

Do you ever feel as though the world, and especially your immediate world, barks incessantly and is unnerving? Noise and/ or pressure is coming from all sides, and you are sweating like when you have a vivid nightmare? Tensions are high. Maybe someone has said something to you? Maybe you are afraid something is going to happen to you, or a friend, or a family member, and you won't know what to do? Maybe you will be stuck in a situation in which you don't have any control and will feel helpless? I have been in a hurricane before, and even in a tornado, but I don't know what it must be like to be amid all the fires out west, or in a drought season in Africa. I don't know what it must be like to be in a school or a church or a mall or theater in which a student or teacher or someone from the neighborhood opens fire. I don't know what it must feel like to have someone say, “I have fallen out of love with you.” I don't know what it must feel like to have a business partner go behind your back and leave you hanging. I don't know what it is must be like to wake up each morning not knowing where my next meal may come from or whether I will have work to make money to pay bills. I surely hope you don't either, but we all hear stories, or know someone perhaps, so it is likely we all know to what I am referring? Some of us may even know these situations more intimately than we care to. What do you do in those situations? What is your thought process and breakdown?

I listen to music often. It has become one of those things that can help me take deep breaths when I hear stories including situations like I just mentioned. And I don't listen to rock music or heavy metal! A little James Taylor, Jack Johnson, Lauren Daigle, or the Message is just right for me. I am not seeking revenge on the world, just peace to know these things don't have the last word. In one of my listening sessions this past week, I heard the chorus of a song that has stuck with me. The song is *Fear is not my Future* by Brandon Lake and Chandler More and the chorus is...

*Fear is not my future. YOU ARE*  
*Sin/ Shame/ Sickness is not my story. YOU ARE*  
*Heartbreak is not my home. YOU ARE*  
*Death is not the end. YOU ARE (God is)*

Who is YOU? God is, of course. God is our future. God is our story. God is our home. God is the end. No matter how much the devil wants to try and stir up and shake up, our faith and covenant relationship with God gives us a different promise and God's promises give us a different outlook and way to deal with life.

The apostle Paul writes to Romans, “If God is for us, who/ what could be against us?” He acknowledges clearly in the verses leading up to verses 31 to 39 that there are and will be many things that try to bring us down, pull us apart, threaten us, break us, scare us, defeat us. His reminder? “WE ARE GOD’S!” And to be God’s means something!!! It means a big something!

Paul goes on to explain that God, who gave up God’s own son for us, will freely give us everything we need. And because God is all powerful and the One who has final say in judgement, nothing can separate us from God’s love even if the trials we face kill us (Rom. 8:31-39). It may appear as though there is a contradiction in what Paul says, for one moment Paul says nothing could stand against us, and then suddenly he’s talking about us being killed? It may appear odd, but Paul’s focus isn’t on the people of God avoiding physical trials and suffering. Physical protection and healing can (and often do!) happen, but what Paul is trying to say is that is not our main concern.

***“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!”*** Romans 8:35-37, Psalm 44:22

Paul quotes from a psalm that laments the deaths of God’s covenant people and asks God not to reject them forever (Ps. 44:17-26). It seems that Paul would tell the Psalmist, and us, that suffering does not mean God has forsaken us. In fact, we “have complete victory” even in the midst of all that.

It is important to note that when Paul talks about suffering as a Christian, he speaks from a deep well of experience. When he says we don’t want to deal with trouble- tribulation and affliction that’s external, distress- great distress, particularly inner distress, persecution- pursuit, persecution, famine, nakedness- total lack of clothing, danger- peril, or sword- a sword for slaughter or execution, he is sharing from a place of personal witness and experience. I would dare say no one ever wants to go through these things.

But there is something in the way Paul makes it sound like experiencing these things isn’t a big deal. Paul is not aloof and he is not naïve. Instead, Paul is confident. What he says in Romans 8:38-39...

***“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

... isn't just based on hear-say. It is based in faith as well as first-hand experience. To quote Adam Clarke's commentary, "The confidence expressed by the apostle at the end of this chapter is as *rational* as it is *bold*." This section of Romans is a brilliant piece of writing and a glorious affirmation that those who trust God have nothing to worry about. We've already more than won the battle through the victory of God who loves us.

In a way, I don't know about you, but it kind of makes it sound like there's nothing left for us to do. God loves us no matter what and there is nothing that can come in the way of God's love. However, that is not the overall message of Romans. Going back to the Psalm that Paul quotes from, we find a line that reads, "**All this has come on us, yet we haven't forgotten you. We haven't been false to your covenant**" (Ps. 44:17). When New Testament author's reference Old Testament passages, they assume their readers will connect the present argument to that passage's larger context. What Paul is writing about here in Romans is covenants, and he expects us to understand that and make that connection.

With that in mind, Clarke draws a connection and writes, "*We abide faithful in the new covenant of our God; and God is faithful who has promised to support and make us more than conquerors; i.e. to give us a complete triumph over sin, and death, and hell, not leaving one enemy unsubdued.*" (commentary on Rom. 8:37) This is perhaps connected to something else Paul wrote to Timothy, his protégé, in 2 Timothy 2:11-13, "**This saying is trustworthy: If we died with him, we will also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we deny him, he will also deny us. If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, since he cannot deny himself.**"

There's a reciprocal aspect to our relationship with God. It's connected to grace. God's faithfulness is a constant, but we can't reap the benefits of it without being in covenant with God and remaining faithful ourselves. As John 15 reminds us, we must abide with God- remain with God, connect with God- as a branch to a vine or tree.

If God is for us, who/ what can be against us? Nothing can separate us from Christ's love. Nothing can vanquish us because God has already won the pivotal battle of the wars we're fighting. And because we know there are many things that will try, we need to stick close to God- love God with a perfect heart and stay faithful to the covenant- because it's in God that "**we are more than conquerors**" (Rom. 8:37). Whatever circumstance you are in, you can always turn to God and ask God to share help, strength, and wisdom with you. Having confidence and peace that God will not abandon you, is one of the chief benefits to living in covenant with God.

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