

## Sermon Summary #5

### Inseparable: Now and Forever Romans 8:1, 28-39

Doubt or uncertainty isn't always bad. It can often be productive, by driving us into deeper prayer and study and investigation. If we are absolutely convinced about everything, beyond the shadow of a doubt, we face the even bigger problem of arrogance and pride. Doubt humbles. It reminds us that we are finite and that our knowledge is always subject to improvement and increase.

But doubt can also be crippling in a way that undermines our relationship with God. If we are constantly doubting his word or wondering if he will fulfill his promises or are cynical of his stated intentions, it's hard to grow spiritually.

I've known many who are tormented by fears that God can't be as good as he portrays himself in Scripture. Some experience a gnawing anxiety about whether Jesus was really God and whether he can be trusted with their lives. But the worst and most crippling kind of doubt is when a child of God lives in fear and anxiety over the forgiveness of their sins and the security and safety of their soul in Christ.

In Colossians 2:2 Paul prayed for the Christians in that city that they might "*reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding.*"

Let me say a couple of things about this statement. *First, "full assurance" is a very real possibility for us.* That doesn't mean we will never again scratch our heads in bewilderment or wonder if a biblical statement can really mean what it seems to mean. But it does mean there is a degree of certainty concerning the most basic and foundational truths in Scripture that is attainable in this life, most important of which is *the assurance that we are truly the children of God and that nothing can separate us from his love.*

I don't think it's possible, at least not this side of heaven, for us to banish every wayward thought that might run counter to what God says in his Word. But that doesn't mean we can't experience what Paul refers to as "full assurance" (v. 2).

*Second, this assurance or conviction concerning the truth of the gospel is characterized by "riches" or "wealth".* There is *great treasure* in knowing that the gospel of Christ is true and that we are truly and forever saved and reconciled to God. I think this is Paul's way of saying that indescribable blessing and unfathomable joy and ineffable peace fill the human heart when it attains "full assurance" of all that God has made known of himself.

*Third, and perhaps most important of all, look closely again at Paul's words: "full assurance of understanding."* We could as easily render this, "full assurance that *comes from understanding*" or "unshakeable confidence that is produced by knowledge" or something similar.

The point is that *assurance is a function of knowledge.* Our confidence in God's promises is subject to varying degrees, depending on the depth of understanding that we have attained in the things of God. Not everyone is equally confident about what God has revealed to us in Christ, because not everyone is equally informed.

When knowledge is made an end in itself, or is prized for its own sake, it breeds arrogance, pride, and "puffs up" (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1). But when a person humbly applies himself to the pursuit of knowledge and looks to the power of the Spirit to bring illumination and insight, the wealth of our assurance increases and the riches of confident hope expand.

***Although we can have full assurance of eternal life the moment we trust in Christ (John 3:16), our confidence grows and intensifies in direct proportion to our cognitive grasp of the broad expanse of what God has revealed. Knowledge is the soil in which the seeds of peace and certainty germinate.***

As our understanding deepens, so too do the peace and tranquility of "*knowing that we know*" that God is true and will do what he has said he will do.

One of the goals I have in this series of messages on eternal security is to enable you to *defeat doubt* by immersing your mind in the Word of God. This is the ordained means by which the Spirit will indelibly imprint on your heart the joyful and undeniable assurance that what God has said, God will do. That is why we are spending so much time digging so deeply into these passages that describe the love and grace of Christ and the unshakable security we have in him.

Today we look at Romans 8 yet again and in even more detail. And we begin with the very first verse in the chapter.

### **Romans 8:1**

There is a *poetic beauty* in the way this chapter begins and the way it ends. It begins with **No Condemnation in Christ** (v. 1) and ends with **No Separation from Christ** (v. 39).

I want you to see three things Paul says about our eternal life and the forgiveness of sins we have in Christ.

First, note what Paul says about *the nature of the gift*: "No condemnation!" The word "condemnation" has a dark and ominous sound to it, and rightly so. We hear it used often.

- We read of someone "under sentence of condemnation" for some heinous crime committed.
- The President "condemns" the terrorist activity of 9/11.
- Survivors of the Holocaust "condemn" the RCC for apparently not speaking out against Hitler's agenda.
- A dilapidated building is "condemned" by the city and consigned to ultimate destruction.

No less foreboding is the use of the word in Scripture where it refers to the liability or exposure of sinners to the penal sanctions of divine law; vulnerability to divine wrath, etc. It is the opposite of *justification*. If to be justified is to stand boldly before God because we are righteous in his sight through faith alone, to be condemned is to cower with fear because we are unrighteous and worthy of death.

When we think of that word and all it entails: the loss of hope, fear of the future, uncertainty of today, shattered dreams, painful separation, etc., Paul's declaration suddenly begins to echo and reverberate in our hearts with a power and force that makes it feel as if we are going to explode with joy, exuberance, gratitude.

***If you are in Christ Jesus, there is no valid reason why you should ever again experience fear or apprehension about your relationship with God or your eternal destiny.*** That doesn't mean you *won't* experience such fear. It does mean there is no valid reason why you *should*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains:

"There are many who misunderstand this. They seem to think of the Christian as a man who, if he confesses his sin and asks for forgiveness, is forgiven. At that moment he is not under condemnation. But then if he should sin again he is back once more under condemnation. Then he repents and confesses his sin again, and asks for pardon, and he is cleansed once more. So to them the Christian is a man who is constantly passing from one state to the other; back and forth; condemned, not condemned. Now that, according to the Apostle, is a wholly mistaken notion, and a complete failure to understand the position. The Christian is a man who can never be condemned; he can never come into a state of condemnation again. 'No condemnation!' The Apostle is not talking about his experience, but about his position, his standing, his status; he is in a position in which, being justified, he can never again come under condemnation. That is the meaning of this word 'no'. It means 'Never'."

Why is this declaration by Paul so important? Two reasons: (1) Nothing paralyzes as powerfully as guilt/shame. Financial worries, family struggles, physical pain, etc. are hindrances and create pressure in life. But nothing makes life look like it's not worth getting up for like guilt, shame, and condemnation. (2) It's also important because *the only sin we can defeat is a sin that has been forgiven*. There are natural ways of overcoming bad habits: therapy, formulas, will-power, etc. But they invariably produce self-righteousness, not God's righteousness.

**Forgiveness of sin, the removal of guilt, with the consequent declaration: no condemnation, must precede our battle against sin if it is to empower our battle against sin. God's declaration of "No Condemnation" must come first and thus enable and energize our transformation into righteousness-loving, Christ-exalting people. The divine declaration must come before the human transformation. Being right with God must precede doing right for God.**

Second, note what Paul says about *who enjoys* this blessing. Paul does not say Christians are free from condemnation because they are sinless but *because they are in Christ*. "No Condemnation" is not a universal blessing. It is reserved for those who are *in Christ* through faith. We must be careful to resist the temptation of false sentimentality that beckons us to give false assurance to a non-Christian simply because they are "sincere," "nice," "religious," "believe in God," etc.

To be "in Christ" by faith alone means, among other things, that his righteousness has been reckoned or imputed to you. It means you are united with him in a spiritual covenant. It means there is an almost indefinable mystical oneness or spiritual fellowship with the Lord that you share every moment of life. To put it as simply as possible, *to be "in Christ" means you are saved by him and are in vibrant spiritual union with him.*

**N.B.** Some Greek manuscripts add to v. 1 – "who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." (see KJV). No. Early scribe wouldn't let v. 1 stand alone (fear?). So he took last phrase of v. 4 and appended it here on v. 1 to soften the force of Paul's statement, as if to say: "Oh, sure, there's no condemnation . . . so long as you're walking in the Spirit and not after the flesh." But when are we ever walking sufficiently and consistently in the Spirit as to escape condemnation? If our freedom from condemnation is suspended on or conditioned by or only as good as our success in not indulging the flesh, we are hopeless! It will never happen this side of heaven.

Third and finally, *when is it true?* Now! Not when we get older. Not when we get more mature. Not when we overcome all sinful habits. Not when we get past being hurt by others. Not when all our bills are paid. Not when we get a new job. Not when we learn more of the Bible. Not when people start treating us nicely and with respect. Not when we get the praise and public adulation we think we deserve. Not when our enemies stop persecuting us. Not when the wrongs against us have been put right. Not when we've been vindicated. Not when we stop making fools of ourselves in public. Not when we stop failing God. Not when we break free of all addictions. Not when we've stopped doubting God. **Now!**

### **Romans 8:28-30**

It is important to remember that everyone who believes in the Bible believes in predestination and election. The issue isn't whether you have a doctrine of election but *what kind of doctrine* you have. The verb *to choose/elect* is used 22x in the NT, 7 of which refer to election to salvation or eternal life. The noun *elect* also occurs 22x, 17 of which refer to men and women chosen or elected to eternal life. The noun *election* occurs 7x, all with reference to salvation. The verb *to predestine* occurs 6x, 4 of which refer to men being predestined to salvation (cf. Eph. 1:5,11).

It's not our goal today to address the nature of election but rather to observe *the unbreakable and eternal chain of God's saving purpose for us in Christ*. I say it is "eternal" because it spans eternity past into eternity future. It starts with divine foreknowledge before the foundation of the world and consummates in glorification in the age to come.

**(1) The first link in this eternal chain of salvation is foreknowledge.** I'm not going to address all the many theories of what this means. Based on the use of this language in both OT and NT, my understanding of it is this.

Often in Scripture the verb "to know" refers to something far more than mere mental or intellectual understanding. It is used as a virtual *synonym for "love."* It means to set one's affection upon or to highly regard or to delight in

someone with peculiar interest (see Gen. 18:19; Exod. 2:25; Psalm 1:6; 144:3; Jer. 1:5; Amos 3:2; Hosea 13:5; Matt. 7:23; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 John 3:1).

In an earlier sermon in this series we looked at Matthew 7:23 where Jesus reveals his future response to false disciples at the last judgment: "I never **knew** you, depart from Me." As Baugh has pointed out, "Clearly, mere intellectual cognition is ruled out as the meaning of 'know' here, since it is precisely Jesus' knowledge of their real motives and covenantal status and commitments that leads to their condemnation. Rather, he says that these people never had covenantal relations with him; the Good Shepherd did not know them as his sheep, and they did not know him (John 10:14)" ("The Meaning of Foreknowledge," p. 194). Cf. Gal. 4:8-9

Thus, **to foreknow is to forelove**. That God foreknew us is but another way of saying that he set his gracious and merciful regard upon us, that he knew us from eternity past with a sovereign and distinguishing delight. God's foreknowledge is an active, creative work of divine love. It is not bare pre-vision which merely recognizes a difference between men who believe and men who do not believe. God's foreknowledge creates that difference!

**(2) The second link in this eternal chain of salvation is predestination.** *Predestination* is not synonymous with foreknowledge. Foreknowledge focuses attention on the distinguishing love of God whereby people are elected. *Predestination* points to the decision God made of what he intended to do with those whom he foreknew (see Acts 4:28; Eph. 1:5,11). *Predestination* is that act in eternity past in which God *ordained* or *decreed* that those on whom he had set his saving love would inherit eternal life.

**(3) The third link in the eternal chain of salvation is calling.** This is not merely an invitation to come to Christ. This "calling" is the powerful work of the Holy Spirit by which he effectively secures a response in the sinner's heart. We know that because all who are called are also justified. Paul doesn't say that only "some" of those called are justified. Paul "fuses the called and justified together so that those who have experienced calling have also inevitably received the blessing of justification" (Schreiner, 450-51).

**(4) The fourth link in the eternal chain of salvation is justification.** I hope I don't have to spend much time in explaining this. Justification is the legal declaration by God that the righteousness of his Son, Jesus Christ, has been imputed to us or reckoned to us so that we stand in his presence fully accepted and fully forgiven.

**(5) The fifth and final link in the eternal chain of salvation is glorification.** Note the use of the past tense in describing glorification. Yet we are told in Romans 8:18-25 that glorification is still future. Paul clearly wants to emphasize the fact that our glorification is so sure, so securely set and sealed in the mind and purpose and predestined plan of God that it may be spoken of as having already occurred.

Now here is what I especially want you to see.

Note well that each link in this eternal chain of salvation is *co-extensive* with every other link. Paul makes it clear that the objects of God's saving activity are the same from start to finish. **Those whom** he foreknew, not one more nor one less, **these** he predestined. And **those whom** he predestined, not one more nor one less, **these** he called. And **those whom** he called, not one more nor one less, **these** he justified. And **those whom** he justified, not one more nor one less, **these** he glorified. There is a continuity in the recipients of salvation from divine foreknowledge in eternity past all the way through glorification in eternity future.

So, how many did God lose in the process? Not one! All whom he foreknew in eternity past will ultimately be glorified in eternity future. Not one is lost. Not one! *No one who is foreknown fails to be predestined. And no one who is predestined fails to be called. And no one who is called fails to be justified. And no one who is justified fails to be glorified!*

### **Romans 8:31-39**

Last week we looked at vv. 31-32, so let's turn our attention to vv. 33-39.

If there is one overriding, all-consuming fear that people have when it comes to the security of their salvation, it has to do with their sin: "My sins are simply too numerous. I keep doing the same stupid, selfish things over and over

and over again. When I think of how ungrateful I am, how prone I am to repeat past failures, how prideful and lustful and weak and addicted I am, ***I find it almost impossible to believe that a God worth his salt would bother to put up with me any longer and continue to invest his energy in my life.***

In response, **Paul doesn't say that people won't charge us with wrongdoing.** They do it all the time! He's not suggesting that Satan won't make every effort to condemn us by bringing up to God and to our own consciences the many ways we fall short. ***But all such charges fall short. All such accusations are to no avail. Why? Is it because we are innocent of what they accuse us of? No. In fact, we are probably guilty of a lot more than they can think of or find time to mention! They are to no avail because "Christ Jesus is the one who died" (v. 34a) for us!***

The penalty which those sins call for, whether they be past, present, or yet future, has already been paid in full! How can anyone condemn you when Christ has already been condemned in your place? What is left for you to suffer? What guilt or penalty remains that might damage your relationship with God?

And it doesn't stop there. ***He not only died but was raised from the dead*** to testify to the sufficiency and perfection of what he accomplished for you on the cross.

And he not only was raised from the dead but was ***exalted to the right hand of God the Father***, the place of supremacy and authority and honor and power.

But he was exalted not only to demonstrate his power and authority but also so that he might ***intercede*** on your behalf (v. 34b). Each time an accusation is brought against you, **Jesus turns to the Father** and says: "I was reckoned guilty for that sin. I died for it. Your justice has been satisfied." Over and over and over and over again . . .

***This is the basis or ground on which Paul declares in v. 33b, "It is God who justifies!"*** God is the one who declares that you are righteous in his sight, *no matter how loudly* your enemies may say that you are guilty, *no matter how viciously* Satan may attack you, *no matter how painfully* your own conscience may scream in protest. It is God who justifies you! Who, then, could possibly bring a charge against you that might stick?

And *when*, exactly, did God do this? According to Romans 4:5 God justifies the ***"ungodly"***! God passed a favorable sentence on your behalf *in full view of your moral failures*, in full view of your shortcomings. God justified you ***with his eyes wide open!*** He knew the very worst about you at the time he accepted you for Jesus' sake. God didn't wait until you were "godly" and then justify you on the basis of what you've achieved. He looked at you in full and exhaustive awareness of every sin you would ever commit and because of what Jesus achieved he declared you righteous in his sight.

For some of you, I suspect *that may still not be enough*. You still live in fear that God's love won't last. You are ***still terrified that something somewhere at some time will wrench you from God's loving embrace***. That's why Paul writes what he does in vv. 35-39.

Here again Paul addresses that gnawing fear in your soul that some day, some way, Jesus will stop loving you: "I've had enough! I'm fed up! I've given you every opportunity, every chance, every benefit of the doubt! It's over! Get out of my sight!"

Perhaps you think this way because others who've said they would never cease loving you finally did, and what reason do I have to believe that God is any different from them? So here Paul goes to great lengths to drive home the point.

***Tribulation*** – Perhaps one day when I'm suffering some trial or persecution I won't respond the way I should. I'll get angry at God or bitter or curse his name. Maybe tribulation will separate me from the love of God in Christ. No.

***Distress*** – What about the inner turmoil, the emotional anxiety, the doubts and fears and despair I so often feel? Will God some day look at my heart and say, "I've had enough"? No.

***Persecution*** – Will what others can do to me: words, rejection, physical abuse, etc. separate me from the love of God in Christ? No.

***Famine, nakedness, danger, sword*** – If I should ever go hungry or without clothing or I’m exposed to untold dangers and threats or perhaps even killed, slaughtered as just so many sheep, does that mean God has abandoned me and cut me off from his love in Christ Jesus? No.

Far from it! “In all these things,” all of them, every single one of them, “we are more than conquerors.” It is “in” them, not by evading them or avoiding them or being spared the devastation they bring, but right smack dab in the middle of them, we conquer through Christ.

***Note well: it is “through him who loved us” that the conquering comes. It isn’t our courage or our resolve or our endurance or determination, but through the presence of Christ at all times and on the basis of what he has accomplished that we conquer. It is not our hold on him, but his hold on us that enables us to stand securely through the very worst.***

As if to hammer the final nail into the coffin of our doubts and fears, Paul lists every conceivable threat to the love of God for us:

***Neither death nor life*** – Death can’t sever you from his love. In fact, it only serves to bring you into his glorious presence! Nor is there anything that life can throw your way that might cut you off from his affection.

***Not angels or rulers*** – Angels are good angels, rulers are demons. The point is that no spiritual power, whether good or evil, can separate you from God’s love in Christ.

***Nor things present nor things to come*** – Nothing now, nothing future.

***Nor powers*** – No supernatural force, no miraculous event, nothing, no matter how strong it may seem, can separate you from Christ.

***Nor height nor depth*** – Nothing above, nothing below.

***Nor anything else in all creation*** – This final phrase is designed to shut off and close down any possible loopholes. No being, no thing, no event, nothing that is or ever will be, not even yourself (after all, you are a created thing) will be able to separate you from the love of Christ!

**But what about God himself?** He’s not created. He’s the Creator. So maybe he’ll separate me from the love of Christ.

But the whole point of Paul’s argument in Romans 8 is to reassure you that God is on your side and eternally for you.

v. 31 – God is for us (not against us)

v. 32 – God will give you everything you need to stay in his love

v. 33 – God will not accuse you; God is the one who justifies you

Conclusion: A story of our visit to the Texas State Fair . . . This is why Paul prayed for the Colossians and why I and others pray for you today, that you might "***reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding.***"

Praise God that we can know today with full assurance that the Christian and the Lord Jesus Christ are truly **inseparable, now and forever!**