**Gospel Fearless**

Romans 8:31-39

The believers in Rome who first received this letter from the apostle Paul understood the dangers listed as very real and ***imminent threats*** to them. More than likely Nero was Emperor in Rome - who was notoriously unstable, and would eventually set the city on fire and then try to blame the Christians for it. In these closing verses of Romans 8, Paul describes the dangers of this world.

The **Dangers** of this world:

* Physical: Persecution, suffering, oppression, death
* Spiritual: Accusation, condemnation, separation

**The closing lists** detail ***physical dangers*** to Christians - tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. Death, life, angels, rulers, things present and things to come, powers, height, depth, anything else. I include demonic oppression as a physical danger in the sense of being a threat to our physical bodies, even though they are spiritual beings.

Think about **HEIGHT AND DEPTH**. What’s the worst thing a crazy dictator could do to you? Leave you up on a high mountain or chain you to a cannonball and drop you into the crushing depths of the ocean. Places like that are hard for us to reach - and human remains would be impossible to recover from them. But it is no problem for God.

***No matter how your body is treated***, even if you are killed in a painful and terrifying way, NOTHING can separate the Christian from the love and blessing of God. Nothing. The message of Romans 8 to **Christians is to BE FEARLESS**. Nothing can harm us in a way that really matters. Here’s the application for the end as we begin:

So fear **Nothing** and use **Everything** you have for Jesus

This was **how Paul lived**, saying, “I consider my life worth nothing to me if only I may finish the race and complete the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace,” and “for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain,” and “I want to know Christ and the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of SHARING in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.”

***The proper fear of God*** drives out the fear of anything or anyone else. And the experience of the LOVE OF GOD removes the fear of God’s judgment that could otherwise paralyze us.

In the end, for each one of us, **it’s a choice** between the physical and the spiritual. Here is how Jesus said it:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.” Mark 8:34-35

If you choose to primarily pursue **Physical** safety and comfort, you will forfeit the **Spiritual** security and eternal blessing that is found in Christ.

“But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” Mark 8:35-36

**This whole life is a TEST**. Will we choose to live for this world or the next? Will we choose to live for Jesus and His kingdom or ourselves and our own kingdoms? In the end, when you stand before God in judgment, it will be ***a Pass/Fail final exam***. Did you choose this world or the next one? That choice is represented by the sign of JESUS. Will you choose Jesus or this world? Jesus or YOURSELF? Whom do you PRIMARILY serve?

A lot of people who say they believe in Jesus have really chosen this world, not His world. And in the end, that **fake faith won’t save them**. Those are the people to whom Jesus will say, “Depart from me, I never knew you. You weren’t about my kingdom on earth, so you don’t get my kingdom in heaven.”

I’m not preaching salvation by works. This is just the simple message of the Lord Jesus - “if you’re not for me, you’re against me.” Don’t kid yourself. If you don’t actually live for Jesus in what sense do you believe in him?

In the early church, **persecution provided a dividing line** between those who were truly committed to Jesus and those who were not. You couldn’t just say, “I believe in Jesus” and go about your life - it was a risk to follow Jesus; it cost you something to associate yourself with Him.

Still today, in other parts of the world, persecution purges and purifies the church. The day may not be too far off that persecution comes to the United States. ***Would you hesitate to stand up for Jesus if it cost you your job, your family or your life?*** That decision may not be a sci-fi / fantasy story to imagine and it might be coming sooner than any of us would guess.

***How can anyone stand firm to the end?*** By holding fast to the truth in passages like Romans 8:31-39. This gospel truth can make us fearless. It should make us fearless. Paul answers his own questions in verse 37. ***Who can accuse us?*** Who can condemn us? Who can separate us from the love of Christ?

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” Romans 8:37

Even if we are brutally slaughtered, we win. It’s like **Obiwan facing Darth Vader** - “If you strike me down, Darth, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine.” Vader sweeps his light saber through the old Jedi’s brown cloak - but Obiwan’s body vanishes and the cloak flutters softly to the ground. Vader was confused and frustrated - just as the devil is when persecuted Christians die for their Lord.

Here is the truth, brothers and sisters: ***our enemies CANNOT KILL US. They can only send us home.*** Death holds no fear for the Christian. It is simply the doorway to the life we were truly made for. It is our entrance to the joy and glory of eternity with our Lord and Savior. Here is the last verse of Romans 8:

“Nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God **in Christ Jesus our Lord**.” Romans 8:39

**How can we be FEARLESS** in the face of persecution, suffering and even death? The answer is right here. ***We rest secure IN CHRIST***. So let’s study the love of God for us in Christ. But before we look at God’s protection and provision for us in the Lord Jesus, we need to pause to seriously consider - **do these promises apply to YOU**? Are you IN CHRIST?

I often compare Jesus to **a LIFEBOAT**. If you’re on a ship that is sinking in the ocean, how would you be safe? Would it be enough to 1) know the lifeboat is there? Or even 2) to believe the lifeboat could save you? No. You would very clearly know that the only way to be safe would be to GET ON BOARD.

How did people exercise FAITH in the **days of NOAH**? Who was saved when the great flood came? The ARK was available to save anyone - but it only actually saved those who GOT ON BOARD.

***Have you gotten on board with Jesus?*** Can you truly say that you are IN CHRIST? Have you committed your life to Him? Is Jesus actually your Lord and Master? Do you obey Him and set your heart and life to serve Him? Do you PRIMARILY PURSUE Jesus and His kingdom or do you primarily pursue your own comfort and security?

The promises in Romans 8 are for **those who are IN CHRIST** - who have pledged themselves body, heart and soul, to the Lord Jesus. If you belong to Jesus by faith then NOTHING can separate you from His love. And that should make you FEARLESS. “What can mortal man do to me?”

There are **two sides to the love of Christ** - His protection and provision. I learned that definition of love from the great apologist Josh McDowell. Ephesians 5 describes the love of a husband for his wife that ***“nourishes and cherishes”*** her. McDowell helpfully translated those two words as protect and provide. He told his daughters to question any boy who would take them out and dare to say, “I love you” - does he mean “protect and provide”? Or does he mean, “I love what you can do for me”? Protecting and providing; nourishing and cherishing - that is love. The other thing is self-love not true love. The love of Christ first PROTECTS us:

The **Protection** we have **in Christ**:

* **Reconciliation** - Jesus’ death fully satisfies the just wrath of God

“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…” Rom. 8:31-32

Paul asks himself **four questions** - this is the first one. Who can be against us? Three more questions express the ways someone could oppose us - by accusing us, condemning us, and ultimately separating us from God’s love.

This is a critical question for everyone: ***is God FOR YOU or AGAINST YOU?***

On the one hand, **God loves everyone**. John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world.” But on the other hand, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” So in His love, God calls everyone to repent and come to Jesus for salvation. But in His justice, ***God has to punish sinners*** who refuse to repent. So the default setting for everyone, since we are all sinners by nature and by choice, is that ***we are ENEMIES of God***.

* **Reconciliation** - Jesus’ death fully satisfies the just wrath of God, so the believer is no longer God’s enemy but has become God’s child

“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” Rom. 5:10

***The bad news*** is that everyone starts out as God’s enemy. But the good news is that IN CHRIST we become God’s children! We have been RECONCILED to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus. To reconcile with someone there must first be a conflict, then you can go through a process and be reconciled.

Say ***a couple gets divorced***. But a few years later they start talking again, they remember all the reasons they fell in love in the first place and they RECONCILE. They forgive each other the wounds of the past and come back together. They were enemies who hated each other. But now they are united in marriage again, committed to loving each other.

***All of us were God’s enemies.*** He had to be against us because we were controlled by our sins which placed us at war with God’s Law. But at the moment that you called on Jesus in faith, ***your sin was transferred*** from you to Jesus on the cross - so the punishment that should have fallen on you fell on Jesus instead. Not only did God ***FORGIVE your sin*** - fully paying your debt and releasing you from it - God also pronounced you JUST or RIGHTEOUS in Christ.

* **Justification** - Faith in Jesus connects the believer with the infinite grace of God to not only forgive all of your sins but to give you credit for the perfect righteousness of Christ

“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.” Rom. 8:33

The devil is the Accuser. He loves to assault us every day, reminding us of our failures and sins - showing us our guilt and shame. But for the Christian, no more accusations can be made, no more allegations can be brought - because all of your sin and mine has already been paid for at the cross. The one who is IN CHRIST has not only been forgiven but has been pronounced PERFECTLY RIGHTEOUS! That’s what it means to be JUSTIFIED!



This is ***the great exchange*** of the gospel! Jesus takes your sin upon himself on the cross, and gives you credit for His righteousness! 2 Cor. 5:21 - “God made him who had no sin to BE SIN for us, so that IN HIM we might become the righteousness of God!”

In one heartbeat, at the moment you put your faith in Jesus, ***both of these transactions took place***. Your sin debt was erased, and your righteousness ledge jumped to INFINITE.

It’s what would happen on your **wedding day if you married a super rich person**. Let’s say you had half a million dollars in debt from college and credit cards. You meet a billionaire and fall in love. Before the wedding, all that debt is yours - you are suffocating under the weight of all the interest - and will be paying it off for the rest of your life.

But as soon as you are married two things happen at once: first, your new husband pays off your debt. He writes a check, he orders a transfer. ***Instantly his account drops by half a million and your debt is gone.*** Poof. That is **FORGIVENESS**. But that’s only half the story. At the same instant, once you are married, everything that belongs to your rich husband now belongs to YOU! You now have access to all of his bank accounts, investment portfolios, all of his cars and drivers, his houses and vacation homes, his airplanes and yachts. Everything that is his is now yours because you are MARRIED.

If you picture it financially as in this image, that is **JUSTIFICATION**. You were half a million in debt. Now you are a billionaire. Just like that. Replace dollar signs with RIGHTEOUSNESS and you have the gospel. You were in a deep hole of sin. You were way in the red. But Jesus paid it all off for you and at the moment that you were united with Him by faith, all that was His became YOURS. That’s what it means to be IN CHRIST. You are ONE with Him. Married to Him. His life is yours. His power is yours. His righteousness is yours. His eternal home is yours. Everything that is His is now YOURS.

And that’s the other side of our protection in Christ:

* **Representation** - Jesus serves as personal high priest and advocate for every believer.

“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died… who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Rom. 8:34

If you belong to Jesus, He is now your high priest - ***your defense attorney.*** He represents you before God the Father. Who could possibly accuse you much less condemn you? They would be trying to accuse not you - but Jesus Himself! And Jesus is the Prime Minister of the universe! He sits at the right hand of the Father, because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him.

***That is the ultimate PROTECTION.*** That is the ultimate place of security: IN CHRIST. Once you are bound to Jesus by faith, you are IN HIM - you are WITH HIM, you are ONE WITH HIM. He represents you. He stands between you and judgment. Who can be against us? Who can accuse us? Who can condemn us? No one. No one. No one. Jesus paid the price to reconcile us - so we are no longer God’s enemies but are now His children! He not only washed away our sins, He dress us in His own righteousness. And now and forever, He intercedes for us - pleading our case before the Father. Which leads in to the second half of our blessings in Christ. He not only protects us, He provides for us!

The **Provision** we have in Christ:

* **Affection** - As an adopted child of God, the believer enjoys the same status as Jesus

“Nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 8:39

Paul summarizes all of the blessings Jesus offers us in one word: **LOVE**. Where there is love there is safety and there is support. If you have the love of God in Christ, you have everything. If you don’t have the love of God, you have nothing.

So verse 35 poses the most important question anyone could be asked: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

There is only **one thing** that can separate you from the love of Jesus - only one. ***YOU.*** The devil can’t do it. No other person can do it. No disease or accident can do it. Only YOU can keep yourself from experiencing His love - if you refuse to come to Jesus and surrender your life to Him.

Once you get out of your own way and humbly call on Jesus to save you, NOTHING can ever separate you from His love. Nothing. No one. Listen to the truth of Romans 8!

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” Rom. 8:35

What is ***the worst thing*** that could happen to any of us? Safe to say it’s on that list. Persecution for Paul meant ***severe beatings*** that often killed people. It meant months and years in prison. It meant severe deprivation, as ancient prisons were not designed for comfort - and if your friends didn’t bring you food and blankets you starved to death or froze or both. Tribulation meant shipwrecks, attacks from bandits, theft, fear. These words were not abstract concepts for Paul - he experienced every one of them, just as Jesus did.

We are sheep to be slaughtered, verse 36. That shouldn’t surprise us since Jesus sent us out ***“as sheep among wolves.”*** How do sheep usually do with wolves? It’s not an even match. Sheep have no defenses. They aren’t fast. They can’t organize up against a pack of wolves. Yet Paul can say, “In all these things we are more than conquerors through HIM who loved us.”

“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 8:38-39

This is our confidence as those who belong to Jesus! Neither a painful death nor a difficult life, no spiritual forces, however dark and terrible; nothing in the present or future - can break our bond with Jesus. To be united with Christ is to be one with Him forever!

And to be one with Jesus is to be covered with His love - the object of God’s infinite AFFECTION.

* **Affection** - As an adopted child of God, the believer enjoys the same status as Jesus

“Nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Rom. 8:39

***Think what it means to be a CHILD OF GOD!*** He is your Father, you are His precious child. That means access, it means attention, it means total protection and abundant provision.

When God looks at you, He sees JESUS, to whom He said, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” Hear those words from the Lord today! If you are one with Jesus then God Himself says this to you: “YOU are my beloved son, my precious daughter. I am well pleased with you!” And everything God the Father does for God the Son is now available to you!

* **Abundance** - Union with Jesus gives the believer “every spiritual blessing” in Him: life, power, the Holy Spirit and the love, joy, peace, etc. He brings with Him.

“How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Rom. 8:32

In Christ we have **EVERY Spiritual blessing**. Once you have the Son of God, you have everything. If you don’t have the Son of God, you have nothing. Being united with Jesus means you become a temple of the Holy Spirit, and where the Spirit of God lives there is life, love, joy, peace, and every other good thing.

***If God did not spare His only Son***, but gave him up for us all, how will He not, along with Christ, give us everything we need now and forever?

The enemy comes to steal and kill and destroy. But Jesus came to give us life and ABUNDANT life at that.

Do you belong to Jesus? Are you ONE with Him? In Christ we have total protection and abundant, infinite provision! So here is our application and the exhortation of this passage:

So fear **Nothing** and use **Everything** you have for Jesus.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.” Rom. 12:1

The only response to God’s infinite grace to us in Christ is to give everything back to Him. He gave everything for us, we should give all that we are and all we have in service to Him.

And nothing can stand in our way! We have nothing to fear!

**John Paton** was born in Scotland in 1824. He was raised by devout Presbyterian parents and throughout his life was inspired by his father’s hard work and life of prayer. His father withdrew to his prayer closet three times every day and led the family in prayer time twice each day. When Paton parted from his father the image of the dear man weeping, with head uncovered, praying for his son, stayed with the young missionary throughout the next 50 years of missionary work - calling him to live up to his father’s piety, holiness and loving investment in him.

After theological and medical studies and ministry in Glasgow, Paton was married and set sail for the New Hebrides islands in the south pacific (off of Australia) at the age of 34. These islands were inhabited by cannibals, so the danger of working among them was very real. Paton’s wife gave birth soon after arriving there, but she died giving birth and their son died 36 days later.

**Paton persevered with ministry** to the natives despite fierce opposition and numerous attempts on his life. One time he narrowly escaped on a ship that arrived just in time to save him and two other missionaries.

All told, Paton served for ***30 years in the New Hebrides***. He translated the New Testament, led many to saving faith, treated the sick and trained workers to bring the gospel to all 30 of the islands. By 1899 one entire island professed Christianity and missionary stations were established on all of the others.

Credit goes to Paton and the two brave women who married him and went with him to that far off land. Mary died early on. Maggie lived and served with John for 40 years. Mary died giving birth to one son, who died as an infant. Maggie gave birth to 10 children, four of whom died in early childhood. Who had the more difficult assignment?

***Do you feel the truth of Romans 8?*** Nothing could separate John or Mary or Maggie from the love of God that was their in Christ Jesus! Death could not do it. Nor the death of children. Savange cannibals could not do it, nor the dangers of sea travel in the 1800s.

They feared nothing and gave everything in service to King Jesus. They fulfilled the words of John Wesley.

# “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth.” John Wesley

Brother, sister - may we embrace the fearless faith of Paul and John Paton and John Wesley and the countless others who have gone before us! And may we give all we are and all we have in service to our King, the Lord Jesus Christ!

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