

Answering Eternal Questions

Blessed Assurance – Part II

Romans 8:31-33

Introduction

On March 11, 1898, a teenager by the name of Peter Dyneka sailed away from his home country of Russia, bound for Nova Scotia. For him, it was literally the other side of the world. He would become an evangelist, greatly used by God. But God was about to teach him an unforgettable lesson.

His family had saved for months in order to purchase this ticket to his future. Peter's mother had packed enough food for the long journey. Mostly bread and garlic – they could not afford very much.

Every day, Peter would look longingly through the windows of the ship's dining room as the wealthy patrons enjoyed their extravagant meals. Oh how he envied them, as he returned to his little room and ate his black bread and garlic.

About halfway through the voyage, some of the sailors noticed his predicament and promised him that if he would take their chores and do their work in the kitchen, they would give him meals in return. Peter was delighted and began to work very hard – and he was given meals in the back of the kitchen, as promised.

It was not until the very last day of the voyage that Peter discovered the truth – three meals a day in the ship's dining room were included in the price of his ticket. He belonged in there with the others; he had been tricked into all of that work, to get food that already belonged to him.¹

Most of us today, know that our tickets to heaven are free, but we do not understand the privileges that come with the ticket. The apostle Paul

has been describing to us, everything that is included in the ticket!

We have been chosen by God and given the ticket to heaven. And those whom He has called are justified – declared righteous; and those whom He has justified He has already glorified! It is all included in the ticket.

Part of the believer's problem is that he does not understand what he has. He has his ticket to heaven, but really is not very sure he is secure. He does not understand how eternally comprehensive and unchangeable his ticket to heaven is.

So many today are insecure in their faith. Many, I am afraid, have been led to believe that they can somehow lose their ticket. They have been taught that in the middle of the voyage they can be thrown overboard, or put on another ship and taken back, or, as many are led to believe, they might even choose to jump overboard themselves and swim back to Russia.

Anyone who is bound for heaven does not want to swim back. Any true believer is comprehensively secure in his salvation – there are no ship transfers at sea.

Furthermore, the believer does not have to work his way into the dining room of God's lavish grace. It is all included in the believer's – all expenses paid – ticket!

The security of the believer in this comprehensive salvation has been the focus of Paul as he concludes this final section of Romans, chapter 8. We will spend our time today, the next Lord's

day, and perhaps the next on the subject of the believer's security and song.

What an incredible paragraph this is. It has been called by some, a hymn of assurance; a song of triumph; the highest plateau in the whole of divine revelation; one Bible scholar called this paragraph the highest peak in the highest Himalayan range of scripture.ⁱⁱ

Paul begins in the first part of verse 31 by taking, as it were, a deep breath, and then exclaims,

What then shall we say to these things? . . .

In other words, "What are we going to do in light of these things?"

What are the "these things?"

Certainly, it includes the preceding passage, where Paul has announced the truth of the believer's:

- predestination;
- calling;
- justification;
- glorification.

However, I would agree with those who expounded this text in prior generations that Paul has reached the climax of this entire letter. It is the peak of thought and logic and the gospel. He discussed in:

- chapter 1 – the corruption and depravity of man;
- chapters 1 and 2 – the inexcusability of man;
- chapter 3 – the failure of sinful man to even comprehend or desire the gospel;
- chapter 4 – the inability of man to impress God with religion or blood lines;
- chapter 5 – the origin and inescapability of mankind's sinful nature;
- chapter 6 – the enslavement of mankind to sin instead of to God;
- chapter 7 – the conflict of sin and spirit even in those who believe;
- chapter 8 – the initiating, life-giving, electing, calling, redeeming God who moves on our behalf to bring us out of hopelessness, groaning, and despair into the very light and life of God!

Now, what are we going to say about all of these things?!

Declarations – the Eternal Security of the Christian

Let me give seven questions – some of them part of another. I have taken the intention of Paul's question and placed it into four categorical declarations or statements – four irrefutable, overwhelming, comprehensive proofs regarding the eternal security of the Christian.

Declaration #1 – Because God has delivered you, there isn't anyone who can destroy you!

1. The first declaration is – Because God has delivered you, there isn't anyone who can destroy you!

Let me repeat that. Now I know there are English students and teachers in my audience, and I am not supposed to begin a sentence with the word "because." However, I like the way it sounds and the way it works out, so if it bothers you, just don't put a period at the end of it and we can pretend it is not a sentence! So, to repeat it, "Because God has delivered you, there isn't anyone who can destroy you!"

Look at verse 31 again,

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

Within this question, is Paul's first declaration:

The believer's salvation cannot be destroyed!

Doubted? Yes. Discouraged and, even at times, despairing to see its fulfillment? Absolutely. Defeated at some point? Yes. But salvation, security, relationship, position, acceptance with God destroyed? Never!

You might write into the margin of your Bible, next to that little word, "If," in "If God is for us . . ." the word "since". It would then read, "Since God is for us . . ."

That little Greek particle translated "if" ("ei"), does not refer to a possibility, but a true condition. For those who, like me, did not do too well in English grammar, you could also translate this conditional particle with the word "because".

In other words, Paul means, “Because of the fact that God is with us, there can never arise a greater power to destroy us.”

The obvious implication is that if anyone were able to rob us of our salvation they would have to be greater than God Himself, since He is both the giver and the sustainer of salvation. Who, then, could conceivably take our salvation away?ⁱⁱⁱ

Paul is shouting his question to the universe – “Is there anyone stronger than God?”

If God be for us, who can be against us?!

Can other people take away our salvation?

You might ask, “How about other people – can they take away our salvation?”

Most of the people reading this letter to the Romans were Jewish. They were well aware of the Judaizing heresy that was being taught by legalistic Jews who claimed to be Christians. They were insisting that Gentiles could not be saved unless they adhered to all the Mosaic law, including circumcision. They were wanting to take away the Gentile’s security of salvation by insisting they fulfill some duty or some act of obedience to the law.

Some things never change!

Today, there are Protestant denominations that want to add to the work of God by requiring works of man, such as baptism, in order to ensure salvation. They might say, “But didn’t Peter say, ‘Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins’?” Yes, but that little word “for,” or “gar,” can be translated “as a result of; in light of”. So Peter was saying, “Repent and be baptized as a result of the remission of your sins.”

The Roman Catholic church teaches that salvation can be lost by committing so-called mortal sins, as if any sin is not fatal. The Roman church also claims the power and authority to revoke grace; to take away or to dispense grace to those who follow their traditions.

Like the Pharisees in the first century, they add to the word of God through Christ. There is no support anywhere in scripture that gives any church or individual the right to take away anyone’s salvation.

The apostle Paul implies in this verse, “To do that, you would have to be greater than God, for God

has initiated salvation and He has promised to preserve the believer.”

Jesus Christ said in John, chapter 10, verses 27 through 29,

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish [from the Greek “apollumi,” literally, “they will never be lost”]; . . . My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

In other words, whoever is capable of taking your salvation away would have to be greater than God, and since no one is greater than God, no one is able to take it away.

You cannot get any more secure than that.

Can God take away our salvation?

Someone might ask, “Couldn’t God take away our salvation?”

For God to take away our salvation would require God to have failed.

For the triune God who chose us, called us, redeemed us, immersed us into Christ’s life, imputed to us the righteousness of Christ, and sealed us with the Spirit to decide to cast us out, would require failure on His part to complete the work by preserving and glorifying us for heaven.

That is Paul’s argument in the next verse. Look at verse 32 of Romans, chapter 8,

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

A child of God to be given away by God would require not only failure within the Godhead, but disunity within the Godhead.

The Son would need to change the Father’s eternal will. The Father would have to get the Spirit to unseal us and the Son to stop interceding for us.

The Father sent His Son to sacrifice Himself for us when we were an enemy of God – as they had agreed before the foundation of the world that Christ would redeem the Father’s chosen people. Yet, after the work of Christ is completed and the Spirit continues, for the Father to then reject even one of

us, would bring great confusion and disunity not known by God.

There would be disunity in the Trinity.

Can Christians lose their salvation by committing a terrible sin?

A third question is, “Can a Christian lose their salvation by committing some terrible sin?”

The person or church that holds this belief does not understand:

- the depravity and spiritual inability of man to save himself in the first place;
- the calling by the Father of true believers;
- the initiating, redeeming work of Christ, independently of good works on the part of man.

In other words, since you were not saved by your own power or effort to free yourself from sin, to bring yourself to God, and to make yourself His child – God has done all of that – how then could it be that by your own efforts you can nullify the work of grace that God Himself has accomplished?! You cannot nullify the work of God’s grace!^{iv}

Even – and this is going to be shocking! – the Christian is not greater than God!

Can Christians choose to return the gift of salvation?

There are those who suggest a fourth possible cause of losing your salvation and ask, “Can the Christian himself choose to return the gift and hand in his salvation?”

Can a Christian return the gift of salvation like a sweater that did not really fit? You know, after Christmas you take that sweater back to Wal-Mart and get the extra large. What was your wife thinking giving you a medium? Was this some kind of suggestion?!

The individual who thinks they can return salvation forgot, or never learned, that we came to God because God first came to us; we love God because God first loved us. God initiated it all.

So this argument starts with the wrong person. Those who hold to this do not understand how they got salvation in the first place!

I must add that the so-called Christian who hands their salvation in and exchanges it for something that fits them better, never had salvation to begin with! Anyone who does not want it, proves they never had it. They are the seed that seemed to take root; that seemed to have a little life, but died away. They never had the genuine article to begin with.

Now, this does not mean that a Christian cannot backslide, or disobey, or even deny the Lord temporarily. The disciples did! But the individual who says they were once a Christian, but are now happily reunited with the world, the flesh, and the devil, never saw the light.

Perhaps you know someone like that. They used to go to church and they used to carry their Bible around and they used to talk about the Lord, but now, they could not care less for any of it. They are happy as a lark to be back in the world.

We have a dog at home – a beagle and basset hound mix named Patches. She is an outdoor dog, which is, I think, the way God intended it. Yesterday she was given a bath, something she gets only because it gets to the point that when you pet her, your hands need washing. As soon as she got that bath, she ran around looking for things to roll around in – things that are counter-productive to a bath. We have a horse pasture behind us and she loves nothing more than running out there and finding old dried manure to roll in . . . she is totally depraved. She evidently prefers that smell to the smell of perfumed shampoo.

As Paul wrote to Timothy, in II Timothy, chapter 4, verse 10,

. . . Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me . . .

The world was his true love!

You do not:

- experience the fresh release of guilt from sin and then decide you want the stench of guilt back in your life;
- hunger and thirst after God and then altogether lose your appetite;
- live in the light of heaven and then want to live in the darkness of hell;
- fellowship with the saints and sing the praises of God and then despise the church of the living Lord;

- walk with Him, trust in Him, and depend on Him and then decide you never really needed Him after all.

That is the individual that John had in mind when he wrote of some who had left the fellowship, in I John, chapter 2, verse 19,

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, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

So, for the true believer, Paul declares that no one can destroy what God has done – no church, no person, no tradition, not even the Christian himself, or God will nullify what He has done.

Eternal life is eternal. You have never approached anyone and asked them, “Hey, would you like to hear about the gift of temporary life?” or “Would you like to learn more about the doctrine of eternal insecurity?”

Before we leave this first declaration, I want to point out a play on words that Paul’s Jewish readers would have immediately caught.

In the beginning of verse 32, Paul uses a phrase taken verbatim from the story of Abraham and Isaac. Paul writes,

He who did not spare His own Son . . .

These words come directly from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible where God is congratulating Abraham’s faith in regards to sacrificing his only son, Isaac. He says to Abraham in Genesis, chapter 22, verses 16 through 17a,

. . . because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, . . . I will . . . bless you . . .

The irony of this story, and the use of Paul’s words would not have been lost on his Roman readers.

Abraham had been commanded by God to offer his only son as an offering to God. Isaac asked where the lamb was for the sacrifice and Abraham said, and I quote verse 8a of that chapter,

. . . God will provide for Himself the lamb . . .

Imagine Isaac carrying the wood on his back, up the hill of Mount Moriah – a picture of Jesus Christ,

who would be nailed to a wooden cross as an offering for our sin.

We are told that Isaac willingly allowed himself to be placed on that altar – evidently trusting his father’s bedrock belief in the resurrection – and just as Abraham raised the knife to kill his son, God spoke from heaven and stopped him, praising him for his unshakable faith in the promise of God.

What happened next is probably more significant than anything else, yet it is most often overlooked. Abraham names that hilltop “Jehovah-Jireh,” which is translated, “The Lord Will Provide,” as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.” (Genesis 22:14)

Abraham speaks in future tense, as the lamb had not been provided – a ram was offered, not a lamb. However, Abraham effectively prophesies of the coming Lamb of God who would be slain for the sin of the world.

Mount Moriah was among other small hills along a ridge. A short distance from Moriah would be a city built and inhabited off and on by Abraham’s descendants – the city of Jerusalem. By the time of our Lord, the hill on that same ridge nearest the city had been given a slang Aramaic expression, because of the way it was shaped. It was called Golgotha, because it was shaped like a skull.

Ladies and gentlemen, the prophecy of Abraham would come true to the very last detail. He had prophesied, in verse 14,

. . . In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.

And it would be on this same mount – I personally believe in the very same place where Isaac, the only son of Abraham, was spared – that several thousand years later, the only Son of God would not be spared. As Paul writes, in Romans, chapter 8, verse 32a, He would be,

. . . delivered . . . over for us all . . .

God designed every detail! Listen, beloved, God planned your redemption from eternity past! And the power of God which redeemed you from your past has already prepared your future, and He will escort you there!

There isn’t anyone big enough to stop Him.

There isn’t anyone strong enough to overpower Him.

. . . [Since] God is for us, who can be against us?

Because God has delivered you, there isn't anyone who can destroy you!

Declaration #2 – Because God has acquitted you, there isn't anyone who can indict you!

2. The second declaration of your eternal security is – Because God has acquitted you, there isn't anyone who can indict you!

Look at verse 33 of Romans, chapter 8.

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

The enemy might whisper in your ear, "Sure, God did everything for you and Jesus died for you, but just look at yourself! You don't deserve Him! You don't deserve salvation! You don't deserve heaven!"

Job, chapter 1, informs us that Satan has the ability to accuse the believer before God. In other words, he says to God, "Do You see John or Susan or Stephen down there? Did You see what John just did? Did You hear what Susan just said? Hey, look over there, did You see what Stephen just did? Why do You want to keep him?! Why do You want her?!"

This verse is actually legal language. The words "bring a charge," can be literally rendered, "to arraign before a judge". In other words, "to haul into court and face the charges".

Are the charges real? Yes! Satan does not have to manufacture accusations – we give him all the help he needs. Our consciences dredge up more than enough and our actions and thoughts add to our potential indictment.

But wait! Paul provides the answer of the High court of heaven. Look again at verse 33b,

. . . God is the one who justifies;

It is God who takes sinners and calls them saints. It is God who imputes to bankrupt sinners the righteousness of Christ.

In other words, God says to the Accuser, "You can't tell Me anything I don't already know. When I justified John and Susan and Stephen, I knew the sins they had committed before they were saved and I know the sins they will commit after they are saved. I know everything about them and My Son paid for everything – past sin, present sin, and future sin. In fact, they don't even know what they're going to do yet, but I've already included that in My Son's comprehensive, entire, eternal payment for their sin upon which I declare them justified!"

. . . the blood of Jesus [My] Son cleanses [them] from all sin.

(I John 1:7)

In our country, if someone is found guilty, they will immediately appeal to a higher court. Even in a jury trial, a verdict can be appealed if there was some error in presenting evidence or if the judge erred in his instructions to the jury or any number of things. If you were found guilty, your hope would be in an appeal; in some higher court to rule in your favor.

That is Paul's point! Whoever brings a charge against God's elect, no matter who they are, none of the charges will stick. You have been fully pardoned.

There is no higher court to overrule the court of heaven. There is no higher judge to throw out your redemption on the basis of some new evidence. There is no one to challenge His ruling on your behalf.

God, the sovereign, supreme Judge has taken the divine gavel in His nail pierced hand and has pounded it on the bench . . . and the sound of it rings throughout the universe . . . and His verdict will never be reversed.

Your case is closed for eternity. You are secure forever!

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ⁱ Erwin Lutzer, You're Richer Than You Think (Victor Books, 1978), p. 9.

ⁱⁱ James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 2 (Baker, 1992), p. 951.

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Jr. Romans: Volume 1 (Moody Press, 1991), p. 502.

^{iv} Ibid., p. 504.