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WHY OUR SALVATION IS SECURE

Romans 8:29-30

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Romans, Lesson 53

Why Our Salvation is Secure Romans 8:29-30

Throughout history, controversy has raged over the question of whether Christians can lose their salvation. In fact, in this church before I came (19 years ago), there was a difference of opinion among the leadership on that issue. If all the texts in the Bible were clearly on one side or the other, there would be no controversy. But there are texts that seem to support each side. I can't deal with these difficult texts in this message. If you're interested, Martyn Lloyd-Jones spends over 100 pages on many of them (*Romans: The Final Perseverance of the Saints* [Zondervan], pp. 263-366).

When you come to any difficult passage in Scripture, here are a few guidelines: Interpret the more difficult text in light of clearer texts. Also, consider each text in its context and in light of the purpose and flow of thought of the author. And, interpret individual texts in light of the overall teaching of Scripture on a subject, comparing Scripture with Scripture.

When it comes to the security of our salvation, I believe that the clear, unambiguous passages of Scripture come down strongly on the side that if God has saved us, He will keep us to all eternity. It's easier to explain the texts that seem to say that you can lose your salvation in light of the clear texts that say you cannot, rather than vice versa. And, as our text here shows, the security of our salvation (or the final perseverance of the saints) flows out of Paul's overall doctrine of salvation. Paul is showing that our salvation from start to finish is from the Lord and so it can never fail:

Our salvation is secure because God originated it,
He effected it, and He will complete it.

These verses reveal our past, present, and future. Before the foundation of the world, God planned our salvation: He foreknew and predestined us to salvation. As a result of these sovereign decisions, at some point in our lives, He effectually called us and justified us, so that now He is working to conform us to the image of His Son. In the future, we will be glorified, fully conformed to

Christ, who will be preeminent over all. The entire process comes from God and is sustained by Him. It's all designed for His glory. If His sovereign purpose for the glory and supremacy of Jesus Christ is certain, then our future glory with Christ is certain.

Also, as I said last time, it's important to understand that Paul's purpose in writing these deep truths is pastoral and practical. He didn't write about predestination to spawn arguments and debates. He wrote these things to comfort believers in Rome who either were facing persecution or probably would face it in the near future. They, like us, also had plenty of other trials in life that could have caused them to stumble if they hadn't handled them from God's perspective. And so Paul wants us to know that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (8:28).

As I also pointed out last time, that promise is only good if it's true. How can we *know* that it's true? How can we *know* that God will really work all our trials together for our good? Paul explains why in 8:29-30, where he shows us what "good" means, namely, that we will ultimately be conformed to the image of Christ and be glorified with Him.

But, how can we know that that is true? We know that it's true because God's purpose is certain. His purpose goes back to His decree before the foundation of the world to save a people for His glory. It reaches forward to our glorification in the ages to come, when we will be perfectly sanctified and not able to sin. It's essential to see that salvation from first to last is *totally* of the Lord. If any part of it is due to us, it's in jeopardy. If you're saved, it's because God determined to save you and planned it from start to finish. As I cited Bishop Moule (in my message on Romans 8:28, *Romans* [Christian Literature Crusade], p. 237), "Not one link in the chain of actual Redemption is of our forging—or the whole would indeed be fragile."

1. Our salvation is secure because God originated it.

There are two parts to this, which I covered in more detail in our last study. So here I'm just reviewing.

A. God originated our salvation by setting His love on us before time began.

This is the meaning of “foreknow” (8:29). It does not mean that God looked down through history, saw who would believe in Him, and decided to predestine those people to salvation. That would make God’s eternal purpose depend on the fickle will of sinful men. It would make man sovereign, not God. It goes against the many Scriptures that show that apart from God’s initiative, none seek Him. It would give sinners reason to boast. And, it goes against the meaning of the word as used in other verses, where it means that God foreordained to set His love on someone so as to enter into a relationship with him.

Also, in Romans 8:29-30, God is the subject of all the verbs. He is taking the action. And the action of His foreknowledge is not simply that He knew in advance what people would do. In that sense, He foreknows everyone. Rather, He chose to set His love on some and He predestined these to salvation. If you want specific references and a more thorough defense of that interpretation, I refer you to the previous message. Paul’s point in saying that God foreknew us is that He originated our salvation by choosing to set His love on us before the foundation of the world.

B. God originated our salvation by predestining us to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Again, to review, predestination is God’s purpose and plan to rule His universe as He determined. Just as a man who builds a house follows a predetermined plan, so God predetermined His purpose and plan for history. Thankfully, our salvation is a part of God’s plan to glorify Himself through His Son, who will have first place in everything (Col. 1:18). As Paul writes (Eph. 1:11), “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will.” If we want God to promise salvation, then we must be content to let Him predestine it, because predestination is His determination and commitment to fulfill His promises (Ichabod Spencer, *A Pastor’s Sketches* [Solid Ground Christian Books], 1:250).

Also, we saw that our salvation is not primarily about us or our happiness, although we will be supremely happy throughout eternity. Rather, God predetermined to save us so that His Son “would be the firstborn among many brethren” (8:29). That means

that Christ will have supremacy over all the redeemed, whom He is pleased to be associated with as His brothers and sisters.

God would not have left His eternal purpose of glorifying His Son up to the so-called "free will" of sinful people! If our salvation is bound up with God's purpose of exalting His Son, then it's a sure thing. God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son so that He will be the firstborn, preeminent over all. God will not fail in that purpose. The security of our salvation rests on God's ability to fulfill His predetermined purpose.

So "foreknew" and "predestined" are the first two links in this divine chain of redemption. They took place before the foundation of the world. The next two links take place in time:

2. Our salvation is secure because God effected it.

By "effected it," I mean that He made it happen in our experience. Paul mentions two aspects of this.

A. God effected our salvation by calling us.

We studied this briefly in 8:28, where Paul refers to us as "those who are called according to His purpose." *Called* (or *calling*) is used in two senses in the New Testament. First, the general call of the gospel goes out to all people. Jesus mentioned this when He said (Matt. 22:14), "Many are called, but few are chosen." He issued a general call when He said (Mark 1:15), "Repent and believe in the gospel." Or, when He said (Matt. 11:28), "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." This general call is genuine on God's part, but it is not effectual because of the hardened hearts of the fallen human race (John 3:19-20). Those who refuse the gospel call will be without excuse on judgment day.

But in the New Testament epistles, *call* (or, *calling*) is always used of God's *effectual* call. It *always* accomplishes God's purpose of giving life to the spiritually dead so that they respond to the call. Spurgeon somewhere compares the general call to sheet lightning that lights up the night sky, but doesn't hit anything specific. But the effectual call is like the lightning bolt that hits its target.

We see an example of God's effectual call in Jesus' calling Lazarus from the tomb. Remember, Jesus had just said (John 11:25-26), "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in

Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." The raising of Lazarus that followed was an unforgettable illustration of Jesus' power to call the spiritually dead to spiritual life. When Jesus called, "Lazarus, come forth," He imparted life with the call, so that Lazarus responded. God's word is powerful to create new life (John 5:24-26; James 1:18).

Paul refers to the same truth (2 Cor. 4:4) when he says that Satan, "the god of this world, has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." How can such spiritually blind people ever see? Paul explains (4:6), "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." God's word powerfully imparts light and life to all whom He calls to salvation. His effectual call cannot fail or be thwarted by our fallen, sinful wills. As Jesus said (John 6:37), "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me...."

God's effectual call always comes through His general call. In other words, the gospel is preached or proclaimed to all. Some shrug it off or perhaps angrily resist it. Some, I might add, respond superficially by praying the sinner's prayer or going forward after an altar call. For a while, it looks as if they've been converted. But they're like the seed sown on the rocky ground that springs up quickly, but has no root. They may respond to the general call because they want God to help them out of a problem situation. But when suffering comes and their problems grow worse, they fall away. Or, they're like the seed sown on the thorny ground, where the worries of life or the deceitfulness of riches choke out the word so that it does not bear fruit (Matt. 13:20-22).

But in the elect, God's effectual call comes with power so that they are quickened from spiritual death to life. Their eyes are opened to the glory of Christ and what He did on the cross. They respond in faith and repentance. The difference between the two responses hinges on God's effectually calling those whom He predestined to salvation.

B. God effected our salvation by justifying us.

“These whom He called, He also justified.” We studied this in Romans 3 & 4, so I will not spend much time on it here. There we saw that we are justified by God’s grace alone through faith in Christ alone (Rom. 3:24, 26, 28, 30). To justify means to declare righteous. Based on Christ’s paying the penalty we deserved, God declares righteous all who trust in Him. John Stott explains (*The Cross of Christ* [IVP], p. 190), “When God justifies sinners, he is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all; he is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law, because he himself in his Son has borne the penalty of their law-breaking.” Our faith does not in any way merit justification; rather faith is the channel through which it is received as God’s free gift.

Paul does not mention faith in Romans 8:30 because he is emphasizing that salvation is from the Lord from start to finish. If we were to fill in the blanks, God’s effectual call to salvation results in spiritual life or regeneration. The first evidence of new life is faith in Christ, through which the sinner is justified. Those who are justified by faith inevitably begin to grow in holiness, which is called sanctification. Paul does not mention sanctification directly in this five-fold chain for the same reason he does not mention faith, namely, because we play a part in our sanctification and Paul is emphasizing that salvation is totally from the Lord. But, Paul alludes to sanctification in 8:29 when he mentions becoming “conformed to the image of His Son.” And, sanctification is implicit in “glorification,” which refers to our final state of total sanctification.

So Paul argues that our salvation is secure because in the past, God originated it. In time, He effected it, or brought it to pass.

3. Our salvation is secure because God will complete it.

This is summed up by “glorified,” which Paul puts in the past tense to show that it’s as good as done, because God has predestined it to occur in line with His purpose. In Romans 5:2, Paul stated, “We exult in hope of the glory of God.” The same focus is reflected in 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Consider two aspects of this:

A. God will complete our salvation by glorifying us.

To be glorified means that we will be completely conformed to the image of Christ, free from all sin and positively like Christ in His holy character. We will not become “gods,” as some false teachers proclaim. But in our character, we will be like Christ.

But, when does glorification take place? There is a sense in which the process begins at salvation, when we begin to be transformed into the image of God’s Son “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). But we will never be completely sanctified in this lifetime (Phil. 3:13-14). There is another sense in which we will be glorified when we die and our spirits go to be with the Lord. At that point, we are free from all sin.

But the full sense of our glorification will not occur until Jesus Christ returns and our bodies are resurrected (Rom. 8:19-22). In Philippians 3:20-21, Paul states, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.” Or, as 1 John 3:2 states, “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” The glorious return of Christ will result in the instant, permanent glorification of all believers living and dead, as we all receive our new glorified bodies.

B. God will complete our salvation because Christ will be glorified by glorifying us.

Jesus will be the firstborn, the preeminent One, among many brethren as the Father through Him brings many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10-17). Paul refers to the second coming as the time “when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day” (2 Thess. 1:10). He adds (2 Thess. 2:14), “It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” So the culmination of the gospel is that Christ will be glorified by our sharing His glory. He will be the firstborn, the preeminent One among many brethren. If God’s purpose to glorify His Son is sure, then our final glorification is secure.

Conclusion

These truths are wonderfully assuring, but they also raise a number of questions. I can only quickly touch on five questions

here, but I hope to deal more thoroughly with these and other questions that will come up as we keep working through Romans.

Question 1: If God only set His love on some and predestined only these to salvation, then does He not love everyone in the world?

Answer: While God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will be saved (John 3:16), there is a sense in which He has a special love for His chosen bride, the church: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). I love all my sisters in Christ, but I have a special love for my bride, Marla, that sets her apart unto me.

Question 2: If God is only going to save those whom He has predestined to salvation, does prayer for the lost do any good?

Answer: Prayer is part of the means that God uses to save His elect (2 Thess. 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:1-4). We can't know in advance whom God has chosen, but when people respond to the gospel with faith, resulting in changed lives, we know that God chose them for salvation (1 Thess. 1:2-6; 2 Thess. 2:13). Before they respond, we should pray that God will open their hearts to the gospel (Acts 16:14).

Question 3: If God is going to save all whom He has predestined, then why should we evangelize?

Answer: Evangelism, like prayer, is God's ordained means for saving His elect (Acts 13:46-48; Rom. 10:14-15). We know that there will be some in heaven from every tongue, tribe, and nation (Rev. 5:9-10). So we should proclaim the gospel to all nations, knowing that God will use it to save His elect.

Question 4: If salvation is totally of the Lord, then is there anything that an unbeliever can do to be saved? What if he's not elect?

Answer: While all of salvation, including the repentance and faith to be saved, is of the Lord, He commands us to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). The Bible exhorts sinners (Isa. 55:6-7), "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Paul (Rom. 10:13) cites the promise of Joel 2:32, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." Since "faith comes from hear-

ing and hearing from the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17), those who have not trusted in Christ are responsible to hear the gospel preached and to read the Bible to learn how to be saved. There is a mystery here, in that sinners are unable and unwilling to seek God unless God is first drawing them to Christ (John 6:44, 65; Rom. 3:10-18). But at the same time they are responsible to repent and believe in Christ. They can't blame God for not calling them.

Question 5: If our salvation is totally secure, won't that lead to loose, careless living?

Answer: Paul's critics accused him of this (Rom. 3:8). But the truth is that a proper understanding of God's grace will motivate us to know Him better (Phil. 3:8-14), to grow in holiness (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1), and to serve God more fervently (1 Cor. 15:10, 58).

Every good parent wants his children to feel secure in his love. Our heavenly Father wants you to know that your salvation is secure because He originated it by setting His love on you and predestining you to salvation before the foundation of the world. He effected it by calling you to salvation and justifying you when He brought you to faith in Christ. He will bring it to completion when Christ returns and you are eternally glorified with Him. Your salvation is secure because it is bound up with God's eternal purpose of glorifying His beloved Son.

Application Questions

Discuss further the five questions in the conclusion, along with appropriate Scripture references:

1. If God only set His love on some and predestined only these to salvation, then does He not love everyone in the world?
2. If God is only going to save those whom He has predestined to salvation, does prayer for the lost do any good?
3. If God is going to save all whom He has predestined, then why should we evangelize?
4. If salvation is totally of the Lord, then is there anything that an unbeliever can do to be saved? What if he's not elect?
5. If our salvation is totally secure, won't that lead to loose, careless living?

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