It is knowing that nothing **“will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (39)

Satan always has a two pronged attack against us. First, he tries to convince us that what God calls sin in our lives would be OK for us to do in this situation. He goads us into thinking it is all right for us to bend His laws a little bit here or there to suit our own needs or desires. He tries to make us believe that we know better than God does what is good for us in this life. His arguments are so convincing that he often gets us to do those things which we know full well are not pleasing to our heavenly Father. Then he runs to God to accuse us of that very sin, asking God to punish us for doing the very thing which he goaded us into doing. He wants us to believe that God is going to be so angry with us that we could never be forgiven — that He could no longer love us. Because of this, we try to hide our faults, so that we will not be called to account for them?

So what does Paul say to remind us of God’s unchanging love for us? **“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** (31-32) God loved us enough that He was willing to sacrifice His own Son on the cross to wash away the guilt of

all of our sins. God knows how sinful we are. God knows whenever we fall into any sin. And still He loves us — loves us enough to have His Son die in our place so that all of our sins would be washed away. If He loves us that much, certainly His love for us is never going to change.

This past week we began the season of the year which we call Lent. Beginning with Ash Wednesday, we follow our Savior on His path to the cross where He laid down His life for us on Good Friday. We see how much He loves us, willingly taking the punishment for our sins so that we would not be punished for them ourselves. We see him holding out His hands to each one of us, inviting us to come to Him to receive the forgiveness which He has won for us.

So why would we be willing to come before God to confess all of our sins — all of our failings — to Him? Because we know of His love that forgives us all of those sins. That love for us will never change. He knows the worst about each one of us, and still loves us. That gives us the confidence to come to Him to receive what He is offering to us — forgiveness for all sins, and help to avoid them in the future.

Confession of sin and assurance of forgiveness is necessary to restore any broken relationship even on earth. If you have offended a friend by something you have said or done, that friend is going to remain angry with you until you go to him, confessing that what you did was wrong and asking for his forgiveness. When that forgiveness is granted, then the original relationship can be restored to what it was before. We may offer many reasons for not wanting to go to make such a confession, but there is nothing else that will ever be able to restore a relationship.

Satan tries to put many excuses in our minds why we cannot confess our sins to God. Paul speaks about of few of them. **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”** (35) We might see many things that are happening in our lives and blame that on the fact that they are evidence that God does not love us as He said He would. But that is never the case. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

That perfect love coming from Jesus is one constant that we can always have in our lives. This season of Lent proves that to us, for we see how our Savior suffered in our place. What love that demonstrates to us. Certainly, if He loved us enough to lay down His life for us, He is going to give us everything else that we need in this life. We have His sure promise on that. **In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**

In this life, we may have a multitude of friends. They may be a great joy and blessing to us. Among those friends, we will probably have some that we consider close friends. They will stand by us, even when some of our faults shine through. But there is only one Friend that loves us perfectly no matter what. There is only one Friend Whose love can never be changed. That is the love of God which is found in Jesus our Savior. May we trust that love so that we go to Him to receive from Him the assurance that all of our sins have been forgiven.