

Introduction: This week we learn from Romans 8:35-39 that Paul wants us to take stock of every possible dangerous situation that we may encounter in this life in order to put God's love to the test. God wants us to face each bleak prospect and each potential "evil hour" with the courage that comes from having tested His bold claim that "*nothing will separate us*" from His love! Isn't this one of the secrets of our persevering in our love for God – to discover to our surprise that God's love *still* works in situations where we had no expectation that His love would find or help us? May this week's notes, then, deepen our joy in such a love as we step back from celebrating God's love in Romans 8:35-39 to see how quietly practical such love is in Romans 8:26-27.

Monday: read Romans 8:26-29 and Romans 3:9-19. We begin this week by considering both the Spirit's groans within us (Rom. 8:26) and the Father's knowledge of every need of our hearts (Rom. 8:27). As we reflect on God's ability to read our hearts, my hope is that we will place more reliance on Him as the One who plants His grace and love within our hearts!

But wait – what does God find when He searches the hearts of people like us in our natural state? The answer is that God's searching knowledge of the human heart never fails to find the evidence that we by nature do not seek or submit to God in our hearts. We are no better than others: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless..." (Rom. 3:10-12).

But the really amazing fact about God as the "Searcher of hearts" is that, despite such knowledge of our depravity, He sets His love upon us in Romans 8:29 as the undeserving objects of His regard, interest, delight, affection and saving action. Yes, all these verbs can be used to describe *why* God predestinates us in the first place – not because of anything within us – but because His love is a "foreknowing" love which must express itself by not only saving miserable sinners like us – but even desiring us before we were ever born! Amazing love indeed! Let us sing about it in hymn # 455:

*And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*'Tis mystery all: th'Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
Let angel minds inquire no more*

Tuesday: read Romans 8:27-29 and 1 Kings 8:37-40. To further remind us that God the Father does not merely love us from a distance, consider again today how Paul describes God the Father in Romans 8:27 as the One who "searches hearts." JB Phillip's translation captures the loving close-up involvement of God with our hearts as follows: "*We do not know how to pray worthily as sons of God, but his Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings which never find words. And God who knows the heart's secrets understands.*"

How wonderful that God can lovingly discern every one of our heart's true and secret needs, and that He is constantly scanning even the most imperceptible sighs and groans! One great example of God the Father's "heart-knowledge" is 1 Kings 8:37-40, where Solomon, in his great dedicatory prayer for the temple, prays that, no matter what calamity befalls any of God's own – be it famine, plague, blight or mildew, locusts, grasshoppers, or war – God would "hear from heaven, forgive and act..." But why is Solomon so confident that God will act decisively to help our heart's needs? It is because God sees and searches every man's heart in verse 39!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God the Father this day for His heart-knowledge of each of His people. Not only does He hear our *groans for our immediate needs*: He knows intimately *all the needs which our hearts and lives will ever have*. Well may we sing with the Psalmist of God's loving omniscience of our lives and needs in hymn # 36 in our Trinity Hymnal:

*Lord, Thou hast searched me and dost know
Where'er I rest, where'er I go;
Thou knowest all that I have planned,
And all my ways are in Thy hand.*

*Where can I go apart from Thee,
Or whither from Thy presence flee?
In Heav'n? It is Thy dwelling fair;
In death's abode? Lo, Thou art there.*

*My words from Thee I cannot hide,
I feel Thy power on every side;
O wondrous knowledge, awful might,
Unfathomed depth, unmeasured height.*

*If I the wings of morning take,
And far away my dwelling make,
The hand that leadeth me is Thine,
And my support Thy power divine.*

Wednesday: read Romans 8:28-34 and Romans 5:5. We must not forget that the only reason we can have our hearts searched by the Spirit of God, who thereby helps us when we don't know how to pray in Romans 8:26-27, is because Christ Jesus in His Ascension to God's right hand in Romans 8:34 has both *asked* God the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit on our behalf, and has *poured out* this Spirit into our hearts as the very love of God (Rom. 5:5). We therefore can say that the Spirit of Christ is the very love of God "poured into our hearts"!

Now we can also see the link between Paul's triumphant assertion that "nothing will separate us from God's love" in Romans 8:35-39 and his teaching about the Holy Spirit's internal, heart-work of intercession in Romans 8:27. The very groans of the Spirit in Romans 8:26, coupled with the compassionate heart-reading of God the Father in Romans 8:27 – these are the proofs that nothing shall separate us from God's love later in Romans 8!

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the commitment of God to have His Spirit of love dwell in your hearts by faith with the help of hymn # 394:

*This day at thy creating Word
first o'er the earth the light was poured:
O Lord, this day upon us shine
and fill our souls with light divine.*

*This day the Holy Spirit came
with fiery tongues of cloven flame:
O Spirit, fill our hearts this day
with grace to hear and grace to pray.*

*This day the Lord for sinners slain
in might victorious rose again:
O Jesus, may we raised be
from death of sin to life in thee!*

*O day of light and life and grace,
from earthly toil sweet resting place,
thy hallowed hours, blest gift of love,
give we again to God above.*

Thursday: read Romans 8:35-39 and Psalm 136. Amazing blessings God poured forth of old when Israel exalted His saving love. Consider Matthew Henry on Psalm 136's famous refrain, that "God's love endures forever": "*This most excellent sentence is magnified above all the truths concerning God, not only by the repetition of it here, but by the signal tokens of divine acceptance with which God owned the singing of it.*" Did you catch what Henry says about God's "owning" such singing about His love? Look at these examples of such Divine pleasure:

In 2 Chronicles 5:13, Solomon has just finished all the work on the temple of the Lord. He brings in the furnishings, the silver, gold and the Ark of God's Covenant in 2 Chronicles 5:1-10. Then the priestly choirs

begin to sing, praising God with that familiar refrain from Psalm 136. And what does God do? He comes down in glory in 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 so that none of the priests can continue their ministrations in God's house! "Lost in wonder, love and praise" would sum up the blessings of God's presence poured out on His people as they magnify His enduring love.

Second, in 2 Chronicles 20:22-27, Jehoshaphat leads Judah in praise and worship as they face a terrible way, surrounded by their enemies in 2 Chronicles 20:21-23. And what do they sing? They sing again of God's enduring love... "Give thanks to the Lord for His love endures forever"!

Meditate and Pray: God confirms our adoration of His love even today with the blessing of His presence. There is nothing more potent in stilling the enemies of Christ's church than to magnify the greatness of God's love for us in Christ. The very forces of Hell tremble when we make much of God's free, sovereign and constant love for us as His elect!

Fri/Sat/Sun: read Romans 8:27-29, 8:35 and Psalm 104:27-32. What a loving team the Holy Spirit and God the Father make when it comes to helping us when we don't know how to pray and when all our hearts can do is groan! The Father reads with perfect, compassionate knowledge exactly what our hearts cannot even put into words. The Spirit adds His voice of infinite understanding to the thoughts and intents of our hearts. The result is that our exact needs are carried to Heaven with groans far more eloquent than volumes of human speech could ever express!

But let us learn especially that the reason the Spirit can with such perception sum up the groans of our hearts in interceding for us is that it was the Spirit who created us! Yes, God the Father laid down the blueprint for our humanity, and by His decree ordained that we should come into existence. Yes, God the Son as the very "Word" of God gave structure to the Father's decrees and framed all the creation by the Word of His power. But it is the Spirit who gives the final, perfecting master-strokes which complete and beautify what the Father ordained and the Son brought into being! The Spirit is the "Jeweler" who places all the jewels of God's grace in our lives in their exact setting! For example, in Psalm 104:30, it is the Spirit who is said to not only create us, but to "renew" the face of the earth: "renew" being a Hebrew word (chadash) which means originally to "polish" or "cut," as in making a sword look new by virtue polishing. It can also mean to "restore" or "repair." That is what the Holy Spirit does when it comes to lovingly helping us in prayer – He makes our tired, weary ignorant and weak groans into beautiful sounds to God the Father! Much like observing a delighted set of parents with their little new-born: Every sound that little one makes, no matter how uncomfortable to other ears, is a symphony to the ears of the parents!

Meditate and Pray: Well may we sing with joy in hymn # 624, knowing how constant God's loving concern for us will be in each unknown future situation – especially because the Spirit who created us will not fail to remind the Father of our every need:

*Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ.*

*O magnify the Lord with me,
With me exalt His Name;
When in distress to Him I called,
He to my rescue came.*

*Of His deliverance I will boast,
Till all that are distressed
From my example courage take
And soothe their griefs to rest.*

*O make but trial of His love;
Experience will decide
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in His truth confide.*