

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Romans 8:1-10, 31-39

Sermon Title: "Never Rejected, Never Abandoned" (A Journey through Romans)

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{SLIDE 1} Can Christians lose their salvation?

This is a question that can stress out a person who believes in God. Can we possibly lose eternal life from God by doing something so awful that God wouldn't forgive us?

We come to Chapter 8, and it makes us wonder if there was a fear that impacted the Christian community in Rome. Was there some strain of doubt that afflicted the group? Could they lose their faith? Could they get something completely wrong that would displease God, and then God would reject them forever? We Christians, now and again, run into that voice or idea of doubt that says we are not good enough. We are not doing enough. We are not praying or reading or worshipping enough. And so, that doubt or fear then says, "God must be displeased with us. God must doubt our faith, and if it continues we might lose God forever."

Remember that the new Christians in Rome were made up of converted Jews and converted pagan Gentiles. Some of those Jews might have carried that

belief with them that says God punishes evildoers by rejecting them. God throws them out on their ears, and there is nothing they can do about. Jews thought this of people who were blind or deaf or constantly sick. They or their parents must have done something wrong for God to punish the person. When Jesus heals a blind man in John 9, the disciples want to know, “Who sinned, the man or his parents, that he was born blind?”¹

The converted Gentiles might have had similar beliefs about the gods they used to worship. If one god is angry with them, then it will punish them severely. Life will be miserable from then on. Their mythological stories tell about many who were severely punished by certain gods. Would this new God, the Lord God who is revealed through Jesus Christ, act the same way? Are we in trouble as well?

{SLIDE 2} Well, let us look at the sin that Jesus mentions in Matthew 12. In verse 31 he says, “Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy...” That’s good to know. Our sins can be forgiven, and it sounds like God is willing to forgive all our sins. But then Jesus continues, “But blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.”

¹ Verse 2.

What is that exactly? Who does that affect?

How are we forgiven of our sins? By repenting from them, right? By turning the opposite direction from them. We recognize that we have done something wrong, so we go to God in prayer. We admit the mistake, no matter how little or big it is. We ask God to forgive it – we ask God to lay it aside, not think of it again, cancel it out. God is willing to do this always, when we come to God with a broken and contrite heart.²

So, what is this blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? It is the unwillingness to go to God in prayer and ask forgiveness. It is the blatant rejection of God's willingness to lay out sin aside and cancel it out. Why would we do this? Why would we want to justify our sins? **{SLIDE 3}** Think about the Pharaoh during Moses' time in the Book of Exodus. How many times did Moses visit him, begging Pharaoh to let the Israelite people go? The Pharaoh wouldn't hear of it. He might change his heart and let the people leave their slavery, but then he would return to hating them and forcing them into hard labor on his buildings and monuments. Exodus says that Pharaoh's heart was hardened at those times. He was immovable, he was unrelenting, he was unforgiving. He did not admit his

² Cf. Psalm 51:17.

faults to God, even when he finally let the people of God depart from his country.

This is what it means to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. We are stuck in our sin and we consciously want to remain stuck in our sin. As one of my commentaries says, “It is not careless acts [we commit], it is a hardened state [that affects our entire being].”³ God cannot forgive that. As much as it grieves God, God will not forgive that.

{SLIDE 4} This allows us to slide nicely into what Paul was saying in Romans 8. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, those who continue to believe in Christ and want to follow his example: there is no condemnation for them. There is no verdict against them, to send them to a nasty place for their sins for the rest of their lives. Paul says in the first sentence of Romans 5, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” To be justified is like render a verdict of not guilty. Being justified means God eliminates our sin and we are placed in a proper and free relationship with God. As we tell our Confirmation Class students, think of being

³ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: Volume 1, The Christbook, Matthew 1-12*, 462.

justified as “just if I’d” done nothing wrong. Just if I’d not become angry. Just if I’d not felt greedy or jealous or vengeful. Just if I’d not rejected God’s loving guidance, and I followed God to the best of my ability.

Remember when we talked about the unforgivable sin. Those who continue to promote such a sin do not understand justification or “just if I’d” not sinned. Such a person sadly would say, “Just if I’d continued to ignore God and lived the life I wanted without anyone stopping me.” Such folk do not know what it means to have peace with God – they do not know what it is like to live with the verdict of not guilty.

{SLIDE 5} Paul continues: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of 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 to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”⁴ Here is another way of putting it: Jesus died on the cross for our sin. He took on all our sins and then died for them, so we do not have to die for our sin, which should be our just punishment. We

⁴ Romans 8:2-4.

should be sentenced to death for all the terrible things we do against others and God. But Jesus took care of that. We are not sentenced to death but to life in Jesus. God's law couldn't save us. We couldn't save ourselves. In fact, our sinfulness robbed God's law of its potency, its ability to make thing right for us and the world.⁵ We and the law couldn't save us. Only Jesus Christ could, and did.

This is our guarantee for eternity. It is introduced and started by God. Jesus Christ justifies us before God the Father, placing us in a proper relationship full of grace and strength and love. And then the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, causing us to be holy every day, lifting our lives us as holy unto God, special in every way. We are not completely free of sin when we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. We are not completely holy. The Spirit makes us holier and holier, free from sin and guilt, enabled to love God and serve our neighbors.⁶ This process goes on and on and on. Christ justifies us, keeps us close to God. The Holy Spirit making us holy and free to be the people God wants us to be. We love this process, and so we continue to walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh, our sinful desires.

⁵ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, cf. 219.

⁶ Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms: Their Meaning and Background Exposed in over 300 Articles*, 214.

{SLIDE 6} Now, the question we wondered about before was: Can Christians lose their salvation? The answer is no. We cannot. God will not allow it, once we have been justified and are being sanctified. That process, or relationship, will never be severed.

But we have probably heard people say, “But what about the person who says she believes in Jesus, but then rejects Jesus later in life, never going to church or praying or anything?” I don’t know what other denominations would say about such a thing. The Presbyterian stance on it is: she or he never had faith in Christ to begin with. It was never there, only lip-service and wishful thinking. Not to say that person still cannot take seriously a relationship with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. That is still an option. However, such faith that a person once expressed might not have been faith at all.

But then another Presbyterian stance on the matter is: We are not to judge. It is not our place to determine who has true faith and who hasn’t. We do not hold the keys to salvation, and unlock the door for those we deem are worthy. Our job is to baptize, preach, and teach about faith in God, and leave the rest to God.⁷ Only God determines salvation.

This bring us to what Paul says in Romans 8:31-

⁷ Cf. Matthew 28:18-20.

39. {SLIDE 7} Nothing. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, Paul tells us. He lists several terrible things that could happen to us. Hardship, distress, persecution, and famine. We might have suffered through only two of these terrible things in our lifetimes, and possibly not all four, but not one of these could separate us from God's love. Nakedness, peril, and the sword. We have suffered nakedness only because we were taking a shower. Possibly we have faced peril, danger, on the highway or at a job. But the sword is not anything we have suffered from. Not like the people to whom Paul writes. They could experience any one of these things at any given time. Remember their faith was under threat. Paul had suffered through many of these terrible things, and it will be a sword that will end his life.

But, none of these things, nor any of the other things Paul lists in Romans 8:38-39 could separate those Christians from, God's love. None of these things listed, nor any other terrible thing we could list, would every separate us from the love of God through Christ Jesus our Lord. Salvation is guaranteed. Salvation is eternal.

How do we know this? We talked about it earlier. Paul said that those who are redeemed through Christ's death and resurrection have eternal

communion with God. They walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh. “Those who live according to the flesh [their sinful desires] set their minds on the things of the flesh, but we who walk by faith in the Spirit set our minds on the things of God.⁸ We are not hostile to God’s guidance. We are not aliens to God’s compassion. We are in the Spirit as resurrected people, and nothing separates us from that.

How do we know the salvation God grants us is eternal? Because nothing we can do or say will cause God to abandon or reject us. Paul listed a number of terrible things that could steal away our faith. We might not have suffered many of those things he lists, but we could come up with our own lists, you know, those things we suffer through each day. Fighting and trying to win the argument. Complaining and trying to make everyone else’s lives dreadful. Jealousy over what people have. Greedy for money. Lustful toward a certain person. Unwilling to forgive a person who injured us emotionally or physically. You name it: We can set our minds on the flesh quite easily and step away from the Christian life. Yet, Paul reminds us that we have God’s love which never goes away. We have a relationship with God and salvation through

⁸ Romans 8:5-6.

Christ that can still grow and deepen. The Spirit is still making us holier each day. Nothing separates us from that. No great or small sin will cause God to step away from us. We are God's people, resurrected from sin.

And then, Paul mentions that we are conquerors. Actually, we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us.⁹ We can bear all of those terrible things in life that sin throws at us with fortitude, with courage and strength. We do this, because we walk in the Spirit and God claims us as his own through faith in Christ. This is unbreakable. And then, we not only bear through the terrible things but also triumph over them. Just as Christ won the fight against sin through his death and resurrection, we win the fight, too, through faith. It is a humbling thought to grasp: that we win over our sin. We are more than conquerors – we are super-conquerors over our sin through Christ who loves us. We rise above our sin, and it remains in that dark and rotten pit where it belongs. If we rise above our sin, all that is left is us and God. All that remains are our reward is salvation: our eternal relationship with God.

⁹ Cf. Romans 8:37.

{SLIDE 8} So when we think we have done it, completely blown our relationship with God, remember what Paul says in Romans 8. When we have been too jealous, too greedy, too angry, too lustful, too all those bad things, stop and pause and consider the great love God still has for us. We are not guaranteed that we will not suffer from temptations and sin, “but we are promised victory over them. God’s pledge is not that suffering will never afflict us, but that it will never separate us from [God’s] love.” Our confidence is in God’s love for us, “which is steadfast, faithful and persevering.”¹⁰ We will move forward with God, and we will move forward with God forever.

¹⁰ John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, cf. 259.

Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the Good News from Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of the benefits of the One who pardons all your guilt, and heals all your sufferings, who redeems your life from the grave and surrounds you with steadfast love and tender affection." God fully blesses us. We may trust Jesus' mercy and patience. We receive life from the Holy Spirit, and are made new. Brothers and sisters, believe and accept forgiveness from God! Amen.