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FREE IN THE SPIRIT

What can we do when we don't live up to our own principles? What if we find ourselves not doing what we want to do, while doing the very things we've determined not to do? These are not questions asked by someone trapped by an addiction. They're raised by a first-century writer who understood the realism and difficulty of spiritual struggle: the apostle Paul.

Many think of Paul as someone who lived above the common passions of life. His own words say otherwise. Nowhere do we find more realism than in the personal questions he raised in Romans, chapter 7. Nowhere can we find better solutions than in the answers he gave in chapter 8.

I hope you will better understand the way to greater spiritual freedom as you examine this brief study by Bill Crowder and the RBC writers.

Martin R. De Haan II

JEOPARDY: A KEY TO BIBLE STUDY

In 1964 Merv Griffin sat in the dining room of his apartment and created a game called *Jeopardy*. Today his idea has grown into one of the most popular quiz shows in American television history. Over the years since then, show host Alex Trebek has challenged some 5,000 contestants with over 135,000 questions in as many as 2,700 categories of knowledge. One of the contestants, Frank Spangenberg, a New York City police officer, won \$144,397.

Griffin gave *Jeopardy* an interesting twist by giving the answers and requiring contestants to come up with the right

questions. In the *Jeopardy* tradition, a “question” might be: “This American author and humorist said, ‘Denial ain’t just a river in Egypt.’” The answer in *Jeopardy* is, “Who is Mark Twain?”

***In Bible study,
as in Jeopardy,
there is benefit in
looking not only
for answers but
also for the
right questions.***

In Bible study, as in *Jeopardy*, there is benefit in looking not only for answers but also for the right questions. The Word of God can seem irrelevant and lifeless until it is read with an awareness of the questions that bring

the story line to life. Information about the pharaohs in Egypt may seem like back-room museum clutter until we begin asking questions that expose parallels in our own lives to the circumstances of people in ancient times.

In the following pages we will see how the

The reassuring words of Romans 8 are a response to the questions raised by Paul's graphic and disturbing picture of his own spiritual struggle in chapter 7.

answers given in Romans 8, one of the most loved chapters in the Bible, match up with the

questions that have plagued many of God's children throughout the centuries. The chapter begins with an uplifting statement:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).

It also ends on a positive note:

I am convinced that neither death nor life . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:39).

What is often forgotten, however, is the fact that the reassuring words of Romans 8 are a response to the questions raised by Paul's graphic and disturbing picture of his own spiritual struggle in chapter 7. Note his sadness and frustration:

I do not understand

what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

. . . I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing (7:15,18-19).

At first these words do not seem to fit the

Paul was describing his inner struggle between his born-again self and a remaining inclination to evil.

apostle Paul, that courageous Christian who evangelized the

first-century Roman world, wrote most of the New Testament epistles, and finally died as a martyr. But he is the man who penned these words, and he wrote it using the present tense. He was describing his inner struggle between his born-again self and a remaining inclination to evil that he called “the law of sin” (7:23). After describing this spiritual battle, he asked, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” He responded with a jubilant exclamation: “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” But he knew this complete rescue would not take place until he was united with Christ: “So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin” (7:25).

At this point we are likely to feel uneasy. We see too much of

Paul knew that his complete rescue would not take place until he was united with Christ.

ourselves in this picture. We don't see ourselves as spiritual giants like Paul. He was assured of final victory, but what about us? We could understandably be asking questions like these:

1. If we keep failing, will God keep forgiving us?
2. Can we stop doing what we don't want to do?
3. Can we be sure God

- won't give up on us?
4. Is there a way out of this awful struggle?
 5. Will God help us overcome the failures we experience every day?
 6. Can anything separate us from the love of God?

Let's look now at each of these questions, which arise out of Paul's struggles in Romans 7. And then we'll see the answers he gives in Romans 8.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM ROMANS 7-8

In Romans 8, Paul gave us encouraging answers to questions raised in the previous chapter. However, he did not promise freedom from the struggle nor uninterrupted victory. He

The Bible doesn't promise freedom from struggle nor uninterrupted victory.

assured all of his readers, all those who are in Christ, that they would not lose their salvation nor lose all the battles along the way. We can be winners far more often than we will be losers.

QUESTION ONE:
If we keep failing, will God keep forgiving us?

ANSWER:
Yes, because He doesn't see us as we see ourselves. Paul began chapter 8 by assuring those who believe in Christ that they stand before God forgiven and accepted:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He

condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (8:1-4).

The “therefore” points back to the exclamation of Romans 7:25, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Because of what Jesus Christ did in paying the full price for all our sins on the cross, we who

We who have placed our trust in Jesus are free from the possibility of condemnation.

have placed our trust in Him are free from the possibility of condemnation. So

much for the fear of losing our salvation because of our failures! The term “in Christ,” the statement about freedom from “the law of sin and death,” and the declaration that “God sent His Son” contain the keys to understanding this wonderful Bible passage.

He sees us as “in Christ.” Those who believe in Christ no longer stand before God as guilty sinners. Instead, we stand before Him as “in Christ.” This is an awesome truth! Jesus offered His sinless self to die on the cross, and in the process He took the death we deserve. We who believe are now so united with Him that we are described as being “in Christ.” He is now in the heavenly realms exalted at God’s right hand “far

above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given” (Eph. 1:20-21). God has taken us who were spiritually dead, made us alive, and “raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). We are now inseparably united with Him.

The fact that God sees us as being in Christ is one of the most inspiring truths of the Bible. To be “in Him” is to be accepted by God on the merits of Christ alone. In bookkeeping terms, this means that all our sin has been put into Christ’s account, and all His goodness has been placed into our account. God’s only requirement is that we trust in Christ. Our salvation is not found in good works,

church attendance, an excellent reputation, or sacrificial religious acts

All our sin has been put into Christ’s account, and all His goodness has been placed into our account.

of devotion—not even in making the Ten Commandments our standard of conduct! We are right with God only because we have received Jesus as Savior. When we did, God placed us in Christ.

He sees us as “free from the law.” Now let’s look at the statement, “the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death” (8:2). What

is this law of sin and death from which we have been set free? It is the good law of God, His rules for conduct, even the Ten Commandments. This answer shocks many religious people. They are trying to please God by keeping His laws, and here Paul said that we are free from these rules! Does this mean that we can now violate God's standards with impunity? Not at all!

What Paul was saying is that because of what Christ did for us, we have been freed from trying to keep the law to earn favor with God. The problem with trying to earn favor with God by following His rules is that we keep breaking them no matter how hard we try not to. The law, you see, tells us what to do but does not

give us the power to do what it says. Even Paul had this problem. He said that the "law of sin" within him kept making

The problem with trying to earn favor with God by following His rules is that we keep breaking them no matter how hard we try not to.

him a lawbreaker (7:23). The law of God is good, but it can't help us because of our inclination toward sin. Trying to gain favor with God by keeping the law is an exercise in futility. It just keeps piling up our sins and increasing our guilt. Therefore, the law can do nothing except condemn us.

He sees us as people who have been rescued. God did not give up on us. He provided a way to make us right with Him. Paul explained:

What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering (8:3).

God provided a way to make us right with Him.

What could not be accomplished by the law, God did by coming to live among us. He came to earth in the person of Jesus. He came in the *likeness* of sinful man, not *as* a sinful man. He was like us in that He came in a body like ours,

one that could get tired and suffer pain—not as a superman. Yet He was without sin. He was completely human, only sinless. Paul continued:

So He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (8:3-4).

Jesus Christ, in our humanity, met the devil and sin on their own ground and defeated them. He died, never having sinned, to atone for our sins. He conquered death by His resurrection. Sin is now a dethroned tyrant whom we can overcome “through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life” (8:2), who has set us free from the please-God-by-works routine.

**QUESTION TWO:
Can we stop doing
what we don't want
to do?**

ANSWER:

Yes, if we learn to rely on the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:4, Paul introduced his readers to the concept of living “according to the Spirit” in contrast to living “according to the sinful nature.” This is an important concept to understand. Let’s look now at what Paul meant by living “according to the Spirit.” And then we’ll look at how we can do this.

We need to focus on what the Spirit desires. This is what it means to live “according to the Spirit.” It is to be “in step” with the Spirit—to follow His lead and

remain under His control. If you are a believer, He is already in you for the purpose of leading and lovingly controlling you. Paul wrote:

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he

does not belong to Christ (8:5-9).

According to Paul, then, every person is either under the control of the Spirit or under the control of the old nature—either on the road that leads to life and peace or on the road that leads to death. Walking in step with the Spirit, therefore, is living with Him as the controller of our lives.

Now, this raises a problem. Many who belong to Christ have a lifestyle that does not appear to be very much under the control of the Holy Spirit. At times this is true of all of us. But if we truly received Jesus as our Savior, we did acknowledge Him as our Master, and our bodies became temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). And we are glad that we have been delivered from

the tyranny of sin and death. However, we are having problems with ourselves. Some of our

Many who belong to Christ have a lifestyle that does not appear to be very much under the control of the Holy Spirit.

old ways still keep us from being what we know we ought to be. So how do we live under the Spirit's control? How do we stop doing what we don't want to do?

We need to consciously yield to the Spirit. Paul addressed this issue many times in his letters. Again and again he

stressed the matter of fully yielding ourselves to God. He did so in the 6th chapter of this letter to the believers in Rome. He said we are to consciously look upon ourselves as dead to our old way of life and offer every part of our lives to God (6:11-14). He said we must remember that we are under new management—that we were once “slaves to sin” but have been set free and are now “slaves to God” (6:15-23).

When Paul told the Ephesians not to get drunk with wine, but to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), he was repeating this same theme: Yield to the Holy Spirit; consciously and continually give Him control of every area of life. As we do this, the fruit of the Spirit will become evident. Our

lives will be marked by “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22).

We will never in this life reach the place where we will

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ourselves.***

be perfectly satisfied with ourselves. In fact, the more we grow in likeness to Jesus, the more conscious we will become of our many continuing imperfections. But our imperfect way will end in victory. Our bodies, these weak tents

that are so often the vehicles of failure, will one day be replaced by glorified bodies completely under the Spirit's control. Paul wrote this:

If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you (8:10-11).

Living in step with the Spirit is walking on the path to life and peace—temporarily on earth, forever in heaven.

**QUESTION
THREE:
Can we be sure
God won't give
up on us?**

ANSWER:
Yes, because God loves us as His children. Sensitive people, who are deeply conscious of their many failures because they too often allow their sinful nature to get the upper hand, may ask, "How

God is patient with us because we have been made members of His family.

can God keep accepting me?" Paul answered this by assuring us that God is patient because we have been made

members of His family. In Christ we have become God's children—His daughters and sons. Because of this father/child relationship, Paul assured the Roman believers that they didn't have to live in the kind of fear they had when they were trying to earn favor with God by works. They now had a new relationship with God. In Romans 8:12-17, Paul spoke of a new intimacy with God, a new source of assurance, and a new attitude toward suffering.

God encourages us to call Him "Daddy."

After repeating his strong warning that people who live under the domination of their sinful nature will die in their sins, Paul added:

But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body,

you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father" (vv.13-15).

Yes, we have a high calling: to put to death the misdeeds of the body. But this is not a command to belittle ourselves or hate our bodies and their normal desires. It means rejecting those behaviors that are improper for a child of God. And because we are God's children, we must see all anxious fear as out of place. We parents would be hurt if our children lived in fear of us. So is God. He wants us to look upon Him as *Abba*, the term Jewish children

use for “Daddy.” He proved His love for us in giving His Son to become our Savior

Because we are God’s children, we must see all anxious fear as out of place.

through the humiliation and pain of the incarnation. He knows we are weak and frail and understands when we fail (Ps. 103:13-14). He stands always ready to forgive like a loving father and willing to help if we turn back to Him. For that reason, we can dismiss all anxious fear.

God assures us that we are His children. As members of God’s family indwelt

by the Holy Spirit, we also have a new source of assurance—the constant witness of that same Spirit. We read, “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (8:16).

Some believers declare that they have absolute certainty about their salvation and their standing because God spoke to them in an audible voice. But they are a definite minority, and they are wrong if they think that an audible word from God is what Paul had in mind. The testimony of the Holy Spirit is an inner affirmation by the Spirit of God to our own spirit. John Wesley described it this way:

An inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses

to my spirit that I am a child of God; that Jesus has loved me and given Himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God (*Sermons I*, pp.124-125).

As we reflect on the wonder of all that God

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has done for us and yield ourselves to obey Him, our inner spirit responds to God in awe, worship, and adoration.

All of this is in beautiful harmony with a promise Jesus made on

the eve of His crucifixion: *Whoever has My commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to him (Jn. 14:21).*

How wonderful that this inner certainty is available to all believers, whether highly educated or barely able to read! A Christian scholar who had been educated in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the United States and Europe wrote a book on the witness of the Holy Spirit in which he pointed out that spiritual certainty must come from God. He knew all the philosophical arguments for the existence of God, the evidence for the authenticity of the Bible,

and the reasons for belief in Jesus Christ. But he said that an uneducated believer could have an inner assurance just as strong as his. The witness of the Spirit of God with the human spirit has nothing to do with advanced scholarship. To use an old maxim in a new manner: It's not *how much* you know, but *Who* you know.

*It's not
how much
you know, but
Who you know.*

God calls us to look beyond our suffering. Having the assurance of being sons and daughters of God changes our attitude toward all of life's circumstances. We begin to see everything

from the perspective of eternity. Paul wrote:

Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory (8:17).

Christians who live in circumstances of affluence and liberty cannot fully appreciate this verse. But it had great significance for the Christians in Rome and for multitudes of persecuted and harassed believers through the ages. Participation with Christ in suffering during this life brings participation with Him in joy during the life to come!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran pastor who dared oppose Hitler and was executed by the Gestapo just days

before the Allied victory, believed this wholeheartedly. While in prison he wrote these words:

For while it is true that only the suffering of Christ Himself can atone for sin, and that His suffering and triumph took place “for us,” yet to some, who are not ashamed of their fellowship in His body, He vouchsafes the immeasurable grace and privilege of suffering “for Him,” as He did for them (From *Beacon Bible Commentary*, pp.178-179).

To the degree that we participate in Christ's suffering, to that same degree we will revel in His glory. When we know this, we can suffer triumphantly.

**QUESTION
FOUR:**
**Is there a way out
of this awful
struggle?**

ANSWER:
**Yes, if we find
ultimate hope in the
life to come.** When we face troubles and trials, it is sometimes hard to keep from being discouraged. We trust God, but we wonder about the why of all the pain we and others around us must endure. At such times we may not enjoy deep inner peace, even though we have not abandoned our faith. During those times we need to take in the truths proclaimed in Romans 8:18-25, where Paul portrayed the created world first as in eager anticipation and then in the throes of childbirth.

**We need to
look forward to a
re-created world.**

Paul was able to be a complete optimist in the midst of pain and persecution because he focused on the glorious eternity that awaits God's children. He wrote:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (8:18-21).

After declaring that our present pain is almost nothing when

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compared to our eternal glory, Paul personified the created world as waiting "on tiptoe" (J. B. Phillips) for the day when we humans will finally and fully become the children of God. Using the literary device of ascribing thought and feeling to nature, Paul said that

the creation didn't choose to be the way it is, so marked by disaster, cruelty, and suffering. It is the way it is because of God's sentence of judgment that made nature a rod of discipline for sinful people. But God is planning a day when all such ugliness will be eradicated, and this great endtime event will occur in close connection with our glorification as the creatures God created to be His vice-regents over the earth.

Francis Schaeffer, in his book on the Christian view of ecology, *Pollution And The Death Of Man*, encourages us to take up a long-neglected responsibility as a result of this promised restoration:

Biblical Christianity has a real answer to the ecological crisis.

It offers a balanced and healthy attitude to nature, arising from the truth of its creation by God; it offers the hope here and now of

“A Christian-based science and technology should consciously try to see nature substantially healed, while waiting for the future complete healing at Christ’s return.”

—Francis Schaeffer

substantial healing in nature of some of the results of the Fall, arising from the truth of redemption in Christ

A Christian-based science and technology should consciously try to see nature substantially healed, while waiting for the future complete healing at Christ's return (p.81).

Interestingly, Paul depicted the natural world as knowing what scientists are just now beginning to realize. Today, many former agnostics are saying that the earth and the life in it are looking less and less like the products of blind chance. The astounding complexities discovered in the disciplines of physics and biology point to an original design that, by all appearances, had human life in view from the very beginning. This understanding, which they call "the anthropic principle," is new to

them. But it is not new to us. We know it from the Bible, and we eagerly anticipate the time when God will restore the original glory of the creation (Acts 3:19-21).

Paul depicted the natural world as knowing what scientists are just now beginning to realize.

We need to anticipate our new bodies. Still thinking in terms of universal suffering in the present, Paul portrayed a universe and a redeemed people in the throes of childbirth:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth Not only so, but

we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved (8:22-24).

The created world is groaning as in childbirth because she will give birth to the new heavens and earth promised to us by God. We groan too as we wait for our new bodies, and we have good reason to wait with great expectation. We already have been given the “firstfruits of the Spirit.” The particular word Paul used here is a strong metaphor, going beyond the idea of a down payment. Like the firstfruits offering in Israel, it is a specimen of what will follow in the full harvest. It is a foretaste of what awaits

us. That is why we can sing these lines from an old hymn written by Charles Butler:

Once heaven seemed
a far-off place,
Till Jesus showed
His smiling face;
Now it's begun
within my soul,
'Twill last while
endless ages roll.

All of these wonderful truths, when understood and believed, will change our attitude toward suffering. We who have learned to say “Abba, Father” are assured that He has designed us for glory, and that suffering is a way of preparing us for this end. Having tasted His goodness, we look forward with a hope characterized in Scripture as “eager expectation.”

**QUESTION FIVE:
Will God help us
overcome
the failures
we experience
every day?**

ANSWER:
**Yes, He has
promised to help
and to intervene
in our daily
lives.** Conscious
of our weaknesses,
inconsistencies, and
repeated failures, we
realize that we are often
our own worst enemies.
We want God's will, but
we are also full of selfish
desires. We wonder how
God will protect us from
ourselves. Paul answered
this question by assuring
us that God will step in
and take care of us. In
the person of the Holy
Spirit, He will help us
in our prayers. And as
our heavenly Father,

He will intervene in
the circumstances of
our lives.

***He will help us in
our prayers.*** One of
the areas where our
weakness shows is in our
prayer life. Even when
we pray, we are plagued
by conflicting emotions.

*How reassuring
to know that
God understands
and that His Spirit
makes sure
our prayers are
acceptable and
effective.*

Selfish, sometimes even
impure thoughts flash
through our minds while
we are talking to God.
Sometimes we don't
know what we should
ask for. Sometimes we

are so sick or weary that we can't do more than say, "Lord, please help me." How reassuring to know that God understands and that His Spirit makes sure our prayers are acceptable and effective. Paul wrote:

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will (8:26-27).

It is the Holy Spirit who groans within us, and these groans are apparently wordless. Through these groans, as He labors to purify

us in preparation for eternity, the Holy Spirit cleanses and revises the thoughts and desires of our hearts and presents them to God. The Father, who perfectly knows our hearts, receives these revised prayers and answers them. Paul perhaps had the intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit in mind when he penned the doxology:

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory . . . for ever and ever! (Eph. 3:20).

He will work in all our circumstances for our good. It is also comforting to know that even though we may

blunder and fail, God will intervene in our circumstances to make sure His purposes for us are realized. Paul wrote:

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who

***It's
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and fail, God
will intervene.***

love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many

brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified (8:28-30).

In these verses Paul's thoughts take in all eternity—from the eternity before time began to the eternity after time ends. In eternity past God made a number of choices. The cosmos came into existence by His choice. We live as His image-bearers because He chose to make us that way. We are saved from our sins and destined for glory because God loved us from before the foundation of the world and chose us as His special people (Eph. 1:4-5).

God's eternal will is the reason for our existence and the ground of our salvation. He is

not going to let anything prevent His will from being carried out to fulfillment—not the schemes of the devil, not the strategies of God's enemies, not even the blunders and failures of His children. Therefore Romans 8:28 is true! God will intervene when necessary to make sure that His purposes for us

*We are saved
from our sins
and destined for
glory because
God loved us
from before
the foundation
of the world.*

are realized. In all of life's circumstances God purposes to grow us up into Christ (Eph. 4:14-19) to prepare us for the

day when we will be like Jesus, experiencing the reality expressed by the apostle John:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 Jn. 3:2).

QUESTION SIX:
**Can anything
separate us from
the love of God?**

ANSWER:

No, nothing can change God's love for us. We have tendencies to be fickle, and we are surrounded by people with the same failing. Promises made today are often broken tomorrow. Popular songs are bestsellers for only a few weeks. Fashions keep changing. A sports figure may be a hero one day and a loser the next. Only God can be trusted to forever remain what He is now. Paul gloried in that and expressed his unbounded confidence that we never need to be afraid that His love may sometime end. First he pointed to the fact that God loves us so

much that He didn't spare the life of His own Son on our behalf. Then he declared that absolutely nothing in this universe is greater than God's love for us.

Nothing is greater than the sacrifice of God's Son.

Paul was exuberant as he thought of all God has done for us—especially the sacrifice of His one and only Son on our behalf:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? 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, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he

that condemns? 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 (8:31-34).

God is for us!

Moreover, His supreme demonstration of love in the past is proof of what He will do in the future. He who has bestowed on us His “unspeakable gift” will certainly not withhold lesser gifts. If God has acquitted us, how can any lesser being condemn us? If the Son of God, the Second Person of the eternal Trinity, died for us, broke death’s power by resurrection, and is now at God’s right hand making intercession for us, will God pay any attention to the charges brought by any other being—angel or devil? Impossible!

Nothing is greater than God’s love for us. Having shown the impossibility of anything changing God’s plans for us, the apostle Paul pulled out all the stops and made a series of exulting declarations:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 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 (8:35-39).

These words say it all. They need no comment. Troubles from natural and supernatural opposing forces may assail us. But nothing in all the universe can defeat us! This was true in the first century. It is true now.

SUMMARY

Question One:

If we keep failing, will God keep forgiving us?

Answer:

Yes, because He doesn't see us as we see ourselves.

Question Two:

Can we stop doing what we don't want to do?

Answer:

Yes, if we learn to rely on the Spirit.

Question Three:

Can we be sure God won't give up on us?

Answer:

Yes, because He loves us as His children.

Question Four:

Is there a way out of this awful struggle?

Answer:

Yes, if we find ultimate hope in the life to come.

Question Five:

Will God help us overcome the failures we experience every day?

Answer:

Yes, He has promised to help and intervene in our daily lives.

Question Six:

Can anything separate us from the love of God?

Answer:

No, nothing can change God's love for us.

LIVING FREE IN THE SPIRIT

Pastor Bill Crowder relates this account of living in the light of Romans 8.

In 1995, on a trip to Moscow to train pastors, my teaching partner went to the classroom to begin a particular class session. When he got there, he discovered an unscheduled meeting taking place. The translator told him that the students had just learned that there was a bill before the Russian parliament that, if approved and signed, would outlaw the evangelical Baptist church. This was as it had been under Communism. When I arrived, we suspended teaching for a while,

and talked about the threat of this proposal with our students. We expressed our deep concern for their safety.

We had gone to Russia with the thought that we were helping to train the next generation of Russian pastors, only to wonder whether we were training some of those who would become the next generation of Christian martyrs in Russia.

We spent more than 2 hours talking, weeping, and praying together, in which we shared our love and concern both for the church in Russia and the church in the West. At the end of the session, one of the students, Peter Zhirenkov, said this to me: “Thank you for caring for us, and thank you for loving us. But do not worry for us or our

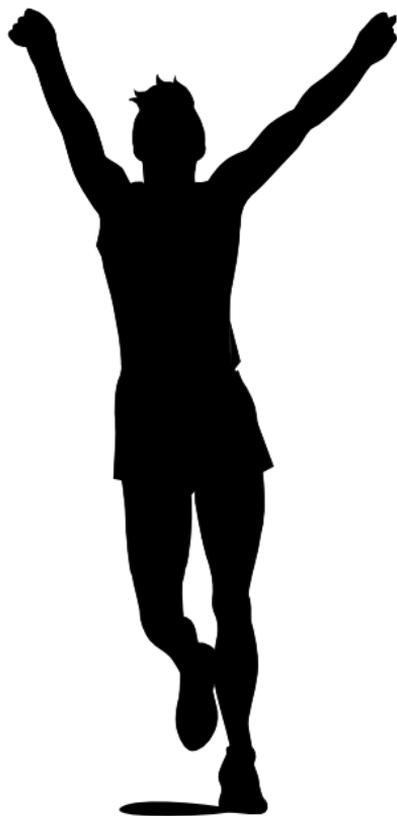
safety. You see, it is not enough for us to believe the gospel, and it is not enough for us to preach the gospel. It is necessary that we suffer for the gospel!”

***“We are
more than
conquerors
through Him
who loved us.”***

—Romans 8:37

What devotion! It is a devotion rooted in the confidence that none of the struggles, battles, or adversities of life can in any way hinder or diminish the love of Christ for us. This confidence makes God’s people “more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

That is living free in the Spirit!



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