

Are You Sure?

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Romans 8

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:38-39 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.

How often have you asked the question or have been asked the question “Are you sure?” Maybe it was regarding something as simple as the weather. Maybe it was about something you were more knowledgeable about than the person your talking to. Maybe it was about something that involved a lot of uncertainty and could affect the course of one’s life.

Or maybe it was about your faith.

You see, many Christians wrestle with certainty in their faith. Not just the occasional “this seems too good to be true”, but rather a joy-stealing, faith-crippling doubt the gnaws at the heart of the gospel.

However, I think the dilemma goes deeper than that. For a lot of us, we may have never doubted the facts of salvation or the promises of God. We just have not allowed these realities to sink from our head to our heart. As one pastor put it: We are professing believers but practicing atheists.

Well I’m here today with some good news for those of us who are believers here today: God wants you to be sure of your salvation and absolutely confident in the promises he has made. The goal, of course, is more heartfelt worship, more Spirit-wrought prayer, and both the ability and desire to glorify God in whatever might come into our lives.

But I also have good news for any here who may not believe that Jesus is their only hope of salvation. That good news is this: Today might be the day of your salvation. My prayer has been and continues to be that as we discuss the confidence a believer can have in Jesus and as we explore how firm God’s love for us is because of Jesus’ death and resurrection and as we learn to rest in the reality of the Spirit’s constant intercession both with us and for us, the Spirit will melt your heart and he will allow you to see and receive the peace and joy and hope that can be yours.

OK, let’s begin. Today we’re going to be cruising through Romans 8. Many of you may know this is a classic chapter and it contains a wealth of biblical truth. No one could adequately preach through the entire chapter in one shot. My goal and prayer today is to fly over the surface, pointing out a few landmarks along the way. The objective? That God, by his grace, may bolster our confidence in him, in what Jesus has done for us, that the entire Trinity, (Father, Son and Spirit) is continually at work together on our behalf and nothing can ever snatch you away from God.

From this perspective, my review of Romans 8 brought 5 elements or themes to light. I want to touch on each of them in turn, but I thought it would be good for you to see them all up front. Because each of us is in a different spot in our journey with Jesus, some of these elements may press on you differently than others. That's ok. Let the Spirit do his work.

- Element 1: We are free because God has completely dealt with sin and given us the righteousness of Christ (vv 1-4)
- Element 2: We are adopted into the family of God (vv 14-17)
- Element 3: We have a certain hope of future glory (vv 23-25)
- Element 4: We have a fully committed co-intercessor (vv 26-27)
- Element 5: We are loved by God and his love is rock solid, diamond hard and, quite literally, stronger than death (vv 31-39)

As I mentioned, I'm going to touch on each of these, but as I wrote these out and now again as I read them, I have to pause and say "Wow!" It's like coming to the edge of the Grand Canyon for the first time. Look at what our Father has given us. Without price. Without condition. I am beyond amazed. Overwhelmed doesn't even come close.

So, let's start at the beginning. ***Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***

Here is the heart of the gospel. We have been rightly separated from God because of our sinful thoughts and actions plus the very nature of who we are. Whether you are skeptic in here today or if you've journeyed with Jesus for 20 or 30 years, let this truth sink in. Sin is real and it is an ugly poison. God's wrath against sin is impartial and is fully justified. Apart from Christ, our condemnation was complete.

Because of this, the punch and the power of these verses should undo us. Listen carefully to what God is saying to you:

- The condemnation that was rightly yours is now completely and forever gone
- The bondage you were entirely ensnared in has been radically removed
- Sin itself has been condemned
- The law and all of its demands has been completely fulfilled on our behalf
- Jesus did all of this and has given it to us as a free gift.

This is the first element solidifying our assurance. Condemnation? Gone. Bondage to sin? Gone. Weakness of the flesh? Gone. Righteous requirement of God? Fulfilled.

Do we believe this to be true? Not just the facts, not just the mechanics. But the soul-stirring truth that there really is no more condemnation for we who are in Christ Jesus.

The next element in demonstrating our security in Christ is found in ***Romans 8:14-17*** ***For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.***

Here Paul builds on the theme of slavery and bondage, but now contrasts this with our new identity as children of God. This idea is so important he draws out three different aspects of our new familial relationship with God. Here they are:

- we are no longer servants or slaves but are now part of the family
- there is an intimacy and endearment to God that was not available before
- as family members there is an inheritance that is ours because of our connection with Christ

It's easy to down play or minimize the significance of our adoption into God's family. Perhaps our own family is only so-so, or you've seen the damage done by families that had professed faith in Christ, yet didn't live it out. Maybe for you, there is no family.

While each of these aspects deserve their own sermon, let's consider one slice of this new intimacy we have with God. What confidence do you really have to go to God in prayer? Seriously. Think about it. We are talking about the Creator of the Universe. What business do we have in his presence?

Now, consider how Jesus frames each of his recorded prayers in the gospels. He approaches God as Father. Abba. Close. Intimate. Isn't this what Paul is saying is the same for us? God is our Abba, our intimate, close Father. No fear. No secrets. No agenda. Just a loving, compassionate Father who is looking for our good and joy.

We can know we are secure because our sins are fully and finally forgiven, and because we have been brought into God's family. Along with these there is the 3rd element of our assurance in Christ: it is our certain hope of future glory.

Look with me at ***Romans 8:23-25*** ***And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.***

Here is an important aspect of our journey with Christ that many of us grasp in our heads, but lose track of in our hearts. Everything that we've been given, as good as it is, is just the foretaste, the appetizer, as it were, for God's fuller blessings to us when we are finally reunited with him.

Think about it

- Sin is finally and fully forgiven. Yet it still knocks on our door daily, if not hourly
- The righteousness of Jesus is ours. Yet we still do and say things we don't want to do or say (see Rom 7)

- We really are God’s children and he really is our Abba. Yet we still hide from him instead of running to him
- We are new creations. Yet the old still lingers and we groan under its weight.

What is our response to this? Do we wallow in our groaning? Do we simply give into sin? Do we hide from God like Adam and Eve and think he can’t see us?

Or, do we look up and forward? Do we, as Spurgeon would say, “grab hold of the gossamer thread of faith” and allow the Spirit to do his work? If we do the latter, we would see that Paul points us to a progression in this life. Yes there is suffering. Yes there is physical death and decay. Yes there is sin and struggle. But they each are pointing and pushing us toward our future and our hope. And what awaits us cannot even be compared to what we have today.

Oh, do you see that future? Do hear God’s promise? Our salvation, our adoption are just the first fruits, just the down payment, of God’s new creation.

Before I move on, I have one thing to say about hope. Hope is one of those slippery words that is used in many places and can mean less than the Bible intends us to hear. In our usage of the word, hope often means maybe. “I hope so”, “Hopefully”.

This is not the case in God’s Word. Here hope is certain. Expected. Hope is always directed at something better, whether what we have is pretty good, meh, or down right lousy. You see the hope that the Bible speaks about is built on the unshakable promises and unchanging character of God.

Our sins are fully and finally forgiven. We are adopted into God’s family. All of our lives points us to the certain hope we have in Jesus. But how do we internalize all of this? How are we able to take this truth and make it belief?

I hate to do this to you, but I need to burst some of your bubbles. Because the reality is, we can’t do this. At least not alone. You see, when Jesus promised us a helper, it wasn’t just someone he expected us to call on periodically or when we were going through the really tough stuff. No, we need the Spirit’s help on an ongoing basis.

And that is why ***Romans 8:26-27*** is so important ***Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.***

If you’re anything like me, you’ve had moment where you know you should pray, you want to pray but no words seem right or no prayer seems worthy. If so, then these verses are for you.

Just look at what Paul highlights and what comfort and security he brings:

- we are weak - check
- we don’t know what to pray for - check
- the Spirit is interceding for us - really?

- the Spirit groans (just like us and creation) - groaning's ok?
- God knows the mind of the Spirit - that's good
- the Spirit prays according to the will of God - that's really good

Have you ever thought "I might be praying contrary to the will of God?" Go ahead and admit it. It's ok to not be ok here, right? Since we've all had this thought interspersed in our prayer times, isn't it heart charging to know that the Spirit is praying right along side of us in perfect unity with God's will.

There is one other item here that personally bolsters my confidence and assurance. It is ok to groan. Earlier in Romans 8 Paul says creation is groaning; groaning to return to the perfection of Eden. Creation is looking for something better. He also says that we are groaning. We are anticipating the completion of this journey and to be clothed in immortality. (Check out 1 Cor 15). Both of these are good, but they feel incomplete. However, when we realize that the Spirit is also groaning both with us and for us, that assures me and should assure us all, that our groaning is not in vain.

So, where does that leave us?

- our sins are fully and finally paid for
- we are right before God because of Jesus
- we are free from the bondage of both the sin and the law
- we have been adopted as dearly loved children of God
- God is our Abba
- we have a certain hope that God will bring all of his promises to fruition
- we have a certain hope that despite how things are now, God will make all things new
- we have been given faith so that we can wait with hope
- the Spirit is interceding with us and for us
- the Spirit is groaning right along side of us as we wait in hope

How can this all be true? One might say its too good to be true. What is the anchor, the foundation, the nuclear core that makes all of this not just possible but certain and real? It is the love of God in Jesus.

Look at Romans **8:31-39** with me. I would like you to follow along in your Bible or device because this passage is so crucial. I don't want us to miss a single phrase. As I read it slowly, let the very Word of God soak into your souls

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.

My friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, do you hear what God is saying to us today? The anchor for our security, the bedrock of our faith, the steel that strengthens us for our journey with Christ is the unconquerable, unfathomable, unconditional love of God.

Just look with me at what Paul is expressing for us here: First he says God is for us. I know that can easily become a cliché, but our hope and joy, our faith and security rest in the reality that God's not a distant being watching earthly events unfold like a prerecorded football game. No, no, no. He cares for you. He's on your side. He's for you.

And, because he's for you (and because he's God) there is no one and no thing that can be against you. This really the theme of the remainder of Romans 8. In a sense Paul is asking: how big is your God? Seriously. How big? Do we really believe, I mean trustingly believe, gut level, street level believe what the Bible says about our God? If we do and he is for us, what could possibly be against us?

To hammer this home, Paul rattles off a series of rhetorical questions. Again, let them soak into your soul.

- Since God didn't spare his son (a really big thing), won't he give us the (relatively) smaller things?
- Jesus has died. Jesus is risen. Jesus is interceding. For you. Who could legitimately even bring a charge against you?
- Because of Jesus, God has decided (not forced or coerced) to justify us, declare us not guilty. Where is our condemnation? (Hint:look at 8:1)
- After all of this, who or what could even consider separating us from God's love for us in Christ?

Look at Paul's list: Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. This is not meant to be exhaustive but representative. We could add our own items to the list: Cancer, Alzheimer's, job loss, infidelity, depression, wayward children, doubt, disillusion, hypocrisy.

Fill in the blank. The reality is that there is a multitude of things that are trying to separate us from the love of God. But here is Paul's resounding conclusion: there is nothing in all of creation, no matter where you look, no matter what you consider, that can separate us from this rich, deep, abiding love.

The cornerstone in all of this? We are not integral at all to its success. You see God's love is lavished on us. We receive it. We benefit from it. We rest in it. But we don't cause it. And we don't maintain it. In fact the same could be said about each of the elements of assurance that we've considered this morning. As far as I can tell our only contribution is groaning.

Reflect on the massive truths of Romans 8:

- The fact that we are free because God has completely dealt with sin and given us the righteousness of Christ
- The truth that we are adopted into the family of God
- The reality that we have a certain hope of future glory
- The comfort to know that we have a fully committed co-intercessor
- The certainty that we are loved by God and his love is rock solid, diamond hard and, quite literally, stronger than death

What should we do with these truths? How can we take them beyond the doors of this building?

First, we need to believe this is truth. 40 minutes of someone speaking doesn't make this true. Words printed on really thin paper doesn't make it true. God saying it. That's what makes it true. But will we believe it? It's so easy to read the Bible like an encyclopedia. Just the facts, m'am. Oh that we could read a chapter like this and own it and trust what it says.

On the heels of this, we need to trust God. Not just what he says, which is a crucial first step, but actually trusting him. If I could harken back to verse 31. If God is for you, who could be against you? Every sentence in the Bible declares this to be true. But will we actually trust our ever loving, sin-consuming, forgiveness-dispensing Father? I know this can be a cliché: but we need to believe, really believe, that God's got this.

From there we need to step closer to God. He is Abba, right? The Spirit is groaning with us, isn't he? These are demonstrations of intimacy. But here's the thing: intimacy is a two way street. Will you step closer? Will open your heart to God and say what needs to be said, knowing that he loves you and will never forsake you?

Out of this, we ought to ask, seek and knock. I know it's not directly from Romans 8, but think about it. If we believe God's word to be really true, that what it promises, it promises to us and if we really believe that God is for us, that our sins are fully and finally forgiven, that we are really his beloved children, that we certainly have a future and a hope, that both Jesus and the Spirit are interceding for us even at this very moment and that nothing, absolutely nothing ever can separate us from the rock solid love of God, why would we not reach out to him? Why would we not share with him the aches and groans, the glories and the victories? He is our Abba. Let's live like that's true