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VICTORY OVER FEAR



What are some fears you have outgrown?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

Believers have no reason to fear separation from God and His love.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Just about every child has a primal fear of being abandoned—that their parents will put them down one day and never come back. Ever seen a child cry when his parent walks into another room? The child doesn't understand his dad is just around the corner. Or, you may recall a time as a child when you became separated from your mother in a store. Panic continued to rise until you spotted her.

In one sense, we never get over that fear. We don't want to be left alone in our lives. We'll put up with a lot of things—including bad friends and even difficult marriages—just to avoid the painful reality of being alone. Many even carry this fear as followers of Christ. We're not afraid of difficult or even painful experiences, but we are afraid God will lose track of us or that something will happen to make Him abandon us.

This is why Romans 8 is such a powerful chapter of the Bible. Paul wrote with such confidence to assure us that nothing—not even death itself—will keep Jesus from being with us. What made Paul so confident? Let's just say he had field tested this promise of grace.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Romans 8:31-34

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

³² 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? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Paul's epistle to the Roman church is the longest of all his letters. In it, he explained the gospel in a way that's as clear as it is deep. The first seven chapters show how sin is universal in the world, why that sin is so devastating to our lives, and the futility of our efforts to remove our sin on our own. Throughout, Paul pointed to Jesus and showed how salvation comes to us by faith in Christ and all He has done for us.

As Paul moved through Romans 8, he laid down one truth on top of another regarding the great benefits we receive because of Christ's saving work for us:

- ▶ We have received His Holy Spirit (v. 9).
- ▶ We are made fully alive in Christ (v. 11).
- ▶ We are adopted into His family (v. 15).
- ▶ We are co-heirs with Christ (v. 17).
- ▶ We have a glorious future ahead of us (vv. 18-23).
- ▶ We have the Holy Spirit interceding for us before the Father (v. 26).

As Paul reached the climactic moment in verse 31, he simply asked: "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" We can't look at the gospel—any aspect of the gospel—and not see that "God is for us." And when we understand that God is for us, it doesn't matter who's against us.

What helps you know that God is for you?

QUESTION #2

Now, understand how the struggling Christians in Rome would have heard this news. The early church had always faced difficulties throughout the ancient world, and the church at Rome was no exception. Just a few years after receiving this letter from Paul, the Roman Christians experienced a major time of persecution under Emperor Nero. They knew what it was like to feel as if everyone was against them. How wonderful, then, to be reminded that God will never abandon His church or leave them defeated.

How can we be sure? Because this is the same God who gave His Son for us. And since He was willing to give Jesus for us, why would He hold back anything else?

We have a secure standing before God because of the finished work of Christ. Not only that, but Jesus is still at work on our behalf: He also “is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” So here we have the answer to Paul’s two questions in verses 34-35: God, the only righteous Judge, the only one who can condemn us, does not condemn us. On top of that, He gave His Son for our salvation, who even now prays for us. That’s why it’s called the good news!

Paul knew what he was talking about. Although he didn’t write this particular letter while in prison, Paul had his share of jail time. He knew difficulty. He knew opposition. But he also knew God was with him. Everything Paul wrote about in Romans 8, he had experienced first-hand. The joys that erupt from these verses are based on realities Paul had experienced himself. From his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-6) to an earth-shaking worship service in the Philippian jail (see Acts 16:25-26), Paul had found Christ to be faithful and present through it all.



When have you felt criticized or condemned as a follower of Christ?

QUESTION #3

Romans 8:35-39

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul was always a realist. He had suffered for his ministry, and he would suffer again. The church knew—and continues to know—periods of difficulty, persecution, and suffering. “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

While this is true, something else is more true: Christ is present in it all. Not only is Christ present, but it’s also important to remember that nothing anywhere or in any way could ever change our status and pull us away from the embrace of Christ.

Go ahead and make a list. Put down everything and everyone you think could pull someone away from Christ.

- ▶ Would persecution do it? Could the political powers put you in a place where even Jesus couldn’t get to you? No.
- ▶ What about illness? Could pain or suffering blind you to the reality of Christ in your life? No.
- ▶ What about supernatural powers like angels and demons? Nope. Nothing or no one can pull you away from Jesus.
- ▶ What about death? No, not even death—long seen as the great thief of meaning and hope in life—can pull you away from Christ. He is victorious even over that.
- ▶ What about your own stupidity? Can you do something so utterly wrong that you become too gross for Jesus to hold? No. The truth remains the same: nothing can separate you from Christ’s love.

Which of the threats described in these verses tend to weaken your sense of security?

QUESTION #4

Oh, but you don't know what I've done. True enough. I don't want to minimize your pain, but know this: nothing you have ever done or ever will do can undo or outdo what Jesus did for us on the cross. Paul made it clear: Nothing is more powerful than Christ. Absolutely nothing.

What made Paul so confident? Let's just say he found out the hard way. For example, he knew the hardship of unjust imprisonment. Paul also had been whipped five times with 39 lashes. The Romans had beaten him three times. His enemies had stoned him and left him for dead. He faced various dangers from Jews, Gentiles, robbers, and false teachers. He knew hunger, thirst, and inadequate clothing (see 2 Cor. 11:24-27). Yet in all that he endured, Paul had never been separated from Christ's love.

In fact, Christ's love does more than just help us endure; His love gives us victory: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Instead of fearing that our hardships might pull us away from Christ and His love for us, we see that these challenges actually pull us closer to Christ. Whatever we face—however threatening it may appear on the surface—aids our growth in Christ.

Times are hard. Paul never denied that or downplayed it. But take a moment to let these truths sink in: Christ is praying for you. Nothing can keep us from the love of Christ who, even now, is interceding for us. Therefore, we can take all the world wants to bring against us. Since God is for us, it really doesn't matter who's against us.

How do Paul's assurances in verses 35-39 help us find victory over fear?

QUESTION #5

NEVER FAILS

Listen to the song "Your Love Never Fails," by the Newsboys. As you listen, use the space below to record your reactions during the song—emotions you feel, lyrics that stand out, images that come to mind, and so on.

What's a moment from your life that gives you confidence that God's love will not fail?

*"To fear and not be afraid - that
is the paradox of faith."*

—A. W. TOZER

LIVE IT OUT

Disciples of Jesus can never be separated from His love. Consider taking one of the following steps this week in response to that truth:

- ▶ **Make a list.** Write out a list of obstacles you feel are working against you right now. Consider how God can work in you and strengthen you through this time.
- ▶ **Open up.** We often allow fear or shame to close our hearts when it comes to difficult circumstances. Instead, be intentional about sharing your experiences with someone this week. Confess your struggles and actively seek God's love.
- ▶ **Be bold.** Our fears also have a way of preventing us from taking action for Christ. This week, take a bold step to show your faith in the fact that you cannot be separated from God's love. Speak to someone about the gospel, make a commitment to a ministry, give up your resources, and so on.



You may have been abandoned or neglected as a child, but you will never be separated from your Father as a child of God. Let that truth give you confidence as you live for Him this week.

My thoughts

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLvictory**