

IF GOD IS FOR US

Romans 8:28-39

Paul does not open this section of Romans to hand us a puzzle. He is not inviting us to search the records of heaven to see whether our names appear on some hidden list. He has just spent this whole chapter writing about suffering, about groaning, about a creation in bondage waiting to be set free, and now he takes us from the depths of our present hardship all the way back into God's eternal purpose, and forward again into everlasting glory. He writes, "we know," not "we wonder." Whatever comfort this text offers, it is not the comfort of a guess.

CHOSEN BEFORE THEY COULD CHOOSE ANYTHING

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 8:28-30

We want proof, don't we. We want some evidence, however small, that we were the sort of people worth choosing.

At age eighteen, Katie Davis went to Uganda planning to teach for a year. She decided to stay longer. Over the years that followed, she took in thirteen daughters. She did not choose the easiest children in the room. Several came to her carrying illnesses that had already caused other families to walk away. One arrived so sick that doctors did not expect her to see adulthood. Not one of those girls brought Katie anything she could not have found more easily elsewhere. She simply chose them, before they had done a single thing to earn it.

We assume it must have worked that way with God too. Somewhere in eternity, we imagine, he looked down the corridor of time, saw something promising in us, our faith, our sincerity, our decision for him, and chose accordingly. Paul will not let us think that. He foreknew. He predestined. He called. He justified. He glorified. Every verb in that chain belongs to God. Not one of them belongs to us.

But we search within ourselves anyway. We comb back through our decisions, our sincerity, the feeling we had on the day we were baptized or confirmed or first believed, looking for the reason we were chosen. The longer we search, the less we find. That is not because the evidence is hidden from us. It is because it was never there to find.

WHAT THE FILE SAYS

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

Romans 8:33

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Romans 8:35-36

Every child Katie brought home came with a file. Diagnoses. Abandonment. Sometimes a note from a doctor who did not expect the child in front of him to reach adulthood.

We have a file too, and we are the ones who wrote most of it. Paul names the danger for us plainly: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. We are, in the prophet's words that Paul borrows, sheep marked for slaughter, not sheep admired from a comfortable distance. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect" is not a rhetorical flourish for people with nothing to hide. It is a courtroom question, and we are the ones standing in the dock.

Our own conscience reads the file back to us, usually at the hour we least want to hear it. The days we called "duty" and gave grudgingly. The years we spent more certain of our own righteousness than of God's mercy. The love we owed people who are no longer here to receive it. We did not need Satan to write this file. We wrote it ourselves, one entry at a time, and there is nothing in it we can strike out on our own authority.

SHE WOULD NOT LET THEM GO

What then shall we say to these things? 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, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ... It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Romans 8:31-34

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

Katie Davis's choosing of her daughters was not provisional. It held through diseases that nearly took several of their lives. It held through financial strain that would have sent most people home within the year. It held through political unrest in Uganda that put her own safety in question more than once. She did not adopt those girls and then wait to see whether they would prove worth keeping.

But her faithfulness only points to something greater. It cannot secure anything on its own. Yours is secured by more than a mother's resolve, however costly. Look at what God has actually done for you. He did not spare his own Son. Christ Jesus died for you, nailed to a cross that your file, not his own, put him on. He was raised from death for you, walking out of a tomb that had every right to hold him. He is at the right hand of God for you, reigning even now over every power that frightens you. And at this very moment, while you sit in this pew carrying whatever file you brought in with you, he is interceding for you. It is not a past event you have to take on faith alone. It is a present reality. Right now, Christ is speaking on your behalf before the Father.

That last link in Paul's chain, glorified, is not something you can see completed yet. But it is every bit as certain as everything that came before it, because the same Christ who died, who rose, who now reigns at the Father's right hand, will come again. And on that day, what began in his choosing of you before you had done anything will be finished in your own rising to meet him.

You are not a conqueror because you will escape suffering. You are more than a conqueror in the middle of it, because nothing you face there can touch what Christ has already secured for you.

CARRIED HOME

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.

Romans 8:38-39

This year has already tested that promise for this congregation. It began with the loss of John. Just last week, Frank was called to Jesus. We have a habit of saying we “lost” them, as though they had simply wandered off somewhere and we cannot find them. Paul will not let us talk that way. John is not lost. Frank is not lost. They are exactly where this text says they are: held, not misplaced, carried to God’s peace and rest by a love that death itself could not interrupt.

We know it will not stop with them. More names will be added to the list before this promise reaches its full completion in glory. More bells will ring on All Saints. Paul does not soften that for us, so we will not soften it either. But he also does not leave us to face it without an answer. Neither death nor life. Neither what troubles us now nor what we fear may come. Nothing in all creation can reach in and take you out of the hand that has already claimed you.

Do not go looking for your name in some hidden ledger in heaven. Christ has already spoken it: in his dying, in his rising, and in his rising again on the last day for you. Nothing in all creation, not the sins on your file, not the grave that took those we love, not whatever grave waits for you, can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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