

The Decisive Reality | Romans 8:38-39 | August 27, 2017

This week we read another statement possessing dynamism beyond reach and beautifully fades as a sunset into the ineffable – “*nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.*” Spend time with the thoughts from Esther in her *Loving to Know* taken from pages 416-417.

1. Indwell the word
2. Perceive with depth
3. Place yourself in proximity
4. Steward rather than summon
5. The anchor of “Ah-Ha” is gracious and transformative
6. Steward what we have
7. Humbly grope for the “yet-to-be-known”
8. When it comes it comes from “outside”
9. Indwell bodily clues
10. Put yourself “in the way of knowing”
11. Truth always exceeds proof
12. Reality self-discloses lavishly

Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, (Multnomah Books, 1985).

A marriage, or a marriage partner, may be compared to a great tree growing right up through the center of one’s living room. It is something that is just there, and it is huge, and everything has been built around it, and wherever one happens to be going—to the fridge, to bed, to the bathroom, or out the front door—the tree has to be taken into account. It cannot be gone through; it must respectfully be gone around. It is somehow bigger and stronger than oneself. True, it could be chopped down, but not without tearing the house apart. And certainly it is beautiful, unique, exotic: but also, let’s face it, it is at times an enormous inconvenience.

So there are many things that can be said about one’s life’s mate, but finally, irrevocably, the one definite thing that needs to be said is that he or she is always there. And that, while it may be common enough in the world of trees, is among us human beings a rather remarkable state of affairs.

Marriage is the most persistent reminder of the presence of other people in the world: that they are there, that they are real, and that they are wildly different from the imaginary beings who normally

people our thoughts and fantasies. To be married is to be confronted intimately day after day with the mystery of life, of other life, of life outside of oneself... The loved one simply is “there,” in a way that no other living thing in the world except oneself has ever really been “there” before. Even parents do not intrude and impinge upon one’s adult life the way a spouse does, and it can be rather a surprise to discover that one is, after all, not alone. At night, in the morning, naked, over meals, in bath, and in bed, the partner is always there, there in body or there in spirit, there at the back of the mind and there in the pit of the heart. Although day-to-day married life may seem as natural and almost as automatic as breathing, yet there is a way in which the two partners never really do get used to one another, not in the way they are used to breathing. As autonomic, as tedious, as dreary as a marriage can become, there is nevertheless something in it which defies being taken for granted. The whole course of a couple’s life together is fated to share that same odd quality of perfect naturalness united with perfect awkwardness—second nature combined with utter novelty.

In the long run what is most uncanny about marriage is not any sense of growing familiarity and comfortableness with the enormous reality of this other presence in one’s life, but rather just the opposite: the growing strangeness. As the years roll by, all that happens is that the puzzle of time is added to the original enigma of love. Ten years, thirty years, fifty—it becomes more and more imponderable. There is just something so purely and untouchable mysterious in the fact of living out one’s days cheek by jowl under the same roof with another being who always remains, no matter how close you manage to get, essentially a stranger. You know this person better than you have ever known anyone, yet often you wonder whether you know them at all. The sense of strangeness increases, almost, with the depth and security of the loved one’s embrace.

What is this alien, unknowable place at the very heart of the one we love? Probably it is the place of our own familiarity with God. For one of the most profound ways in which the Lord touches us, and teaches us about Himself and His Own essential *otherness*, is through the very limits He has placed upon our relationships with one another. It is an enormous source of human frustration that our need for intimacy far outstrips its capacity to be met in other people... The very distance we feel from the person we love most clearly may be, paradoxically, a measure of the overwhelming closeness of God. 42-44

Romans 8:38-39

*...nothing **will be able** to **separate** us from the **love** of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (vs 39)*

Will be able = *dynasetai* [Future Middle Indicative 3 person singular – *dynamai*]

NIDNTT, Vol 2

Might, Authority, Throne – The word *dynamis* suggests the inherent capacity of someone or something to carry something out, whether it be physical, spiritual, military or political... *dynamis*, from the stem *dyna*, means power, strength, might; also the verb *dynamai*, be able, have the strength to, and the noun *dynastes*, a ruler... [NOTE: that the **power** seems to always point toward an-*other*; a *personal* being].

601

Old Testament: The most comprehensive demonstration of God's power is seen to be the creation of the world (Jer 34:5; 39:17). On the basis of the nation's experience, individuals can also praise God as their refuge and strength (Ps 45:1; Sam 22:32 ff.). God's power, at work in the believer, is the Spirit (Mic 3:8). God is Spirit, not flesh: he far transcends the whole creation (Isa 31:3 f.). It is not, however, **dynamis**, but **ischys** (Strength) that is mostly used as a translation for Hebrew **koah** and **oz** in the LXX: Israel did not only potentially, but actually experience the manifestation of God's power. 602

New Testament: In the NT **dynamis** is found 118 times... God is the Mighty One (Lk 1:48)... with God all things are possible (Matt 19:26; Mk 10:27; Lk 18:27; Mk 14:35)... Paul lays a greater emphasis on the present experience of the revelation of God's might, which he understands primarily in terms of the power which raises the dead in the last days, and the new creativity of the Holy Spirit. This power of God which is at work in the last days was perceptible in Christ, the Risen One; and now Christ, the Exalted One, is the bearer and mediator of this same power. Admittedly God's invisible power can be deduced from the words of creation (Rom 1:20). But it is the raising of Jesus from the dead that represents the central eschatological proof of God's might (cf. Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 5:14; 2 Cor 13:4; Phil 3:10 also Heb 11:19)... Paul in fact uses the verb **endynamoo**, to strengthen, to describe this work of the exalted Christ in the lives of individual believers in Phil 4:13 (also Eph 6:10; 1 Tim 1:12; 2 Tim 4:17; and 2:1). In Christ's mediating work there is a double revelation of God's eschatological power: the Word which brings salvation and the Holy Spirit who creates and makes new. 604

Separates = *chorisai* [Aorist Active Infinitive – **chorizo**]

NIDNTT, Vol. 3

Figurative Separation; so convinced was Paul of the constancy of divine love that he could actually list – and then dismiss as impotent – all potential obstacles to the continued flow of God's love in Christ (Rom 8:35-39). To his question "Who shall separate (**chorisai**) us" (vs 39). Neither adverse circumstance (vs 35-36) nor created form or phase of being (vs 38-39) could sever that love. 534

Love = *Agape*

NIDNTT, Vol. 2

Classical Literature: What we describe as *love* is differentiated in Greek by various expressions... The etymology of **agapao** and **agape** is not clear. The verb **agapao** appears frequently from Homer onwards in Greek literature, but the noun **agape** is only a late Greek construction. Only one reference has been found outside the Bible, where the goddess Isis is given the title *agape* (2nd century AD). **Agapao** in Greek is often quite colourless as a word, appearing frequently as an alternative to, or a synonym with, **erao** [erotic] and **phileo** [friend], meaning to be fond of, treat respectfully, be pleased with, welcome. When, on rare occasions, it refers to someone favoured by a god, it is clear that, unlike **erao**, it is not the man's own longing for possessions or worth that is meant, but a generous move by one for the sake of the other. This is expressed above all in the way **agapetos** is used, mostly of a child, but particularly of an only child to whom all the love of his parents is given. 538-539

Old Testament: In the LXX **agapao** is used by preference to translate the Hebrew verb **ahab**. The noun agape finds its origin here, in standing for Hebrew **ahbah**... The phenomenon of love in the OT is experienced as a spontaneous force which drives one to something or someone over against itself. 539-540

New Testament: In the NT love is one of the central ideas which express the whole content of the Christian faith (cf. Jn 3:16). God's activity is love, which looks for men's reciprocal love (1 Jn 4:8, 16). 542

Paul stands entirely in the line of OT tradition when he speaks of the love of God. **Agape** is for him electing love, as is indicated by his use of **agapetos**, "the chosen one"... A believer is a sinner who is loved by God. When he realizes this, he enters the sphere of God's love. He himself becomes loving. Hence, also in Paul love for God and love for one's neighbor derive from God's own love. 544-545

TDNT, Vol I

Paul clearly sees and sketches the new situation created by the loving work of God. The great argument of Romans on the theme of the new epoch which has now dawned rightly culminates in a hymn which, beginning with the love of the elect for God, moves on to the love of Christ, and finally closes with the assurance "*the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (R 8:28; 21 ff.). This assurance rests on three facts. The first is that God has sent His only Son and that this act of love found fulfillment on the cross in the self-offering of the Son, "the Beloved". The second is that God has called the apostle and continually calls those whom He has chosen; His loving will is directed to them... The third is that the **agape** of God is shed abroad in our hearts and is thus the decisive reality in our existence. 49

The loving action of God is revealed and executed in that of Christ "*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom 5:8). The eternal love of God becomes in the love of Christ a world-changing event of which Paul usually speaks in verbal forms and then always in the aorist [punctiliar past tense]... He is at work in living power (Ro 8:35; 2 Cor 13:11 ff). Love holds us captive (2 Cor 5:14), or rather "*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*" 49

The meaning of the Pauline concept of "God's love" is plain. It is the orientation of the sovereign will of God to the world of men and the deliverance of this world. The work of love is God's goal from the very first... The goal of the work of divine love is the new man. But this goal is not attained without man and his work of love. For all God's work, whether in creation or redemption, presupposes both the possibility and the necessity of human action. God's will does not exclude human volition. It includes it, finding its purest fulfillment in its fullest exercise. The imperious call of God is a call to freedom. 49-50

God has the first word. He establishes the relationship. This is laid down once and for all in Romans 8. His resolve, election and calling are decisive. From Him proceeds everything that may be called **agape**... The same fundamental relationship brings Paul in 1 Cor 8:3 to the pregnant formulation "*But if anyone loves God, he is known by God.*" We are capable of active orientation to God only to the extent that we

are passive before Him. The same schema of passive and active is used in the service of the same guiding thought in Gal 4:9; 1 Cor 13:12; Phil 3:12... God pours forth the Spirit into His elect (Rom 5:5; 2 Thess 2:13). Again, man is passive. But the Spirit liberates man from supreme activity in love. Freedom constrains and completes itself in love. 50

However, it is not the goal of love that our love should respond to God, nor that we should attain freedom for our own sake. Its goal is that the man who is called should place his life in love and freedom in the service of his neighbor (cf. Gal 5:13 f.; Rom 13:8; 1 Thess 3:12). 50