

Freedom Series

5. Freedom from Fear: fear of the world (Romans 8:18-39)

You'll remember when we looked at Spiritual Warfare that we perceived that there are three things that prevent us from reaching our potential in Christ, the world, the flesh and the devil

🌍 The World

By the world I mean those things in this world which cause us to stumble and even fall as God's people. It's usually the way in which the world or circumstances associated places fear in our hearts and stops us from functioning as Christians. We'll look at these in more detail in a few moments.

🌍 The Flesh

By the flesh I mean our own human nature. Our own sinful nature. You'll remember when we did Freedom from Condemnation a few weeks ago, we saw how our sinful nature drags us back and makes us frustrated. We want to do things God's way, but our own flesh contends against us. Next week we're going to explore the frailties of the flesh as we deal with such issues as temptation and see the ways in which we become fearful and we fail.

🌍 The devil

I left this one until last. We are contended against by the devil, satan, and his forces. Perhaps it has surprised some of you that I would believe in such a person as the devil or his demonic forces. It was fashionable a few years ago to suggest that the devil just represented forces of evil and was not a personal adversary of God and God's people. Therefore they would suggest that when the Bible refers to people who were demonized, they were just mentally ill or something like that.

Scripture teaches the reverse of this. There is a spiritual enemy and he does try to prevent us from being the people we should be. He is capable of messing up our lives and as we saw in Ephesians 6, he fires his fiery darts at us. In the Bible and the New Testament in particular, Jesus opposed satan and cast out demons and gave his disciples the authority to do the same.

Someone once said, "*Why does the modern world doubt the existence of satan when he's the only rational explanation for it's existence!*"

There is the other pole of course. You'll find in some societies that the influence of the occult is much more emphasised than in ours so that the whole world will be seen in terms of a cosmic battle and Christians will see demon in everything whether there actually is one or not.

Both camps suit satan. On the one hand he gets a free run at Christians who don't believe he exists, and on the other if Christians blame him for everything they don't take responsibility for their own sin and therefore don't repent and will not reach their potential.

If we remember back to Ephesians 6 we read *11 Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil' s schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

We need to recognise that and protect ourselves from these forces with the armour of God. But we also need to recognise too our own weaknesses and responsibilities.

The enemies of the Christian faith keep us in bondage, they bind us up and keep us from functioning. If it's not fear of satan and his evils, it's fear of the world, fear of our own weaknesses, fear of death, fear of ill-health, fear of whatever. They bound by it, slaves to it and captives to them so that as Christians they can't function fully as the children of God.

We'll explore fear of that which is satanic or demonic after I get back from my holidays in August but I felt we needed that introduction as we considered our enemies this morning. The trouble with our trilogy of enemies - the world, the flesh and the devil - is that sometimes difficult to unravel them. Someone once posed this question -

When is it Satan and when is it just life's bumps and bruises?

What is attributable to satan and what's life? It's a question of discernment. As we look at the trilogy of enemies we see that they are a mixture and we'll find them overlapping. Let's look at our first enemy then - fear of the world Fearing the world. Many Christians are fearful of the world. Their fear binds them up. How are we made fearful of the world?

● **Fear of Persecution and Abuse** - in the world today many Christians are persecuted. We hear many grand stories of how Christians risk life and limb to stand for Christ - but there are many Christians out there who have given up the fight. Persecution may not on our agenda as Christians but even though we may not feel persecuted, many Christians are fearful that they will attract abuse if they profess their Christian faith. It is discouraging and we feel like not bothering to witness again. We are afraid that we will be abused in some way. Most Christians are not persecuted but it is abuse by other people, or fear of it, that satan uses to prevent us reaching our potential in Christ. I know that some of you are in hostile family situations when husband

or wife or children are hostile to your faith. Perhaps you sometimes wonder whether you can go on with your faith under that kind of situation. You are called to be children of God - you are called to be free.

Sometimes the abuse isn't even aimed at our Christianity. It's abuse by a husband, wife or even parent, or maybe by someone at work. They trouble us, they make us worry - and as Christians we despair and become discouraged by what people are doing to us. The saddest thing about people who are being abused is that they have a misplaced loyalty to their abusers. Abused Christians sometimes tolerate their abusers by thinking "If I stand up to them, then somehow I'll be a bad witness". We are the children of God. Every situation is different but one thing is true. God wants you to be free of that fear. If you are being abused, seek help from someone who will pray for you and whose counsel you trust. You need to be free.

● **Fear we will be overwhelmed by our problems** - some people are worse worriers than I am. We worry don't we? We worry because of situations that occur in our lives. They are usually small things that occupy our minds. It may be worries about other things - money worries, worrying about relatives or friends, worrying about things associated with what we own. These are real fears - but fear takes over from sense. You can be so easily crushed by one thing after another. You stop praying. You get wound up. You know it because most of you have been there - or maybe are there now. God doesn't want you to be bound by your fears and worries. He wants you to be free.

● **Fear that the world will overwhelm us.** If you bring up teenagers you'll know all about this. As I've said before, we all laugh at teenagers and their silly peer-pressure fads but adults are no better. We are still under pressure from the world. Under pressure to accept sin as OK. The world pressurises Christians to accept homosexuality as OK. It pressurises us to accept extra-marital sexual relationships as acceptable. We are pressurised into the materialistic values in our society. Or that the world will overtake us in other ways. We worry. Many people live in fear because of what they think might happen to them - not going out in the dark, fear of burglary or robbery.

God doesn't want us to be paralysed by fear of the world. He wants us to grow and mature in Him and not be bound. We are called to bring the world freedom - to bring to people Christ.

We are called to change the world, not for the world to change us. And we have the authority as the sons and daughters of the living God to do it. And that is the difference. We are the children of God, we change the world - it doesn't change us!

Our passage in Romans this morning is designed to change our perception of the world and all its accusers so let's encourage ourselves with the promises of God.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

[or And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God who have been called according to his purpose.]

29 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. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

It's back to a familiar theme. We are the children of God - it goes all the way through Romans 8. It's sometimes difficult when the world seems to crowd in on us that this is true; but I believe this is a promise of God.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God who have been called according to his purpose

Do you believe that's true? Sometimes we find it difficult to appreciate that when we are in the middle of a crisis don't we. When we feel assailed by problems we say, how can God be in this? How can God do this to me? We've all said it, or thought it. We can't make sense of it. But there's the promise. Trust it - it's true and ask God to help you to understand His will in it.

The main problem with this comes because we prefer to walk in our paths rather than according to His will. Sometimes the problems that assail us are of our own doing. We forget that we've been called to live as children of God and live the old way. We are going to look at this issue further next Sunday.

We are called to be children of God, so let's claim the promises of God. So we've established that we are God's children and what is said of us

29 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. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

That's you and that's me this morning. You are chosen, justified, glorified. And our problems with the world then fall into context. We are the children of God, in Christ we have overcome the world.

1 John 5: 3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

We are children of God. So what you may say. Paul illustrates the fact of who we are with a series of "So what?" Questions. If you are children of God this morning then grab this.

You are the children of God so

◆ If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 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?

Never let people who mock your faith get you down and tell you otherwise. God has made us promises. How can anyone take that away from you. I've said this before but it was the testimony of one of my young people in Tottenham. He said to his friends "Remember this, you are a child of God so that makes you a Prince or a Princess, so walk down the street with your head held high because of whom you are and don't let people disrespect you." That's so true. What other person can give you that hope? They can't take it away from you. What other answer do they have?

You are the children of God so

◆ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

This carries on from the last point. How often have you ever had the accusation pointed at you "And you call yourself a Christian?" "You are a hypocrite and all the people who go to Church are hypocrites". Great - then if our Church is full of hypocrites then come and join us - we can always do with an extra one! Don't let people ever tell you that you're not good enough. One of Satan's biggest accusations to Christians is the clam that you're not good enough.

Your life is a mess, you're having problems. Maybe you feel depressed. Or maybe you are just down? Things aren't going right for you. And you feel you have failed God. You feel less than a Christian. *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?* Grab this. If you are a Christian, you are a child of God. Nothing changes that fact. You are justified before God because of the work of Christ on the cross and by His shed blood. You might feel a disaster zone but to God you're justified - it's Just -as-if-I'd never sinned.

Still not convinced then grab this?

You are the children of God so

◆ 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.

So you've sinned, you feel a failure. The world is telling you it. You feel crushed by your circumstances. Don't be condemned because you are not being condemned by Christ. He's there interceding for you. Your sin and your failure is dealt with. Don't ever let anybody or any circumstance try to fool you. Don't ever let the devil point the accusing finger. You are a child of God, you are justified and Christ personally is dealing with your weakness and failure.

You are the children of God so

 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 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.

This is a wonderful promise. Nothing can separate us. There isn't anything in creation or any circumstance that can separate us from God's love.

We started by looking at those things which threaten to crush us and hold us in bondage and make us far from Christ. How we behave in life usually has something to do with what we think of ourselves. I'm sure I've said it before, but when I was teaching exam failures, half my time was spent building up people's self perception. They could pass A Levels but I had to encourage them to restore their shattered confidence. That's what the world does. It shatters your confidence. Our churches are full of people with shattered confidences - and they cannot function properly. -held in bondage.

We are the children of God. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit. *Phil 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*

Let's remember that who we think we are makes the difference. It's because we see the world in a different light. We see people who trouble us or even abuse us in a different light. We see our worries in a different light. We see the pressures the world brings in a different light.

Through Him we have the power to change those things. No longer do we rely on our own wisdom and strength. It is Christ who can change those situations.

You may say to me this morning: Mark I know all the promises of God but these things are just crushing in on me. I feel crushed by my family situation. I have a relationship that I find deeply distressing. I am worried about my situation. I know I'm a child of God but.. Don't suffer it alone. That's what being part of a Christian family is about - we support one another. Speak to somebody you trust. People that will pray with you. People that will advise you well. You can be free of these bonds. Find freedom in Christ this morning. Find the strength anew to face your fear of the world.

*Father
Thank you that I am your child
In Christ
I am chosen
I am justified
I am glorified
By the power of the Holy Spirit
I pray that I may know Your strength
in the situations I fear.
I pray that you will give me the wisdom
to deal with people that want to abuse me
That I may persevere where necessary
or to say enough is enough
I pray that you will give me the peace not to worry
about situations the world has thrown at me
That I may see them in their context
And find the means to deal with them
I pray that in all things I may be able to do things
according to Your will.
That I may glorify You as Your child.
In the name of Jesus
Amen*



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