



TAMEONTA

Be Encouraged!

By Q. Valdois

“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. 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? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? 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. 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.’ No, 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.” (Romans 8:28–39 ESV)



Contents

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Be Encouraged!..... | 1 |
| The King's Ambassador..... | 6 |
| Ministry Updates..... | 11 |
| Call for Writing..... | 12 |

We all have our favorite passages in Scripture. They may be familiar or obscure passages that the Holy Spirit has used to give us insight, guidance, or encouragement throughout our lives. It amazes us when we experience what the writer talks about in Hebrews 4:12: the Word is living and active. What makes these printed words on a page alive is that they point us to the source of life, Jesus.

As kids in school many of us stood and recited the pledge of allegiance every morning before we started our lessons for the day. The regular repetition of the pledge over time almost made the words meaningless. It's not until we stop and really listen to the words we're saying that they regain some of their power and significance. The same thing can happen to our favorite passages of Scripture. We sort of skim over them and assume,

“The Word of God is alive...and the Holy Spirit has a way of interrupting our arrogance and showing us that we still have much to learn.”

because they are so familiar, that we already know all there is to know and have already wrung out all that God has to say to us from the passage. But the Word of God is alive, and the Holy Spirit has a way of interrupting our arrogance and showing us that we still have much to learn. God does this to me often, and I'm just starting to get to the point where I expect to be startled as I read and study the Word, knowing that there is an ocean of depth just beyond the surface of my reading.

With that said, I want to take a look at a very familiar passage: Romans 8:28-39. In this passage, God through Paul is giving us something that will concretely change our lives. It's something that you can, and should, get out every day and use. It will sustain those of you in prison, as well as those who have gotten out and are struggling with the transition and the issues of everyday life. In this great passage Paul presents a joy that, if you have it, will enable you to face anything in life without shrinking or crumbling. It's the assurance that God doesn't just love you now, but He always will. Nothing can separate you from that no matter what. Paul presents this assurance in two ways that cover our entire lives.

The first thing he tells us is that God loves us no matter what bad things are going on *inside* us. Sometimes we do some awful things. You know what I mean. When we struggle with, or give in to, sin we can get so disillusioned with ourselves that we're tempted to say, "I can't believe that God loves me." What does Paul say in verse 33? "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies." (ESV) When we are tempted to doubt God's love for us we must rely on the assurance Paul gives in this passage and, really, in the whole book of Romans.

Look back to 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (ESV) This is not a passing comment that can be taken out of its context. From the first chapter in Romans Paul is leading us to this point. His argument shows that, with the law of God as our judge, we are hopeless and condemned because we are born law-breakers. There is nothing we can do to remedy that on our own. It doesn't matter if we start today living up to the law's requirements; our yesterday already sentences us to death – and rightfully so. It sounds dire, and it is. But Romans chapter one lets us in on a

little secret: death is not only what we deserve, without Christ it's what we really want and passionately pursue.

God did what we and the law were powerless to do (8:2-4). He sent His Son who fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law perfectly, and then He put Christ's perfection on our account. Christ did it all. That's why Paul says in verse 33 that no one can bring a charge against God's chosen. The confidence we have that God loves us, no matter what bad things are going on inside us, is not based on us or our performance. It's based on God's love for His Son and Christ's perfection that was put on our account. Nothing can change that.

Secondly, we're told that God loves us no matter what bad things are going on **outside** us. Sometimes the circumstances of life are overwhelming. We struggle to find any good in what is happening around us or to us. At these times we are tempted to say, "God doesn't love me or He wouldn't let all this bad stuff happen to me." Look at the list in verse 35 and I'm sure you'll be able to identify personally with something there. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword are all outward circumstances that, when we are facing them, can tempt us to doubt God's love for us.

"The confidence we have that God loves us no matter what bad things are going on inside us is not based on us or our performance, it's based on God's love for His Son and Christ's perfection that was put on our account. Nothing can change that."

Romans 8:28 is the key to helping us trust God when bad things are going on outside us: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (ESV) Looking over the long haul, God is working everything that happens together into His plan.

Examples of how God works circumstances for the good of His children can be seen throughout the whole Bible, but let's look briefly at two passages that show us a little how this works. These things happened many years apart, but they happened in the same town of Dothan.

The first is in Genesis 37. Joseph is thrown into a well. His brothers consider killing him, but decide to sell him into slavery instead. Joseph prays for deliverance, but there is silence and he experiences many terrible years in slavery, false accusations and imprisonment.

Many years later a second significant event happens in Dothan. Second Kings chapter 6 tells us that Elisha is in Dothan, and by now it's a city. He wakes up in the morning to find the king of Syria's army surrounding the city, specifically looking to capture him. Elisha's servant wakes up, looks at the army surrounding the city, and freaks out. Elisha tells him, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (vs. 16). He then prays that God would open the servant's eyes so that he can see the horses and chariots of fire that God has placed around the city. God strikes the army blind and delivers them into Elisha's hand.

If you know the story of Joseph, then you know that if he hadn't been sold into Egypt and suffered all those years of slavery and prison, millions of people would have perished in the famine and his family would have destroyed themselves by their sin. Joseph was eventually placed in a position of authority that ended up saving the nation of Israel and providing for their expansion.

What this shows us is that God was just as actively working everything for good in Joseph's life as He was in Elisha's life. In His seeming slowness and inactivity in Joseph's life God was just as active as He was in His swift, noisy answer to Elisha.

Very seldom do we even get a millionth of a millionth of a millionth of a glimpse of how God is working everything for good to those who love him and are called according to His purpose...but He is. So you can be assured that, no matter what's going on inside or outside of you, God's love for you hasn't changed.

“Every possible situation that might turn you away from God will fail because God's love is so powerful that He'll keep you facing him, keep you loving Him, and keep you in His arms.”

Look back at Romans 8:38-39. Paul is trying to explain his utter certainty of God's love, and it's almost like he can't find enough words to express himself. Nothing can dislodge you from God's love, and nothing can dislodge His love from you. Including you. Every possible situation that might turn you away from God will fail because God's love is so powerful that He'll keep you facing him, keep you loving Him, and keep you in His arms.

You know, there are a lot of people walking around Colorado who say, "Oh I believe in a God of Love. I believe He loves everyone unconditionally. I believe that He loves me no matter what I do." But it's not changing their lives because it's abstract. Love is a kind of force and an abstract cognitive belief.

The thing that will make this truth life-changing is if we personalize it. We have to personalize this love in two ways: we have to personalize it in our lives; and we have to personalize it in Christ.

In Deuteronomy 7:7, 8 Moses tells Israel something about God: “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (ESV).

Do you see the logic there? God said, “I didn’t chose you because you were greater...you were less. I brought you out of Egypt because I loved you.” It’s a circular argument...”I love you because I love you because I love you.” God loves you because He loves you.

We also can’t look at love as an abstract concept. Jesus is the love of God. Back in Romans 8:35 Paul says, “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?”

In Gethsemane and on the cross, all the evil forces in the universe were arrayed against Jesus. He could have stopped them. He could have avoided the death and the torture and the mocking and, worst of all, the justice and wrath of God that we deserve coming down on his head. But he stayed.

Bomb after bomb after bomb was coming down on Christ trying to get him to drop us, and even hell itself couldn’t do it. He held onto us. He is our Savior. He died for us. That’s how we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God. If he wouldn’t abandon us then, He won’t abandon us now.

If hell itself couldn’t separate his love from you, do you think you having a bad week will do it? The Father spared not His own Son; do you think He’s going to let your life go off the rails now?

“If hell itself couldn’t separate his love from you do you think you having a bad week will do it? The Father spared not His own Son; do you think He’s going to let your life go off the rails now?”

Paul gives us something that we can use every day of our lives. Even in life’s hardest circumstances, there’s a joy to be had because we are assured that God loves us and that His plan is being worked out for our good and His glory.

The King's Ambassador

By *Nathan Cothorn*

Friends, the moment you trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and received the gift of salvation you were called into service. I remember when I first heard the call to serve - that deep down knowing that I was meant for the ministry. And when I heard it, I certainly wanted to serve, but I had a problem that stopped me short. That problem was doubt. Not in my salvation, but doubt that I would, or even could, be called into the ministry. I mean, look at me (covered in tattoos). Look at where I'm at. And on top of all that, I kept thinking, "Who was I to think that I could be in the ministry?"

Like me, I'm sure that some of you have felt the same way. I also know that some of you feel called into the ministry: to preach; to teach; to music ministry; and the list goes on. But like me, you've had doubts as to the practicality of it all. You look the dirty facts square in the face and they taunt you. You think, "Look at me; look at where I'm at; and who am I?" I'm here to tell you right now, brothers and sisters, exactly who you are. You are a blood-bought, blood-washed saint. You're a son of the Most High, a child of



"It's not about who you once were, it's about who you are now in Jesus Christ."



the Living God. It's not about who you once were, it's about who you are now in Jesus Christ.

Look with me at 2 Corinthians 5, beginning in verse 17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (KJV).

This text tells us a few things that I want you to notice. First - if any be in Christ. That "any man" is the believer. You and me. The same as the "whosoever" in John 3:16. If "any man" be in Christ, he is what? A new creature.

- Old things have passed away (you're not who you used to be).
- Behold, all things are become new (not "some" things, brothers and sisters: "all" things are become new). And all things are of God, who hath:
 - One - reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ (that's our salvation: peace with God by the cleansing, saving blood of Jesus).
 - Two - and hath given to us (that "us" still being the "any man" from verse 17) the ministry of reconciliation.

So, verse 17 and 18 tell us that if we be in Christ, we are:

- A new creature
- Given a ministry

That ministry is called the "ministry of reconciliation." Reconciliation is the act whereby God, through Christ's atonement, brings people who are at odds with Him back into a peaceful,

proper relationship with Himself. The hostility was caused by sin, and was eliminated by the cross. Paul tells us exactly what this ministry is in verse 19: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” That, my friends, is the gospel message. The same one we find in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” God, in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. Now look at the rest of verse 19, and you'll find our call to the ministry again: “and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”

Verse 20: “Now then (because of what has just been established in the previous verses) we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, be ye reconciled to God.” You hear that? Ambassadors for Christ. Brothers and sisters, that's still the “any man” that be in Christ from verse 17. That's you and that's me. Ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech the world by us. And what's the message we cry out? “Be ye reconciled to God!”

Now, just so we fully understand on what grounds that reconciliation is possible, Paul tells us in verse 21 : “For He (that's God) hath made Him (that's Christ) to be sin for us, who knew no sin (Christ was the Lamb without spot or blemish) that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” God made Christ to be sin for us, so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. That, my friends, is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and

when we share that gospel with others, we are engaging in the ministry of reconciliation.

As ambassadors of the King of the universe, it is our duty to walk in the high calling wherein we have been called. I know - there are a lot of negatives staring us in the face. Things that we see as obstacles grow into excuses. You may say:

- ***What about my circumstances? Don't you know where I'm at?*** They don't matter. Paul ministered from prisons as an inmate, from highways, byways, streets, synagogues, market places, homes - it didn't matter. Brothers and sisters, wherever you find yourself, you'll find lost souls who need Christ.
- ***Well, what about my education? I'm no Bible scholar!*** Friend, are you telling me that the God who took unlearned fisherman and transformed them into preachers and teachers and authors – and, most importantly, into soul winners – can't teach you the same things? Brothers and sisters, you get in that Word and the Holy Spirit will teach you things that an unsaved college professor couldn't even begin to comprehend.



“As ambassadors of the King of the universe, it is our duty to walk in the high calling wherein we have been called.”



It doesn't matter who your family is, what neighborhood you're from, what school you went to, or whether your rich or poor. It does not matter. God can use you if you give yourself up to be used. And the more of you that you give up, the more of you God has to use.

I want to tell you about a man named David Spurgeon. David was, at one time, president of the "Outlaws" motorcycle club. If you know anything about that world, then you know that the outlaws are one of the largest and most dangerous 1%er clubs out there. If it's bad they're into it, and David, being the "Pres," had his hands deep in all the garbage.

But one day, God did what only God could do: He brought David to "the



"Everything you've been through in life, both good and bad, has uniquely equipped you for a particular mission field."



Place." You know the Place. It's the one you come to when you finally realize that all you've ever done, all your best efforts, did nothing but leave you broken, and alone, and needing something more than you've ever been able to provide on your own.

Sitting in jail after a federal raid, and having just watched his best friend get gunned down by a rival club - David was

at that Place. God doesn't bring you to that place without showing you "The Way." It was in that jail that a visiting pastor introduced David to Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And so David Spurgeon, president of the Outlaws motorcycle club, accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Lack of evidence eventually put David back on the streets, except now he was a new creature in Christ. He started going to church, he quit the club and left the old life behind. And, when he heard the call to serve, he surrendered to the ministry. Now brother Spurgeon is a full-time evangelist, a speaker, an author, and he preaches at churches across the country. He's walking in the calling. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."

I used to wonder if God could use a man like me. But I'm done wondering. These marks that cover my body - they're part of my testimony. All of my experiences - part of my testimony. Brothers and sisters, everything you've been through in life, both good and bad, has uniquely equipped you for a particular mission field. Your face tattoos are a part of your testimony. They say, "I've been where you've been." And friend, there are a lot of people out there right now who will listen to what you have to say about Christ, who will not listen to me - and vice versa.

Who you were before you met Christ stands in stark contrast to who you are now in Christ. I always tell people that I don't believe you can find a more powerful demonstration of the power of

Christ to change a person's heart and life than in the examples of some of the men and women reading this right now. There are unsaved people, in your unit and on your yard, who will see your changed heart and your changed life and want some of what you've got. Psalm 40:1-3 says: "I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (KJV).

Many shall see it, brothers and sisters. Your life is on display. It says that many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. That's the power of example, of testimony. But keep in mind that you can give a bad testimony, too. As a Christian, an ambassador for Christ, people are watching.

Use the gifts and talents God gave you. Lord knows we've used them in service to sin and selfish gain - now use them for the glory of God, for the saving of souls, and for the edification of the church. I like to use my friend Scott in my illustrations because his example has been such a personal one in my own experience. Scott and I used to be in the same gang, and he was always someone you could count on for, well, whatever was needed. He also used the talents God gave him to pursue any number of the scumbag hustles that fill the world around us. Then one day Scott came to "the Place." God showed him "the Way," and he eventually surrendered to the ministry. He put everything in God's

hands, and one by one, the Lord has been removing obstacles and replacing them with opportunities.

Seeing God work in Scott's life affected my own. How you walk when you go back to that yard really does matter. You can lead people to Christ by your example, or you can leave them cursing God and those who serve Him. Use your testimony, your gifts, and your talents for God's glory. And remember, it's never about the gift, or the talent, or you. It's about what God can do with it for His glory.



"How you walk when you go back to that yard really does matter. You can lead people to Christ by your example, or you can leave them cursing God and those who serve Him."



This is a message of encouragement, brothers and sisters. I know that many of you are walking in your calling. You're putting every obstacle in God's hands and following His leading. Reading this article right now we have preachers, teachers, evangelists, givers, encouragers; missionaries, and probably a future pastor or two. The church in prison is alive, and I praise God for it. For those of you who are not walking in that high calling, search your heart and ask yourself, "Why not?" You are called. You are a new creature in Christ. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are

become new. And unto you has been given the ministry of reconciliation.

I'm going to end with a story. There is a scene in the movie "Titanic" where the string quartet stands on the deck of the sinking ship and plays the hymn "Nearer, my God to Thee." According to actual witness accounts, a man named John Harper, a preacher from Scotland, was the one who called on them to play it. Brother Harper was God's man. After telling his six-year-old daughter that he'd see her again, and seeing her safely loaded on a life boat, he went to work doing what God had called him to do. "Women and children and the unsaved, into the lifeboats!" he called as he ran along the decks, pleading with people to turn to Christ. And, when the ship finally began to go down, he jumped into the water and swam from person to person, pleading with them to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. Of course, the cold water eventually did what cold water does, and brother Harper sank into the depths and on to be with the Lord.

I thought about that story for a long time after I read it, and I realized something. The ship we're on now is sinking just as



"We've been entrusted with not only the knowledge of the gospel, but the sacred duty to share it as well. We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech the world by us: Be ye reconciled to God!"



surely as did the Titanic. A bit slower, maybe, but it's going down just the same. And like brother Harper, I'm not a bit worried about my own safety. I know in Whom I've believed, and I know that when my head finally sinks beneath those waters, I will but pass through a shadow and then be with my Lord. That's my assurance in Christ.

But what about all of those unsaved people who are drowning around me? Where's the sense of urgency to save those lost souls – not from a mere watery grave, but from an eternity of suffering in the lake of fire? When you think about this later on, here are a couple of things to remember:

- They don't see the ship the way you do. You've been given eyes to see and ears to hear. They haven't.
- Not only do you know that the whole mess is going down, you know "the Way" into the Lifeboat. You've got a personal relationship with the Captain of our salvation.

That kind of knowledge does more than merely infer an indirect sense of responsibility - it SCREAMS responsibility!! In Luke 12:48, Jesus says, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (KJV). Friends, we've been given much: our salvation, sonship, eternal life, and an incorruptible inheritance - all of it by way of the precious blood of Jesus shed on our behalf. We've been entrusted with not only the knowledge of the gospel, but the sacred duty to share it as well. We are ambassadors for Christ, as

though God did beseech the world by us:
Be ye reconciled to God!

Ask yourself this: knowing what you know, are you running up and down the decks, pleading with people to turn to Jesus and be saved? Are you doing what God has called you to do? I challenge you brothers and sisters: share the good news of salvation in Christ. Sure, not all are called to preach, but all are called to work. The one who sends the messenger is just as vital to the work as the one delivering the message. It takes many different parts to make the body function. The Lord knew what He was doing when He made the church so

diverse in people and in talents. What you do, whether it's behind the scenes or behind the pulpit, matters. We all have our part in the work. Whatever the Lord has called you to, I encourage you: walk in it!



Nathan Cothorn is a former Colorado prisoner currently on parole. He volunteers preaching at chapel services for Sterling Correctional Facility, ministers to men transitioning through community corrections, mentors other released prisoners one-on-one, and helps to lead worship at his home church.

MINISTRY UPDATES



Sharing the Worship & Art of the Prison Church

By Mark Walker

By God's grace, our ministry has recently had the privilege of

connecting with Crossroads Prison Ministries in the hope that we will be able to work together. First, our leadership had the opportunity to offer some feedback on several ideas Crossroads is exploring for improving and expanding their correspondence Bible study curriculum. As someone who spent years learning from Crossroads' correspondence courses during my time in prison, I am really excited about the opportunity to speak into the future direction of this high-quality curriculum! It was also encouraging to hear about Crossroads' heart for developing more advanced discipleship and leadership training material, which is close to our hearts as well!

Those of you who are familiar with Crossroads will know that they collect poetry and artwork from prisoners, some of which they publish in a quarterly arts journal. Their ministry has been doing this for years, and has amassed a substantial collection of prisoner art which they long to share with the wider church. At the same time, The Cell Church highly values the works of Christian art, music, and literature being produced by the prison churches. Finally, my home church, Fellowship Denver, has a strong and

passionate arts ministry, and the church designed its new building with an art gallery which displays the work of Christian artists for the edification of the church and the city.

Lord willing, this fall Crossroads, The Cell Church, and Fellowship Denver will partner to hold an exhibition of prisoner art. As part of this event we hope to invite members of



Fellowship Denver Church art gallery

both the church and the community, not only to engage with the art, but also to learn about the amazing advancement of God's kingdom in and through the prison churches. We will be sending out more details about this event as they become available. I hope many of you in the community who support The Cell Church will come hear about the work God is doing in the prisons, as you are encouraged and inspired by this unique ministry of the incarcerated church!

The Cell Church is always looking for Christ-focused, gospel-centered prisoner artwork, poetry, music, etc. to share with the rest of the church in the community and in other prisons. Anything you send us will be properly curated and stored, and will be shared and displayed (along with the artist's info) in whatever ways the Lord makes available to us. Our ministry will be happy to return your work to you upon your release, if you so desire.

CALL FOR WRITING

Our ministry loves to publish the Christ-centered, biblically faithful writing produced by members of the prison churches! Some of you have submitted a great deal of your original work, and we are extremely grateful. Unfortunately, the cost of printing has prevented us from publishing as many pamphlets and fliers of prisoner writing recently as we would like. However, we are still easily able to include your writing in Tameonta! That being said, we believe that our publication will be much more effective if we request work on specific subjects that will fit with the planned topics of future newsletters. This issue we are asking for any and all writing on the following subjects:

1. **Adoption** – This can be an exposition of biblical texts on adoption, a discussion of the theological doctrine of adoption, a personal story or poem about how adoption has impacted your life, a combination of these, or any other appropriate focus.
2. **What I Would Say to the Local Church** – Here we are looking for a discussion of your thoughts, hopes, fears, desires, etc. with respect to joining a local church gathering in the community after you are released. What would you want a church in the community to know about you: your life, your family, your walk with Christ, your ministry, your hopes and fears about how the church will welcome you and treat you as a former prisoner?