Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Doctrine of Election
Scripture: Romans 8
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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. (8:31b-34)

Paul begins with an all-encompassing rhetorical question, **If God is for us, who is against us?** The word **if** translates the Greek conditional particle *ei*, signifying a fulfilled condition, not a mere possibility The meaning of the first clause is therefore "*Because* **God is for us**."

The obvious implication is that if anyone were able to rob us of salvation they would have to be greater than God Himself, because He is both the giver and the sustainer of salvation. To Christians Paul is asking, in effect, "Who could conceivably take away our no-condemnation status?" (see 8:1). Is there anyone stronger than God, the Creator of everything and everyone who exists?

David declared with unreserved confidence, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?" (Ps. 27:1). In another psalm we read, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. … The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold" (Ps. 46:1–3, 11).

Proclaiming the immeasurable greatness of God, Isaiah wrote,

It is He who sits above the vault of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. … Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars, the One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power not one of them is missing. … Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. (Isa. 40:22, 26,

28)

In Romans 8:31 Paul does not specify any particular persons who might be successful against us, but it would be helpful to consider some of the possibilities.

First of all, we might wonder, “Can other people rob us of salvation?” Many of Paul’s initial readers of this epistle were Jewish and would be familiar with the Judaizing heresy promulgated by highly legalistic Jews who claimed to be Christians. They insisted that no person, Jew or Gentile, could be saved or maintain his salvation without strict observance of the Mosaic law, and especially circumcision.

The Jerusalem Council was called to discuss that very issue, and its binding decision was that no Christian is under the ritual law of the Mosaic covenant (see Acts 15:1–29). The major thrust of Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia was against the Judaizing heresy and is summarized in the following passage:

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. 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. (Gal. 5:2–6; cf. 2:11–16; 3:1–15)

The Roman Catholic church teaches that salvation can be lost by committing so-called mortal sins and also claims power for itself both to grant and to revoke grace. But such ideas have no foundation in Scripture and are thoroughly heretical. No person or group of persons, regardless of their ecclesiastical status, can bestow or withdraw the smallest part of God’s grace.

When Paul was bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders who had come to meet him at Miletus, he warned, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:28–30). Paul was not suggesting that true believers can be robbed of salvation but was warning that they can be seriously misled, confused, and weakened in their faith and that the cause of the gospel can be greatly hindered. Although false teaching cannot prevent the completion of a believer’s salvation, it can easily confuse an unbeliever regarding salvation.

Second, we might wonder if Christians can put themselves out of God's grace by committing some unusually heinous sin that nullifies the divine work of redemption that binds them to the Lord. Tragically, some evangelical churches teach that loss of salvation is possible. But if we were not able by our own power or effort to save ourselves-to free ourselves from sin, to bring ourselves to God, and to make ourselves His children-how could it be that by our own efforts we could nullify the work of grace that God Himself has accomplished in us?

Third, we might wonder if God the Father would take away our salvation. It was, after all, the Father who "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). If anyone could take away salvation, it would have to the One who gave it. We might argue theoretically that, because God is sovereign and omnipotent, He *could* take away salvation if He wanted to. But the idea that He *would* do that flies in the face of Scripture, including the present text.

In answer to such a suggestion, Paul asks, **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?** How could it possibly be that God would sacrifice His own Son for the sake of those who believe in Him and then cast some of those blood-bought believers out of His family and His kingdom? Would God do less for believers after they are saved than He did for them prior to salvation? Would He do less for His children than He did for His enemies? If God loved us so much while we were wretched sinners that He delivered up **His own Son … for us**, would He turn His back on us after we have been cleansed from sin and made righteous in His sight?

Isaac was an Old Testament picture of Christ. When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the only son of promise, both Abraham and Isaac willingly obeyed. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac is a beautiful foreshadow of God the Father's willingness to offer up His only begotten Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Isaac's willingness to be sacrificed foreshadows Christ's willingness to go to the cross. God intervened to spare Isaac and provided a ram in his place (Gen. 22:1–13). At that point, however, the analogy changes from comparison to contrast, because God **did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all**.

Isaiah extolled the wondrous love of both God the Father and God the Son when he wrote,

Surely our griefs He Himself [Christ, the Son] bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God [the Father], and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our

transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. … But the Lord [the Father] was pleased to crush Him [the Son], putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering. (Isa. 53:4–6, 10)

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross not only is the foundation of our salvation but also of our security. Because the Father loved us so much while we were still under condemnation, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Because the Son loved us so much while we were still under condemnation, 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" (Gal. 1:4; cf. 3:13).

Jesus promises all those who belong to Him: "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2–3). The Lord makes no allowance for *any* of His people to be lost again, but promises each one of them an eternal home in His eternal presence. Jesus also assures us that the Holy Spirit will be with us forever (John 14:16), again making no allowance for exceptions. What power in heaven or earth could rob the God-head of those who have been divinely saved for eternity?

Beginning in verse 8 of chapter 12, Paul speaks almost entirely in the first and second persons, referring to himself and to fellow believers. It is the same spiritual brethren (**us**) he speaks of twice in verse 32. If the Father delivered up His Son **for us all**, he argues, **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** In his letter to Ephesus the apostle is also speaking of fellow believers when he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). If God blesses **all of us**, His children, with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," loss of salvation is clearly impossible. All believers receive that eternal inheritance.

Freely give translates *charizomai*, which means to bestow graciously or out of grace. In some of Paul's other letters the same word carries the idea of forgiveness (see 2 Cor. 2:7, 10; 12:13; Col. 2:13; 3:13). It therefore seems reasonable to interpret Paul's use of *charizomai* in Romans 8:32 as including the idea of God's gracious forgiveness as well as His gracious giving. If so, the apostle is also saying that God **freely** *forgives* **us all things** (cf. 1 John 1:9). God's unlimited forgiveness makes it impossible for a believer to sin himself out of God's grace.

In order to assure His people of their security in Him, “in the same way God, desiring even more 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” (Heb. 6:17–18). The two unchangeable features of God’s unchangeable purpose are His promise and His oath to honor that promise. What greater proof of security could we have than the unchangeable purpose of God to save and keep His elect, the heirs of promise?

Fourth, we might wonder if Satan can take away our salvation. Because he is our most powerful supernatural enemy, if anyone other than God could rob us of salvation, it would surely be the devil. He is called “the accuser of [the] brethren” (Rev. 12:10), and the book of Job depicts him clearly in that role:

And the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.” Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face.” (Job 1:8–11)

Satan accused Job of worshiping God out of selfishness rather than out of reverence and love. Although Job at one point questioned God’s wisdom and was divinely rebuked (chaps. 38–41), he repented and was forgiven. From the beginning to the end of Job’s testing, the Lord affectionately called him “My servant” (see 1:8; 42:7–8). Although Job’s faith was not perfect, it was genuine. The Lord therefore permitted Satan to test Job, but He knew Satan could never destroy Job’s persevering faith or rob His servant of salvation.

In one of his visions, the prophet Zechariah reports: “Then he fan angel] 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?’ ” (Zech. 3:1–2). Although “Joshua was clothed with filthy garments” (v. 3), that is, was still living with the sinful flesh, he was one of the Lord’s redeemed and was beyond Satan’s power to destroy or discredit.

Satan also tried to undermine Peter's faith, and Jesus warned him of that danger, saying, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat." He then assured the apostle, "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31–32).

Because every believer has that divine protection, Paul asks, **Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?** The world and Satan are continually bringing charges **against God's elect**, but those charges amount to nothing before the Lord, because He **is the one who justifies**, the one who decides who is righteous before Him. They have been declared eternally guiltless and are no longer under the condemnation of God (8:1), the only **one who condemns**. God conceived the law, revealed the law, interprets the law, and applies the law. And through the sacrifice of His Son, all the demands of the law have been met for those who trust in Him.

That great truth inspired Count Zinzendorf to write the following lines in the glorious hymn "Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness," translated by John Wesley:

Bold I shall stand in that great day,

For who ought to my charge shall lay?

Fully absolved through Thee I am

From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

It is not that the accusations made against believers by Satan and the unbelieving world are always false. The fact that we are not yet sinless is obvious. But even when a charge against us is true, it is never sufficient grounds for our damnation, because all our sins-past, present, and future-have been covered by the blood of Christ and we are now clothed in His righteousness.

Fifth, we might wonder if our Savior Himself would take back our salvation. Anticipating that question, Paul declares, **Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us**. It is because Jesus makes continuous intercession for *all* believers, **God's elect**, that "they shall never perish" and that "no one shall snatch them out of [His] hand" (John 10:28). For **Christ** to take away our salvation would be for Him to work against Himself and to nullify His own promise. Christ offers no temporary spiritual life but only that which is eternal. He could not grant eternal life and then take it away, because that would demonstrate that the life He had granted was *not* eternal.

In verse 34 Paul reveals four realities that protect our salvation in Jesus Christ. First, he says that **Christ Jesus … died**. In His death He took upon Himself the full penalty for our sins. In His death He bore the condemnation that we deserved but from which we are forever freed (8:1). The death of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf is the only condemnation we will ever know.

Second, Christ **was raised** from the dead, proving His victory over sin and over its supreme penalty of death. The grave could not hold Jesus, because He had conquered death; and His conquest over death bequeaths eternal life to every person who trusts in Him. As Paul has declared earlier in this letter, Christ "was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:25). His death paid the price for our sins and His resurrection gave absolute proof that the price was paid. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He demonstrated that His Son had offered the full satisfaction for sin that the law demands.

Third, Christ **is at the right hand of God**, the place of divine exaltation and honor. Because "He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, … God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:8–9). David foretold that glorious event when he wrote, "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet' " (Ps. 110:1).

There were no seats in the Temple, because the sacrifices made there by the priests were never finished. They were but pictures of the one and only true sacrifice that the Son of God one day would make. The writer of Hebrews explains that "every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He [Christ], having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:11–12; cf. 1:3).

Fourth, Christ **also intercedes for us**. Although His work of atonement was finished, His continuing ministry of intercession for those saved through His sacrifice will continue without interruption until every redeemed soul is safe in heaven. Just as Isaiah had prophesied, "He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). Jesus Christ "is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

If we understand what Christ did on the cross to save us from sin, we understand what it means to be secure in His salvation. If we believe that God loved us so much when we were wretched and

ungodly that He sent His Son to die on the cross to bring us to Himself, how could we believe that, after we are saved, His love is not strong enough to keep us saved? If Christ had power to redeem us out of bondage to sin, how could He lack power to keep us redeemed?

Christ, the perfect Priest, offered a perfect sacrifice to make us perfect. To deny the security of the believer is therefore to deny the sufficiency of the work of Christ. To deny the security of the believer is to misunderstand the heart of God, to misunderstand the gift of Christ, to misunderstand the meaning of the cross, to misunderstand the biblical meaning of salvation.

Even when we sin after we are saved, “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” because in Him “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 1:9; 2:1). When we sin, our Lord intercedes on our behalf and comes to our defense against Satan and any others who might bring charges against us (see Rom. 8:33). “God is able to make all grace abound to you,” Paul assured the believers at Corinth (2 Cor. 9:8). Through our remaining days on earth and throughout all eternity, our gracious Lord will hold us safe in His everlasting love by His everlasting power.

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