

Secure to eternity

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- [0 : 00] Well, do make sure that the Bible is open in front of you to Romans 8, because that's God's word. And let's also ask for his help so that he might open up our hearts. Let's pray.
- Father, as I preach today, help me to preach with clarity, with faithfulness. And may your Holy Spirit use your word indeed to open our eyes afresh to see who you are, what you're doing, and to help us to hold on to you.
- All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Sooner or later, doubt comes knocking on every Christian's door. For some of us, it comes in primarily intellectual form.
- How can I know God exists? How can I be sure that Jesus is God? But probably for many more of us, it comes in circumstantial form. How can God be good when I just lost my job?
- How can God be good when my family situation is so bad? Or it comes in existential form. Can God truly love me when he finds out about all the stuff inside me?
- [1 : 07] If I'm disappointed with myself, surely God must be even more disappointed. And the church hasn't always been very good at dealing with doubts.
- When someone expresses doubt about God or themselves or their faith, people in the church can all too easily shut them down. Just pray about it.
- Satan is testing you. It's just a phase. You'll get over it. Or worse still, stop sinning and shut up. And if that's all that's said, without the questions being addressed, what happens is that you might buy the person's silence.
- But one day, they'll probably silently slip out of the church, never to return. And yet church history shows us that even mature Christians doubt.
- Listen to one of the greatest English-speaking preachers of history, Charles Spurgeon openly tell his congregation. This is on the screen. I must confess here, with sorrow, that I have seasons of despondency and depression of spirit, which I trust none of you are called to suffer.
- [2 : 22] And at such times, I have doubted my interest in Christ, my calling, my election, my perseverance, my Saviour's blood, and my Father's love.
- Or listen to the Christian cultural commentator, Oz Guinness, who spent his childhood in China, and who watched his younger brothers die of starvation. If ours is an examined faith, we should be unafraid to doubt.
- If doubt is eventually justified, well, we were believing what clearly was not worth believing. But if doubt is answered, our faith has grown stronger.
- It knows God most certainly, and can enjoy God more deeply. And the Bible shows us that God isn't afraid of your struggles with doubt.
- In Mark 9, we encounter the father of a demon-possessed boy. Upon seeing Jesus, the father cries out, I believe, I believe you can heal my boy.
- [3 : 23] And yet in the same breath, he also cries out, help my unbelief. He believes, yet he doubts. Now there are other people involved in this story.

The disciples of Jesus, the teachers of the law. But only the father alone openly confesses his struggles with doubt. And he isn't condemned for it.

On the contrary, he is held up as an example. He's a model of what we can call believing doubt. He is uncertain.

He feels conflicted. He doesn't know if Jesus can help his son. But he doesn't walk away from Jesus. He simply takes all of his messy, chaotic self to Jesus.

Help me, Jesus. Help even my unbelief. And that's what our passage this morning is designed to do. Romans 8, 31 to 39 is designed to help those of us who cry, I believe, help my unbelief.

[4 : 34] Romans 8, 31 to 39 is there for those of us especially struggling with circumstantial or existential doubt. You see, as we've been scaling the mountain of Romans 8 for the past five weeks, think about what we've been seeing.

The images have been absolutely breathtaking, haven't they? We've had images of minds being so filled by the Spirit that they will gravitate towards things of the Spirit.

We've had images of bodies that may presently suffer decay, but will one day be fully redeemed and restored as they come into freedom and glory.

We've had images of our lips crying, Abba, Father, as we now realize we are the children of God and held in His hands from beginning to end.

And Romans 8 has been telling us that these images are actually portraits of every single person who trusts in Jesus.

[5 : 44] They are spiritual selfies of you and I. But we might look at the photograph that Romans 8 takes of us and think, well, this picture can't be true.

Can God really be this generous? And where's my sin in all of this? After all, yes, I'm a Christian, but I still sin. I know that. Has that all been airbrushed out?

And what about the world and all the challenges it brings? Maybe the picture that Romans 8 has been giving me is Photoshop. It's fake news.

Paul, thanks for Romans 8, but what if I doubt this portrait? What then shall we say in response to these things?

Well, Romans 8, 31 to 39 will help us respond. And here's what it says in one headline. In Christ, there is absolutely nothing that can separate you from God's love.

[6 : 53] Because the evidence is overwhelming. And so for the rest of this morning, that's what we're going to do. We're going to consider the evidence. Consider the evidence of who God is.

what is done and what he's doing. And so let's look at verses 31 and 32 and consider this. God is absolutely committed to you.

That's the first piece of evidence. Look at verse 31. If God is for us, who can be against us? Now, just imagine, what if Paul simply asked, who is against us?

Well, we could come up with a long list, can't we? There's our past mistakes. The things we can't undo. The things that we regret, like a relationship gone sour, or a foolish decision we made, and now they attach themselves to us invisibly, like an unwanted guest that never leaves.

That's against us. There's our family history. The way our respective families impress upon us certain patterns of thinking, or doing, or relating.

[8 : 20] You know, maybe the way that they handled conflict, or maybe the way they dealt with shame. And now they've shaped us in negative ways that we can't easily shake off.

Maybe that's against us. There's our temperament, which in some situations can certainly work against us. So maybe, for example, you're quite a chilled person by personality, but that means that sometimes you can be quite indecisive in situations that call for decisiveness.

Or maybe you're very analytical, which can be good in some settings, but means that you're overly critical in others. And that works against you.

And we haven't even talked about our own indwelling sin yet. The struggle that Paul mentions one chapter earlier in Romans, that often he does what he does not want to do, and he doesn't do what he knows he should do.

Sin is a formidable enemy. Then, of course, there's the pressures that the world brings. We'll consider them later. And of course, Satan is real.

[9 : 38] He is active, and he is against us. Who is against us? Well, actually, the list is pretty long. And the thing is, that's a question that many of us regularly ask ourselves, don't we?

Who is against us? Now, maybe not in those exact words, but certainly in substance. We often mouth in our minds our mistakes, or our family history, or the weaknesses of our personality, or our ongoing battle with sin, which we sometimes lose, or the stresses that just living in this world can bring, or how sometimes we have genuinely become the victims of circumstances, or the victim of the sin of others, or how at other times we genuinely have been the one who have done wrong against others.

Well, and just all these obstacles, all these barriers we face in living for Jesus. And so no wonder we get discouraged. No wonder we doubt.

And that in itself is a rational response. Because if we had to deal with all of these ourselves, well, it's just impossible, isn't it? We're deluded if we think that we can tackle all the things that I've just named, or on our own.

But that's not the question Paul is asking. Listen to him again. If God is for us, who can be against us?

[11 : 25] Ah, that now brings a completely different flavor, doesn't it? If God, who simply said, let there be light, and there was light.

If God, who commanded the storm, be still, and it was still. If God, who said to the prophet, Ezekiel, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

And sure enough, Babylon soon displays Egypt as the world's superpower. Well, if God is for us, who can be against us? The answer is, no one.

There's a famous story about John Chrysostom, a church leader from the 3rd century, meeting with the Roman Empress. First, the Empress threatens him with banishment, to which Chrysostom replies, you cannot banish me, for this world is my father's house.

But I will kill you, the Empress said. No, you cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God. I will take away your treasures, said the Empress.

[12 : 39] No, you cannot, for my treasure is in heaven, and my heart is there. But, I will drive you away from your friends, and you will have no one left, the Empress responded.

No, you cannot, said John, for I have a friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to harm me.

Now, unfortunately for me, there is no historical record that this meeting actually happened, and so, as a preacher, I can't verify this admittedly powerful story.

But the words that Chrysostom said in this supposed dialogue can be verified, for he did indeed say very similar words in his sermons and in his letters to friends, because he is simply quoting scripture.

And so, even if he didn't meet the Empress in this way, he knows God is for him, and God is for you, because all that Chrysostom said is true of you, if you trust in Jesus.

[14 : 02] The world belongs to your Abba Father. Your life is hidden with God. Your treasure is in heaven where no thief can get at.

God is absolutely committed to you. But wait a minute, you say, we've only considered the claim.

We haven't considered any actual evidence yet that God is for us. And you're right. Romans 8.31 might assert that God is for us, but we still doubt.

How can we be sure God is for us? After all, couldn't he very well be in reality a reluctant God?

A God who sighs when he sees you and goes, ah man, I have to bail him out again? Can't she sort herself out? Couldn't he very well be a God who is deeply unwilling to help me?

[15 : 07] And who only grudgingly does so because the Bible says that I'm a good God, so I guess I need to keep my reputation up, law. Why can we be so sure that God is for us?

What's the evidence? Well, look at verse 32. He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how can we be sure, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

You see, here's Paul's argument. If God has already given you what is most dear to him, what is most precious to him, what is most valuable to him, his one and only son, who's been at his side for all eternity, the one with whom he has the closest relationship with, if God has already given up his greatest treasure and done the greater thing, do you really think that he will hold out on you?

Do you really think that he won't come through to work in all things for your good? He did what he never asked Abraham back in Genesis to carry through.

He did not spare his only son. And if he sent Jesus to be the sacrifice, why wouldn't he want to give to you all the benefits that flow from the sacrifice of his son?

[16 : 56] Total forgiveness, a resurrection body, a place in his family, an inheritance that will never fade. Ultimate conformity to Christ.

This is the evidence of God's love for you. This is how God demonstrates right now his love for us.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. It's all been done. the deal has been sealed. And so put your doubts about God to rest.

He's not reluctant. He's not unwilling. Indeed, as Thomas Watson, the pastor from centuries ago, who is full of quotable quotes, once put it, Christ went more willingly to the cross than we do to the throne of grace.

God is not like the person who administers your driving test, looking to catch out your every mistake, perhaps looking for a bribe.

[18 : 12] He's more like a parent helping his kid as he tries to cycle for the first time, making sure that he doesn't fall, cheering him on, becoming his ally.

God. You know, some people could hear 831, if God is for us, who can be against us, and actually be scared of such a statement, because it sounds like something that a suicide bomber will say, you know, if God is for us, who can be against us, then kaboom.

But verse 32 tells us that any suicide bomber saying that would have completely misrepresented the true God. Because this God is a good God.

He gives life. He doesn't take it away. And he's absolutely committed to you. Look at who he's given you, the Lord Jesus, and put your doubts about him to rest.

But perhaps the doubts aren't so much about God. but about ourselves. Sure, God sent his son from heaven, but what about his earthly children?

[19 : 35] What if we feel like David does back in Psalm 51? For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only have I sinned, and done what is evil in your side?

What then? What if we're consumed with doubts about our sinful selves? Well then, let's consider our second piece of evidence.

God has 100% acquitted you. That's verses 33 to 34. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

Again, the answer is no one. That's Paul's expected answer. Now, at first glance, that answer doesn't sound right.

After all, we can think of plenty of people who could bring a charge against me. People I've hurt, people I've disappointed, people I've sinned against.

[20 : 43] And of course, the devil is just itching to play prosecutor. He can't wait to dig up dirt from my life to yield against me. And the hardest thing is, he won't have to commit fraud to do so.

His accusations will be authentic. He doesn't even have to make it up. But even more so than the people or the devil, God himself would have ample reason to bring a charge against me.

For against you, you only have I sinned. And yet Paul obviously means for this rhetorical question to bring a smile to your face.

For when he asks, who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen, what he's really asking is this? Who can make the accusation stick against those whom God foreknew and predestined?

His answer? No one. Why not? Because it is God who justifies. We saw that last week, didn't we? In other words, he has declared you not guilty.

[22 : 07] And that is significant because he is the highest court of appeal. And so verse 34, who then is the one who condemns? No one.

There is no higher authority than God. And if you know that the highest court of appeal has overturned the verdict of guilty, you sleep easy.

Because you know that in God's courtroom, the accusations cannot stick. again, why not? The answer comes back to Jesus.

For all the righteousness of Jesus, all of who he is, all of what he's done, has now been given over to us in such a way that we can point to him and say, that's my defense.

you see, the facts are clear. There is a just judge, and there is a guilty sinner. Christianity teaches both.

[23 : 20] if we take verse 33 to mean, oh, no one will bring any charge against us, or that no one can make any accusation stick against us, because, you know, we are such good people, we're innocent people, then we've got it all wrong.

Indeed, verses 33 to 34 won't sound to us like good news if we think that we're all okay. But, there is a just judge, and there is a guilty sinner, you and me.

Those are the facts. But now there is one more person to factor into the equation. There is Christ Jesus who died, verse 34.

God is the just judge. Therefore, he cannot, by his mercy, set aside his justice. A price must be paid.

And because God is a person of infinite value, the price must be of equal worth. And God, in his infinite wisdom, made sure justice was satisfied by the very means of his mercy, he provided Jesus.

[24 : 42] There is a just judge, there is a guilty sinner, and there is Christ Jesus who died. But more than that, verse 34, he was raised to life, so that he might call us back from death to life, together with himself.

love. And now Jesus is seated at the place of honor, at God's right hand, where he intercedes for us. Now think about what that means.

It means that Jesus isn't talking about you behind your back. He's not whispering to his father, hey, you know, I know I shouldn't say this, but ew, you know, I can't actually stand to be in Daniel's presence.

I don't know how you can do. And it certainly doesn't mean that he's pleading before a reluctant father. We've already established that.

Rather, it means that he is always advocating on our behalf, on the basis of his death and resurrection.

[25 : 52] And that gives us great confidence, for he is representing us as the perfect man, who is perfectly God.

You see, the thoughts that condemn us may come. We can't stop them. Often they are true. Satan would certainly encourage them.

But you don't have to listen to your own verdict on yourself. God certainly isn't listening to those accusations. God wants you to keep listening as he repeats again the verdict he has passed on your life.

Not guilty, not guilty, not guilty. God has 100% acquitted you. When the doubts come, when you wonder whether you just have too much sin in your life, remember this, God justifies the ungodly so we can deal with our sin.

Not by ignoring it, not by pretending it isn't there, but by admitting our sin, admitting that we deserve to be condemned, but rejoicing that Christ has covered it all.

[27 : 19] God has 100% acquitted you. And so I hope you're really beginning to see that in Christ there is absolutely nothing that can separate you from God's love.

Remember, that's the headline. Who shall separate you from the love of Christ? No one. Not God himself. He won't abandon you. He's proven it by giving his son.

And certainly not you yourself. Even your own sin can do it. When Christ Jesus has died, risen, and is now interceding for you.

But what about the world? After all, look at it. It's full of suffering. It's full of sorrow. It's full of death. That's the way the world is.

That's the world the people of God live in. Paul doesn't deny that fact. He doesn't deny that in this life, we have trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword.

[28 : 32] Indeed, how can he deny it when he virtually experienced all of that himself? If we were to turn to the book of 2 Corinthians, we'll discover that Paul went through just about all of those experiences.

people who are in the world. But let's be honest, these things can fill us with doubt. The troubles and sufferings of this world can rob us of our security and assurance in Christ.

a diagnosis of COVID-19, a certain job loss, the fact that you're still single, perhaps even an event that physically endangered you, a car accident, let's say.

They could strike at any moment. What then shall we say? Well, let's consider our third piece of evidence. God will assure you of your advance.

God will assure you of your advance. Verse 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall I trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword, as it is written?

[29 : 52] For your sake, we face death all day long. We are considered as sheep, to be slaughtered. To help us make sense of the suffering that I experienced by Christians, Paul now turns to the Old Testament.

More specifically, he quotes Psalm 44. Now, this psalm is a psalm that is sung not just by an individual, but the entire people of God.

And they are lamenting. Why? Because they truly have been faithful. They have not turned to idols or done wrong in any way at that stage.

But they are suffering, not because of any fault of their own, but simply because they live for God. For your sake, we face death all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. And Paul quotes this psalm and this verse to make the simple point. Suffering has been the experience of believers throughout the ages.

[31 : 03] This isn't anything new. It happened to people back in the Old Testament. In fact, it's to be expected. After all, earlier in verse 17, we were already told that followers of Christ would share in the sufferings of Christ.

And now, we can see that just as Jesus was led like a sheep to the slaughter, so his followers can expect the same.

For many Christians around the world, this is their literal experience. For others of us, we might be spared the literal experience, but we will share in his sufferings.

somehow. But none of this is proof that God has somehow stopped loving you.

That is Paul's point. You see, the saddest thing about the prosperity gospel is that it tells you differently. The prosperity gospel tells you that if you have success, according to worldly standards, whether in terms of material wealth or earthly achievements, that is a sign that God loves you.

[32 : 23] But if you don't have them, well, that must mean that God doesn't love you. Or at the very least, he loves you less than the other Christian who is richer or healthier or who has got more straight A's or who just seems to have less suffering than you.

But that's the exact opposite of what verses 35 to 36 is telling us. 35 to 36 says, you might have hardship, you might have trouble, you might have persecution or famine or nakedness, and yet, none of those things can separate you from the love of Christ.

when Paul was whipped and beaten and imprisoned and stoned, did God love him any less?

When Christ was arrested and mocked and spat upon and crucified, did the Father love his Son any less?

Do you see then, how could God love you any less when you are united to his Son?

[33 : 41] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. In spite of all these sufferings, in the face of such hardship, Paul sees clearly.

No matter the suffering, the message of Romans 8 verse 11 is still true. And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you.

No matter the hardship, the message of Romans 8 verse 21 is still true, that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

No matter the difficulty, the message of Romans 8 verse 30 is still true. And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified.

Those he justified, he also glorified. That's what Paul means when he says you are more than a conqueror. He doesn't mean that although you forgot to study for your exam, you will definitely get an A because you're an overcomer in Christ.

[35 : 05] He doesn't mean that that project at work is definitely going to succeed because you are an overcomer in Christ. No. Rather, he means that even if you didn't get an A because of your own foolishness, even if your project fails because it somehow got sabotaged at the last minute, you are more than a conqueror because nothing can separate you from the love of Christ.

He loves you because Good Friday and Easter is still true. And that means he still has your best interest at heart, even though you didn't get an A, even though your project failed, even though the world seems to be against you.

the evidence is in. In Christ, there is absolutely nothing, nothing that can separate you from God's love.

Not even the troubles of the world, not your doubts about God or yourself. Nothing. And in case you still didn't get it, we have Paul's closing argument in verses 38 and 39.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[36 : 49] Now that pretty much covers everything, doesn't it? Nothing can keep you away from God's love, not even death itself, not even the spiritual world.

Not when the God we worship is the God of Romans chapter 8. I think John's thought hits the nail on the head. He writes this, Paul's five questions are not arbitrary.

They are all about the kind of God we believe in. Together they affirm that absolutely nothing can frustrate God's purpose since he is for us, or quench his generosity since he has not spared his son, or accuse or condemn his elect since he justified them through Christ, or tear us from his love since he has revealed it in Christ.

And that's why when we doubt we need to be like that man in Mark 9 and run to God, run to Jesus. I believe, help my unbelief.

Because it is God himself who can bring relief to our doubting hearts. Today, is the last sermon in our current series.

[38 : 16] And I subtitled this series, What Romans 8 Teaches Us About the Christian Life. But I hope you noticed something as we've been going through this few weeks.

I hope you noticed that Romans 8 doesn't teach us about the Christian life by giving us a list of things to do or not do. Instead, Romans 8 teaches us about the Christian life by teaching us about God.

Romans 8 teaches us that the Christian life is really about coming to terms with who God really is.

Romans 8 teaches us that the heart of the Christian life is God centeredness. is centered on the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In this life, we will face sin, death, and Satan. Those are not insignificant things to be facing. But Romans 8 tells us that even when facing such formidable enemies, in this life, we can be totally secure, all the way to eternity.

[39 : 35] eternity. Why? Because the Father did not spare, but gave up his only Son as our sin offering.

The Son died, rose again, and is now at the right hand of God interceding for us. And the Spirit directs our hearts and minds to please him while interceding for us in our weakness.

if this is who is for us, who can be against us? And if you take this to heart, what will happen to you?

Let me tell you. You will go all out as a Christian. You won't hold back. You won't be scared to confess sin, to hide it, but be willing to be vulnerable because you are 100% confident that God has justified you.

You won't be afraid to suffer, to not take the easy way, because you know God's by your side. You won't be unwilling to love, even in ways that will cost you, because you know what it costs God to love you.

[41 : 04] Your life will be transformed. Being God-centered is actually the most practical thing you can do. And so today, don't be afraid to completely embrace Romans 8.

Don't be afraid to live as if you believe every single word of Romans 8 is true, because it is.

It's God's word. So just listen one more time. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us pray. Father, I pray that as we've been working our way through Romans 8 over the past six weeks, I pray that every single word of Romans 8 would pierce our hearts.

I pray that every single word of Romans 8 would cause us to worship you afresh, to live our lives as a sacrifice of praise to you. Lord, help us to marvel again, to praise you because of what Jesus has done, that he has died as our sin offering, that he has died as our defense advocate to make sure that we can stand in your courtroom and be completely free, be completely liberated, knowing that we are your children.

[42 : 59] Father, we know that in this world there is plenty that could cause us to be disheartened. There is suffering, there is COVID-19, there is all sorts of other frustrations and distresses, there is pain, there is sickness, there is all these things.

And yet, Father, would you remind us once again that there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ. May we take all these words to heart and may we live as if Romans 8 is true each and every single day.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.