

The Christian's Exultation - Part 1

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 8:31-34

Preached on: Sunday, February 26, 2012

Will you join me this morning by taking your Bibles and turning to Paul's epistle to the Romans, Romans chapter eight. This morning I will begin a two part series on the Christian's exultation. We have much to praise God about and we see some of these great truths detailed for us beginning in verse 31. Romans chapter eight verse 31. And even though we will only look at a few of these verses this morning, I want to read this last section of this great chapter two you.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 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, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹

Indeed, this is a passage that speaks to the Christian's exaltation. I pray that you have come here starving for the greatness of God, because, once again, we have a passage set before us that brings us to his very throne in humility, an amazing passage that should arrest the attention of every saint, one that allows us to behold the grandeur of the gospel from yet another vantage point. In fact, whenever you view your salvation it is like looking at light being refracted through a diamond. Every vantage point gives you get another opportunity to see something beautiful and brilliant. So today we will once again examine the great doctrines of our salvation.

Before we look closely at the text, may I remind you that the apostle Paul has told us in Ephesians six that we are to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might? And he tells us that we are to put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. And one of the devil's greatest schemes is to distort the Word of God. We saw this, for example, back in the Garden in the very beginning. And in that text in Ephesians six the way we stand firm against these schemes, especially the schemes of distortion and other types of temptation is to gird our loins with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of

¹ Romans 8:31-39.

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peace. In other words, know that that great war is over because of what Christ has done. We are to take up the shield of faith. We are to wear the helmet of salvation, take up the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and so forth.

And here in Romans chapter eight as you look at this text, you will see many of the elements of this great panoply that we are to wear, the armor of God that helps us to stand firm.

And if you understand these truths and live consistently with them, you will not suffer defeat in your Christian life. And so it is for this reason that we are going through every verse, every word very, very slowly and carefully and systematically so that we don't miss anything that God would have for us. Because frankly, dear friends, if you lack doctrine, if you do not understand Bible doctrine, you will lack discernment and if you lack discernment in your life, you will be vulnerable to defeat. We see it all of the time. You will be vulnerable to moral compromise. You will be vulnerable to spiritual depression. You will be vulnerable to apathy, especially with respect to the Word of God. It is really not all that important to you. You will be vulnerable to living a superficial Christian life. You will lack a zeal for evangelism and on and on it goes.

Now may I remind you again that theme of Romans chapter eight is the assurance of the believer? It speaks to our eternal security. Now I understand that many of you have been taught that somehow you are responsible for your salvation, that because you chose God he chose you. Therefore, since you are in charge of your salvation, given your sin and sometimes your stupidity, it is possible that you just might stop trusting in Christ and, therefore, lose your salvation, forfeit your salvation that you once embraced.

This is a very serious issue. This is not some secondary or tertiary issue reserved just for theologians to haggle over. I have spent literally hundreds of hours over the course of my ministry dealing with people to struggle with these things in a very significant way. They have been taught that you just can't know for sure if you are going to make it to heaven. So you better get to work. You better get serious about living right and serving Christ. And then every group has its lists of things that you better do, what you need to do, what you need to think, what you need to wear, how you need to look and so on and so forth.

In fact, one who came out of such a background said that they remembered hearing over and over again, quote, "If you lack assurance, you are probably lacking in church attendance."

Well, that settles it. Just go to church more and that will take care of your assurance.

Well, many people struggle with this attitude of just not feeling they are good enough to make the cut. How sad to live life as a believer being weary and burdened and unhappy and sometimes angry, certainly anxious, frankly miserable. So much for grace.

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Another dear friend who came out of this background remembered being told, quote, “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.”

How sad. The emphasis seems to always be in these circles what man must do versus what God has done, a huge difference.

Jesus said:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”²

He said:

“For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”³

Beloved, it is God who hangs on to us.

1 Peter 1:3 and following we are told that we have been born again to a living hope. He goes on to say that our inheritance is protected by the power of God through faith. And then he goes on to say:

“In this you greatly rejoice.”⁴

How sad those who do not greatly rejoice who are always trying to hang on.

Well, this is the very error that the apostle Paul tries to dispel here in chapter eight. Well certainly the Holy Spirit knew that many people would struggle with their assurance. And so he reveals these amazing truths in this last section of chapter eight, verses 31 through 39. It is what I would call the grand finale of this grand symphony of assurance. This is the hallelujah chorus of triumph and joy knowing that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

So God knew this would be a problem, so Paul now is trying to put their minds at ease. Many of the early saints were confused by the Judaizers who had infiltrated the church. These were legalistic Jews that confessed to Christ. They professed him to be their Savior. In fact they were deceiving themselves because they insisted that in order to maintain your salvation, that if you were a Jew or even a Gentile, you must be circumcised and you must also continue to obey the law. Otherwise your salvation would be lost. This is exactly what the council of Jerusalem repudiated in Acts chapter 15. This

² Matthew 11:28.

³ Matthew 11:30.

⁴ 1 Peter 1:6.

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is what plagued the Church at Galatian causing Paul to write in chapter five beginning in verse one:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.⁵

He is saying there that you have lost your grip on the principle of saving grace, the very heart of the gospel, that it is by grace alone through faith alone and this proves that you never had salvation to begin with. You have turned your back on the gospel, the gospel that you have been exposed to. Now you are seeking to be justified by keeping the law.

So he goes on to say in verse six.

For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.⁶

In other words, that is the important thing.

So, obviously God knew that false teachers would come along and exploit those who misunderstood the Word of God and therefore had doubts about their salvation. He understood that these teachers would come along and exploit these individuals by giving them all manner of things, religious works that they would have to do to somehow maintain what God began.

So in anticipation of all of this, the apostle is going to reaffirm the positive doctrines that he has previously stated and he is going to do this by restating them in the negative. He wants to squelch, once and for all the opposition. So he begins in verse 31 with a question.

“What then shall we say to these things?”⁷

“These things” refers to all that has come before in this chapter, but not just this chapter, all that has come before in this epistle, the entire explanation of the way of salvation. What are we going to say to these things, that the just shall live by faith, not by works?

⁵ Galatians 5:1-4.

⁶ Galatians 5:5-6.

⁷ Romans 8:31.

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May I remind you of just a few of the things that he has said thus far. You will remember in chapter five he gives us the wonderful benefits of our justification, that we have peace with God. We have access to God. We have a permanent standing in grace before God. We have a jubilant hope of glory. We have joy in tribulation. He gives us proof of our salvation. We have a subjective awareness of God's love. There we learn that we can rejoice in God to the degree that he becomes then unequaled delight of our heart. All of this because of his grace, that we have been saved from the wrath to come. We have been given eternal life.

So he is saying:

“What then shall we say to these things?”⁸

But not just those things that I mentioned. What about just in the verses before in chapter eight? He has already said:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”⁹ in verse one.

In other words, we have been delivered from the penalty of the law. In verse two he tells us how we have been united to Christ by the Holy Spirit, that this is a supernatural, a living and indissoluble union by which Christ's life becomes ours. What are we going to say to this? This forms the very basis of our salvation and all of its blessing.

In verse five he tells us that the whole realm of our spiritual living, the whole realm of our being now, our bent of life is dominated by the Spirit of God, not by the flesh. We have been adopted as his children in verse 15.

Verse 16.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”¹⁰

In verse 17 he reminds us that we are joint heirs with Christ. In verse 23 we have the first fruits of the Spirit, the Spirit of God that indwells us and therefore guarantees that we will have the redemption of our body.

In verse 26 he tells us how the Spirit helps us to pray as we should. He intercedes before us before God. Can you imagine that?

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Romans 8:1.

¹⁰ Romans 8:16.

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And we are also told in verses 29 and 30 that we have been foreknown, that we have been predestined, that we have been justified and glorified. All of these things presented to us in the past tense to demonstrate that our glorification is so absolutely certain that God can speak of it as if it has already happened.

So Paul says:

“What then shall we say to these things?”¹¹

I mean, there is the sense of incredulity here. He is just incredulous. It is like you have got to be kidding me. Do you really think in light of all of this that you can't have assurance of salvation? That is his point here. It is unbelievable to think that.

But, in light of this, yes, there will still be those who think, well, I am just not real sure.

So he begins to offer up a series of challenges against doctrine of the perseverance of the saints to show the utter impossibility that anything could ever separate us from the love of God. And then he starts with the question:

“If God is for us, who is against us?”¹²

Number one challenge is a challenge against the power of God. He is saying here, “What foe could possibly foil the purposes of God? What foe could possibly prevail over those for whom God has done all of these things? Who is going to disannul what God has determined?”

That is the point. If God is for us... it could literally be translated since or because God is for us, who is against us? We would call this, by the way, a no brainer. That is the idea here. Our confidence is in the very character of our omnipotent God. And who is more powerful than God? That is what he is saying. Who is more powerful than God? All of the sudden the hands begin to raise. Well, I am.

You see, my free will is more powerful than God's sovereign will. You see, I might stop believing and I have the power to do that and I might foolishly stop trusting in Christ. I might fall into some grievous sin and therefore cancel out his plan for me. So I must constantly keep working, keep believing. I have got to constantly keep my sin at bay lest it overtakes me and I forfeit my salvation.

How sad. Once again, I would say to you if you believe that, don't you realize, again, what Peter said in 1 Peter one verse four? That we have an inheritance which is

¹¹ Romans 8:31.

¹² Ibid.

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imperishable. It is undefiled and will not fade away. It is reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God. That is good enough for me right there,

“... protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”¹³

I would ask you, dear friend, how much work must you do? How much work does it require to maintain your salvation? How holy must you be, especially in light of the fact that you only see the very snow flake on the very tip of the iceberg of your sin?

Since we were powerless to save ourselves in the first place, salvation being a work of God's grace, how is it that we now have the power to nullify that same grace, that grace that he began in us and that he has promised to protect? Is the imputed righteousness of Christ not enough? Do you not believe what we are told here in the very first verse of chapter eight?

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”¹⁴

Well, yes, yes, I... I... I... I know all of that, but I could only stay saved if I persevere to the very end, because, after all, didn't Jesus say in John 15:6:

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”¹⁵

So what if I stop abiding?

So sad to see these kinds of misinterpretations of Scripture. You see, the imagery there speaks of the judgment that awaits those who were never saved to begin with. The word “abide” means to remain and to stay around. And obviously those who remain prove the genuineness of their faith. Those who don't abide never believed in the first place.

1 John 2:19 reminds of this.

“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”¹⁶

Jesus said in Mathew 24:13:

¹³ 1 Peter 1:5.

¹⁴ Romans 8:1.

¹⁵ John 15:6.

¹⁶ 1 John 2:19.

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“But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.”¹⁷

You see, enduring does not maintain your salvation, it proves it. It is God who maintains our salvation, not us. This is why Peter addressed the saints in 2 Peter one and verse two by saying, quote:

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”¹⁸

He goes on to say:

“...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.”¹⁹

And this is why he said in his first epistle that true believers are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed. This is why he said, “In this you greatly rejoice.”

You see the magnificent power of God to save is exactly what animated David’s praise. You will remember in Psalm 27 verse one he said:

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?”²⁰

In fact, inherent in the new covenant is a divine promise that guarantees our perseverance. We read of this in Jeremiah 32 and verse 40. There God says:

“I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.”²¹

Well, yes, pastor, I hear all of this, but... but we are told in Philippians 2:12 that we have got to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Well, that is true, but that does not speak of maintaining your salvation through human works. In fact, the Greek verb rendered “work out” means to continually work to bring something to fulfillment. And that can’t possibly refer to salvation, because we know from other passages, for example in Romans chapter three verses 21 through 24 and Ephesians 2:8-9, there we are told that we are justified as a gift by his grace. It is not through works. If it was through works, we would have reason to boast.

¹⁷ Matthew 24:13.

¹⁸ 2 Peter 1:2.

¹⁹ 2 Peter 1:3.

²⁰ Psalm 27:1.

²¹ Jeremiah 32:40.

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So to work out our salvation means to be actively involved in a personal pursuit of holiness and fear and trembling. In other words, we don't just passively let go and let God and just disengage and live our lives for ourselves and just wait for God to take us to glory. But we are to have a health fear of offending him and a reverential awe of his holiness.

But, my friends, we do this as part of the process of sanctification over which God superintends. That is why he goes on to add in the very next verse, in verse 13:

“...for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”²²

It is for this reason that Paul said earlier in that same epistle, chapter one verse six:

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”²³

I would remind you that repeatedly in Scripture God uses pleas and various kinds of warnings as his means to secure our perseverance in the faith. For example, Jude urges believers in verse 21:

“...keep yourselves in the love of God...”²⁴

But then he immediately points out to them in verse 24 that it is God who is able keep you from stumbling. He is the one that will make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy.

In 2 Peter one verse 10 Peter expresses his desire for believers to enjoy the blessings of assurance and just the joy of perseverance that continues to validate the genuineness of our faith. And so he urges believers to, quote:

“... be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.”²⁵

“Make certain” means to validate, to confirm. And he has called and chosen you. And dramatically there it is literally saying that we are to assure ourselves of God's effectual call upon us to salvation based upon his sovereign election.

He goes on to say:

“...for as long as you practice these things...”²⁶

²² Philippians 2:13.

²³ Philippians 1:6.

²⁴ Jude 21.

²⁵ 2 Peter 1:10.

²⁶ Ibid.

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And the things that he is referring to are the moral virtues essential to holy living that he had just described, moral excellence, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. As long as you practice these things you will never stumble.

He is not referring to losing your salvation. He is referring to stumbling into doubt and discouragement, living in fear that, perhaps, you are not saved or that you have forfeited your salvation, which, by the way, will always be the experience even of a true believer if he is not practicing and increasing these virtues of righteous living and bearing spiritual fruit.

He goes on to say in that same text in verse 11:

“...for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”²⁷

Boy, that is what I want. I want that abundant supply, the idea that we can have this rich joy of assurance in our life and we can have the hope of eternal blessing in our future life in heaven.

Now you must also understand that professing Christians that immerse themselves in the things of this world and live as if God doesn't even exist will inevitably struggle with the assurance of their salvation. And they should, because there could be good reason that they are not saved and they think they are.

Matthew seven Jesus warns of that very thing that most people who profess Jesus do not really know him. There are the few and there are the many.

I have talked to many people who have that haunting reality in the middle of the night when you can't sleep and it is all quiet and suddenly you have that experience of wondering: Do I really know Jesus? Am I really going to heaven?

Certainly, as 1 John 2:15 tells us, if you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you.

But those how are practicing moral virtues essential to holy living will prove their salvation. They will enjoy the blessings of assurance or the fruit of perseverance even as we read earlier in our Scripture reading in 1 John three verse 21.

“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God.”²⁸

²⁷ 2 Peter 1:11.

²⁸ 1 John 3:20.

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So this is the Christian's exaltation. This is that euphoric joy that we can have because we are living in Christ and we are living for Christ who said in John 10:10:

"I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly."²⁹

My friend, if you are struggling with the assurance of your salvation you are not enjoying that abundant life. What a miserable life it would be to live with that gnawing fear, always wondering if your salvation is in jeopardy because, after all, it is up to me to maintain it.

Dear Christian, since God is for you, no one can be against you, not even yourself. As powerful as you might think you are.

Millions live under this bondage.

Think of the apostate religious system, the Roman Catholic Church that insists that it has the power to both grant as well as revoke grace, a power they believe has been given to the Church by Christ. They also teach that you can forfeit your salvation if you commit mortal sins, sins that are very serious, grave sins they call them as specified by the 10 Commandments, sins that you have committed deliberately and with full knowledge, sins that you know have enormous offense before God. They believe that this will destroy the life of grace within a man, assuming they ever had it. It would result in eternal condemnation. But nowhere in Scripture do we see any person or any ecclesiastical system given any power whatsoever to either grant or revoke grace. Salvation, once again, is a work of God. It is not a work of man.

The great English Puritan theologian of the 1600s Stephen Charnock spoke so eloquently about the power of God and I believe I put this in your bulletin. He said this. "The power of God is that ability and strength whereby he can bring to pass whatsoever he pleases, whatsoever his infinite wisdom may direct and whatsoever the infinite purity of his will may resolve. As holiness is the beauty, all God's attributes so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfections of the divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels if power did not step in to execute them. Without power, his mercy would be but feeble pity, his promises an empty sound, his threatenings a mere scarecrow. God's power is like himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible. It can neither be checked, restrained nor frustrated by the creature," end quote.

Beloved, I ask you. If God is resolved to accomplish his purposes on behalf of those he has chosen to save that he might make his Son preeminent in all things, then don't you think our enemies will be his enemies? Obviously the answer is yes. Whether it is our own sinful flesh or whether it is Satan who is described in Revelation 12:10 as the accuser of the brethren or whether it is some apostate religious system that tells us we

²⁹ John 10:10.

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have got to keep the law or some system that arrogantly believes that it has the power to grant or revoke grace. Beloved, since God is for us, nothing can stand against us.

But then Paul poses a second challenge. This is a challenge against the love of God. Notice in verse 32.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”³⁰

This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. And Paul employed this frequently in his writings. He starts with a proposition that is greater to prove one that is lesser. He is saying that God has already done the greatest thing, the greatest thing he could possibly do. He gave us his Son. He did not spare his own Son, but he delivered him up to death for us all. So why would he not also, along with this gracious gift of the sacrifice of his Son, lavish upon us that which, by comparison is so trivial? If he loved us while we were yet sinners, would he not continue to love us after he has cleansed us from that sin by the blood of Jesus? Of course. He loved us so much even in eternity past knowing that one day when we were born and as we began to live our life we would be rebellious and yet even in light of all of that, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21:

“He made Him [referring to Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”³¹

The point here is given the immeasurable greatness of God’s love in his supreme sacrifice on our behalf, it would be absolutely inconceivable to think that he would fail to continue his work to ultimately bring us to glory that his Son might have the glory of redemption.

Galatians one verse four says this.

“[He] gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”³²

And in chapter three verse 13 he says:

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law.”³³

And Jesus has promised, has he not, that he has gone away to prepare a place for us. We read about this in John 14 verses two and three. Jesus says that I have gone to prepare a place for you and I will come again. I am going to receive you unto myself that where I

³⁰ Romans 8:32.

³¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

³² Galatians 1:4.

³³ Galatians 3:13.

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am, there you may be also, that is, if you want to, that is, as long as you maintain your salvation, as long as you keep trusting, you keep hanging on, you keep obeying.

Beloved, that is nowhere in the text.

John 6:37 Jesus said:

“All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.”³⁴

There is no unless after that. In verse 39 he says:

“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.”³⁵

In other words, I will accomplish all of the Father’s will. But what is the Father’s will? Well, we have already learned that even in chapter eight here. It is to conform all those whom he fore loved and predestined into the image of Christ. It is to make sure that they are justified, that they are glorified, that Jesus might have the preeminence in all things.

Given all of this we can see the rhetorical nature of Paul’s question in verse 32.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”³⁶

The phrase “freely gives” translates the Greek word χαρίζομαι (khar-id’-zom-ahee) and it means to bestow graciously or out of grace. This includes the idea of God’s gracious forgiveness as well as his gracious giving to us all things. Obviously he will give us all things.

Ephesians 1:3.

“[He] has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”³⁷

Beloved, this is our present possession waiting to be fully realized.

So surely God who has already done the greater will likewise do the lesser. He will not refuse the lesser. That is Paul’s argument. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of Christ as he will go on to affirm.

³⁴ John 6:37.

³⁵ John 6:39.

³⁶ Romans 8:32.

³⁷ Ephesians 1:3.

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But notice verse 33 where Paul poses yet another perceived challenge to our security. Number three, this is a challenge against our justification whereby God has declared us to be righteous based on the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Now here the perceived accuser is trying to prove that we remain in a state of condemnation and the challenge is set forth here in two questions, both of which the inspired apostle will answer. Beginning in verse 33 he says:

“Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?”³⁸

And the beginning of verse 34 he says:

“Who is the one who condemns?”³⁹

Now, first of all, I want you to notice closely what the text says. Notice how the Spirit of God describes believers. In verse 33 we are called “God’s elect.”

I humbly ask you. Is this how you describe yourself? You should. This is how God describes you. You know, if we did describe ourselves this way more often, I believe it would go a long way to eliminate most all of the unnecessary debate about God’s sovereignty in salvation and the doctrine of the of perseverance of the saints because, indeed, we are God’s elect through no merit of our own. We are debtors to his grace.

Beloved, please hear me. Based don the Word of God, we are people of promise according to God’s purpose in which we have no power to interfere, none whatsoever.

In Hebrews chapter six the writer assures us of our eternal security on this very basis. Beginning in verse 17 he says:

“In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise...”⁴⁰

Don’t you love that? We are heirs to the promise.

“...to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us.”⁴¹

³⁸ Romans 8:33.

³⁹ Romans 8:34.

⁴⁰ Hebrews 6:17.

⁴¹ Hebrews 6:17-18.

The Christian's Exultation - Part 1

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Romans 8:31-34

Preached on: Sunday, February 26, 2012

Oh, dear Christian, please hear this. You have fled to Jesus for refuge and, therefore, you must lay hold of this great hope, a hope that is anchored in the unchangeable purpose of God. You are an heir of his promise, a promise to give you eternal life, to bring you home to glory.

So on what basis could you possibly question your eternal security?

So here the apostle Paul brings the Christian before God's bar of justice to try to prove his point. It is a courtroom scene that is in view here. But who can possibly bring a charge against us? Who could present this legal challenge in the highest of all courts?

Well, perhaps, as I said earlier, Satan could be in mind here. He is the accuser of the brethren, revelation 12:10. You will recall that he accused Job's faith as being a sham, that is righteousness was really untested, that he worshipped with impure motives, he just acted righteously in order to manipulate God to bless him and just all a hoax and that his faith would falter if it was tested. But it didn't.

In Zechariah chapter three, an amazing text where the prophet reveals a vision that God gave him where he saw Joshua the high priest, quote, "...clothed with filthy garments..."⁴² in verse three meaning the priest living in a perpetual state of defilement because of his sinful flesh and so therefore from Satan's perspective, his life rendered the priesthood as well as all of the people to be morally impure and unworthy of God's protection and therefore subject to condemnation, not to blessing. And so the text goes on to read.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"⁴³

My, what a great example of God's faithfulness to protect those whom he has chosen for himself? Satan's accusations are absolutely meaningless because God protects those on the basis of his righteousness, not theirs.

In Luke chapter 22 you will recall how Satan tried to do the same thing to Peter. In verse 31 Jesus warned him saying:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail."⁴⁴

⁴² Zechariah 3:3.

⁴³ Zechariah 3:1-2.

⁴⁴ Luke 22:31-32.

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And certainly it is one of Satan's greatest passions to try to destroy the faith of the Lord's faithful servants. But his efforts are in vain. Sometimes other people will be the ones that make these accusations against your Christianity. Other times it will be even your own conscience, because, indeed, we still sin, do we not? Of course we do. But all of these challenges are utterly meaningless. Why? The end of verse 33.

"God is the one who justifies."⁴⁵

God is the one who has declared you righteous. So Paul asks in verse 34:

"...who is the one who condemns?"⁴⁶

Now, again, he is just incredulous here. It is as if he is saying, "I am not believing that anyone could possibly think that a legitimate charge could be made against a person whom God has justified. So who is the one who condemns?"

Now think about it. There is only one who has that authority and that is the lawgiver.

My friend, there is no higher tribunal than that of our holy God. God alone is judge and what has he done? He has already declared us to be without guilt. There is no condemnation. So we are cleared of all charges. Even though in some cases they are true, because we continue to sin. But because God is the one who justifies, all of our sins—past, present and future—have been covered by the blood of Christ. We are no longer under the law, Romans 6:14. We now live in the realm of grace. There is not ever going to be that kind of a tribunal. We are not merely pardoned and forgiven—please hear this. We are not merely pardoned and forgiven. We have been declared just in his sight.

And, dear friends, justification is not some kind of legal fiction here. God does not declare righteous those who are really guilty. In other words, we are not standing before the holy judge in all of our filthy rags of sin with a sign hanging around our neck that says, "Guilty, but pardoned." Not at all. What the sign would say is, "Not guilty, blameless, completely righteous." And we would be clothed in the righteousness of Christ because, my friends, we have been hidden in him. That is what justification is, don't you see? And Christ died in some unfathomable way. We also died with him. In our spiritual baptism we are united to Christ in his death and in his burial and his resurrection and the ritual of baptism pictures this astounding truth.

So we will never stand before the judge clothed in filthy garments, merely pardoned and forgiven. But now, again, as Jude's great doxology tells us we will stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy all because of God's work.

⁴⁵ Romans 8:33.

⁴⁶ Romans 8:34.

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So the only one who could condemn us says, "Not guilty. Get out of here. There is no court here. This person is in Christ, totally righteous."

That is why Paul went on to say in verse 34:

"Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."⁴⁷

And here he closes with four reasons why our salvation is secure in Christ. And the enumeration of these realities that protect our salvation is presented to us in an ascending order so that the final reality is the most profound with respect to our security.

Notice what he says. Number one, because of what he tells us in verse 34 the first reality is that he died in our stead. Now may I remind you of this great theology lest you forget it. There are two possible ways to meet the demands of God's law. Number one, you have got to keep that law perfectly in all of its parts, ok? Or, number two, you must pay the penalty for breaking that law and, thus, offending the law giver.

Now the former no man save Jesus of Nazareth has ever done or could ever do. And the latter no man can ever do even if he tried for all eternity. Therefore, Christ on the cross being our infinite sacrifice, holy and pure, totally righteous voluntarily satisfied all of the demands of the broken law and fully propitiated or satisfied that law. He satisfied the offending holiness of almighty God. And at salvation the sinner appropriates that payment for himself by faith in the finished work of Christ as Galatians 2:16 tells us.

So our justification, dear friends, is based upon our union with Christ. We are hidden in him. Therefore God declares us to be wholly righteous because he sees us in his Son. And, thus, in fact, we are righteous in the sight of an all holy and all knowing sovereign God.

So he died in our stead. This is why our salvation is secure. But, secondly, Christ was raised from the dead. This proves that his satisfaction was perfect, that he fully satisfied the demands of the law, that it was paid in full. Jesus conquered both sin and death. He therefore gives eternal life to all who trust in him.

But, thirdly, Christ is now, notice, at the right hand of God. This speaks of the fact that the work is finished.

You may recall that there were no seats in the temple of the priests to sit in because they had to constantly offer up sacrifices of the sins of the people. Their work was never finished.

⁴⁷ Romans 8:34.

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In Hebrews chapter 10 beginning in verse 11 we read:

And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He [referring to Christ] having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.⁴⁸

So in Christ all sin is completely, it is forever removed for all who trust in him, for all who trust in the one who now sits in the most highly exalted position of honor. The work is finished.

But notice what he continues to do on our behalf. And this is the capstone of Paul's argument. This is the most profound reality of all. Christ also, number four, intercedes for us.

You must understand that because Christ lives and he has ascended, he is now able to intercede, which literally means to plead on our behalf. It is an amazing thing. I never cease to marvel at this. In verse 26 of chapter eight we read how the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. But also we see here that the glorified Christ does the same thing.

Hebrews seven verse 25 Jesus Christ, quote:

"... is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."⁴⁹

What an incredible reality, what a profound comfort. Even as we read in 1 John 2:1.

"...we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."⁵⁰

So, my friend, if you still deny the security of the believer, you are, in fact, claiming that Christ's work of intercession is somehow deficient, that somehow it is ineffective.

So I close by simply saying in light of all that the apostle is saying, to somehow dispel any fear that you can be separated from the love of God, if you still insist that assurance of salvation is unattainable that, as many say, it is actually dangerous and that our security is somehow up to us, you simply are refusing to see the obvious. I don't know why. That is between you and the Lord. But for you—and I say this all love—two plus two is five.

⁴⁸ Hebrews 10:11-12.

⁴⁹ Hebrews 7:25.

⁵⁰ 1 John 2:1.

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The truth is, because we are God's elect, we have been justified, we are heirs of promise according to the purposes of God and our salvation is eternally secure. As the hymnist so perfectly summarized when he said, quote:

Behold shall I stand in that great day,
For who ought to my charge shall lay,
Fully though thee absolved I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

End quote.

This, beloved, is the Christian's exaltation.

Let's pray together.

Father, we rejoice in these great truths to know that we are heirs of promise, that we are your elect, purely because of your grace. Lord, we are humbled. We are motivated and we rejoice with exceeding joy because of what you have done for us. And therefore it is our desire to live to the praise of your glory and, Lord, I would cry out for those who may be within the sound of my voice that have never bowed the knee to Christ. May today be the day that they repent of their sins and plead for mercy, for grace and see in Christ their only hope of salvation. Lord, today would you be pleased to save them? We pray all of these things in the precious name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell's messages, please visit OliveTreeResources.org.

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