



WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?

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Fear is such a common issue! Some people startle more easily than others, but all of us have wrestled with fears.

For some, fears are debilitating. For all, they are embarrassing.

There are many different sources of fear. Some fears are strong, some are weak. Some are brief, others seem like they'll never go away.

This much we know is true: EVERYONE has been afraid, and EVERYONE will face fear again.

What does the Word of God offer for this arena of struggle?

We may read of heroic actions (from the pages of the Bible, or the pages of the daily news), but that does little more than inspire us (and sometimes, actually, depress us...). What does the Gospel say?

Today, we'll look at a passage written by Paul to the church in Rome (8:28-39), that has particular bearing on this theme:

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

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.

Now, let's begin to unpack it, segment by segment.

Working together for good

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

The apostle begins this passage with a confident assertion: “We KNOW.” The implication, of course, is that we, too, may know how able and dependable our God is.

“God causes all things to work together for good.” ALL things, is what we really need to hear. Not just some things. Not just the pleasant things. ALL things. Every difficulty, every sorrow, every loss, every pain, the things we like, and the things we don't like—all for our GOOD.

For whom does God do such wonderful things? *“To those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*

Loving God is not a feeling alone, anymore than loving your spouse; it is a commitment of faithfulness. Thus, the calling, *“according to His purpose.”*

God's way is not your way; it is so much higher than your way. When we realize that His way (His purpose) is motivated by His enduring love for us, then living according to it makes sense, and grows easier.

Predestined to be conformed!

²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

“Predestined” is a big theological term, which for many suggests that God has predetermined certain outcomes that cannot be avoided or undermined. I believe that notion is inconsistent with the Bible's fundamental description of human free will (without which there could be no love).

Predestination, then, speaks of what you've been designed for (God's intended purpose), and what the influence of His grace draws you toward, without negating your choice in the matter.

For instance, poor choices could subvert God's plan, but more often, they lengthen the journey and make it more difficult.

In any case, the destiny God has planned for you is to become like Jesus—a real resurrected human, with a heart after God—and that destiny is unfolding in you even now. How does this happen?

In general terms, as Paul wrote, there are three stages: called, justified, glorified. Notice that all three are in the past tense, because all three have already been initiated for us by Jesus Christ.

He has called us to Himself, and we are continuing to follow Him. He has justified us (made us right with God, as if we had never sinned), and continues to cleanse our hearts and renew our minds. He has glorified us, by giving us His Holy Spirit, and preparing us to be the Bride of Christ—a kingdom of priests—to rule the world with Him.

Almost too much to take in, isn't it!?

What then shall we say?

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?

How should we speak about such things? We should say what God has said. He has made us "right" in His sight. We should call Him "our God." We should recognize that He is for us, not against us any longer.

If God is for us (on our side, fighting for us), who can be (successful) against us? This does not suggest that no one WILL be against us, but they will not succeed. This does not suggest they cannot harm us, but they cannot OVERCOME us.

This is in line with what the psalmist wrote (118:6): *"The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"* All of people's efforts to thwart God's plan will fall short and come to nothing. We WILL be saved!

If God was willing to sacrifice His own Son (the greatest treasure He had to offer), what else would He withhold? If He's given His best, He'll also give all the rest that we need.

Who will (successfully) bring a charge against us (the Chosen), when it is God Himself who has justified us?

Who is there to condemn us, when the Judge (Jesus) Himself intercedes for us (through His death, His resurrection, and His coronation).

What can separate us from the love of Christ?

Paul lists seven common conflicts in life, to ask if any of these occurrences should mean that God has withdrawn or ceased to care about us.

Trouble? When things get difficult, as they sometimes do, beware of blaming God. Sometimes a storm comes simply to clear your path forward.

Distress? In an age of stress like the present, it is not uncommon to fault God with failing to hold up His end, but in our weakness He offers more strength, if only we will look to Him.

Persecution? People who resist God will also resist God's people, and the truth we proclaim or represent to them. God has not ceased to protect us; our security is deeper than we know.

Famine? If we haven't enough to eat, what then? Then it is time to double down on prayer: *"Give us this day our daily bread."* If He feeds the smallest birds, won't He provide for you?

Destitution? If we lose our jobs, or can't find work, or can't pay our bills... where is God? Right where He's always been, unchanged in His love and provision for you. If it is hidden for awhile, keep asking, seeking, and knocking.

Mortal danger? People can be mean! That doesn't mean God is. Pray for His protection, and follow the leading of His Spirit. Even if they kill your body, they cannot harm your soul. You have resurrection life!

War? Even this (perhaps the gravest of human tragedies) is not a sign of God's indifference, but of man's brutality. Call upon the Lord to bring you through.

(This list does mean that any of these things COULD happen (thus, the quote of Psalm 44:22: *"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."*), yet, even if they do, that does not mean we HAVE BEEN separated, or ARE separated, or WILL BE separated from Jesus' love.)

Total triumph!

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.

“Overwhelmingly conquer!” A Greek dictionary says this means a “heightened form of victory”; that’s a surpassing victory) That’s TOTAL TRIUMPH!

And it comes to us “*through Him.*” That is, because of our faithful relationship with Jesus. He arose, so we will rise! He overcame, so we will overcome! Jesus’ destiny, He shares with us! That’s how much He loves us.

“*Who LOVED us.*” Notice, this is in the past tense, so we are now to reflect on it, count it done, sealed, and secure. He set His love on you (Psalm 91).

The Apostle described himself as “*fully convinced.*” On what basis could he say that? Well, that brings to mind his testimony to the Corinthian church. Look at what he had been through, as he lived out his faith in Jesus Christ:

2 Corinthians 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one. *11:25* Three times I was beaten with a rod. Once I received a stoning. Three times I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I spent adrift in the open sea. *11:26* I have been on journeys many times, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers from my own countrymen, in dangers from Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers at sea, in dangers from false brothers, *11:27* in hard work and toil, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, many times without food, in cold and without enough clothing. *11:28* Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxious concern for all the churches.

Neither death nor life are any threat to your relationship with Jesus. He’s faced them both on your behalf, with awesome success.

Neither (fallen) heavenly angels nor earthly principalities pose any threat to your station in the Family of God.

Your present circumstances cannot interrupt God’s love (unless you look in another direction), nor can the eventualities of the future. Whatever comes, God can not be unseated from His throne. It’s all workable to Him!

Not powers, whether they are in the heights (above us), or in the depths (beneath us), nor any other created being, can have any effective influence against God's love for you! He's not listening to their testimony, when He has yours!

All of these things have NO ability to derail the love with which God has crowned your life!

All of God's love has been wrapped up and given to us IN Christ Jesus our Lord. His work is finished, and His reward (that's you) is secure.

I'd say Paul's conviction had a really strong foundation. God may not have brought you through all of that, but you will do well to stop and think about what God HAS brought you through. It's probably a lot.

Are you convinced?

Some experience of your own is necessary, but you can fast track it by putting your faith in this passage of Scripture. You can learn from the experience of others, like Paul, and other Christians you may know, and save yourself much first-hand difficulty.

No matter what may come, don't let it come BETWEEN you and the Lord. Tell the Lord today that you will trust Him, no matter what.

Of His enduring, unfailing love, you may be convinced.