

When It Seems Like God Doesn't Love Me

Bryan Elliff

Certain sufferings can make us ask hard questions about God. "Is it really true that there is a God who loves me? I have thrown myself on the Lord, I have prayed with real trust in him. But nothing, no response. Why am I still suffering?" Have you experienced this kind of disappointment and confusion?



For Your Sake We Are Killed All Day Long

If you have, the writer of Psalm 44 is your spokesperson. At first glance, it seems that this son of Korah is full of bright confidence in the Lord. Look how he affirms to God his full and exclusive trust in him.

For I will not trust in my bow, nor will my sword save me . . . In God we have boasted all day long, and we will give thanks to your name forever. (Ps 44:6, 8)

Yet it turns out that this is not the happy song of trust that we might think, but the beginnings of an accusation. The writer's bitterness comes bursting to the surface in the following section.

Yet you have rejected us and brought us to dishonor, and do not go out with our armies . . . You give us as sheep to be eaten and have scattered us among the nations. You sell your people cheaply and have not profited from their sale . . . All day long my dishonor is before me and my humiliation has overwhelmed me. (Ps 44:9-15)

His confusion is overflowing, as if to say, "We trust in you unreservedly, God, but now you are abandoning us! We have thrown ourselves on you, but you are letting us fall in the mud." He even reminds the Lord that it could not be because of their sin that he is letting this happen: "All this has come upon us, but we have not forgotten you, and we have not dealt falsely with your covenant" (Ps 44:17)

And then the writer makes the most famous statement of the psalm. It may sound familiar to you because Paul quotes it in Romans 8. Do you know this feeling?

But for your sake we are killed all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. Arouse yourself, why do you sleep, O Lord? (Ps 44:22)

What Can Separate Us from the Love of Christ?

The apostle Paul understood the disappointment and confusion that we sometimes feel in our afflictions. He knew that it can seem at times like the Lord has abandoned us, that he doesn't love us, that maybe all the hype about being partakers of the new creation in Christ isn't really true.

"What can separate us from the love of Christ?" he asks. "Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'For your sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered'" (Rom 8:35-36)

Paul's not asking here if there is some suffering that could actually make Christ stop loving us. No, he's asking if something could happen to us that would prove that Christ never really loved us at all, that it's all just a hoax. When he quotes Psalm 44, he's recognizing the very confusion that the writer of that psalm had. "I have trusted in you, but I'm dying here. So this is supposed to be the love of Christ?"

But remarkably, the answer comes clear and resonate: "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us." (Rom 8:37) ". . . *in* all these things . . ." That's the key. As we live out our lives as redeemed people in a groaning world, God does not promise to make us conquerors *over* all our sufferings. Sometimes God fulfills his loving purposes for us *in* and *through* our sufferings. Sometimes he decides to place us in horrible circumstances and leave us there, and then to work through those circumstances for our good.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)

If that is true, you can rest with the settled confidence that no affliction, no matter how difficult, means that God doesn't love you.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)