



## **“Guaranteed: Eternal Good”<sup>1</sup>**

### **Romans 8:18-30**

It was about three years ago. I was in my office with my dad and David Pollard. We were praying, and while I was praying, I felt the passion of the Spirit fill me with zeal. I prayed that God would do whatever it took to bring about a revival. I prayed that God would work through me in whatever means. And then came the fateful words: “Father, even if it means we have to limp the rest of our lives, like Jacob, do it!” Of course, I was simply thinking illustratively, but today I believe those were the specific words God wanted me to pray. In probably less than six months later, my dad had a stroke – forever changing his walk. I remember thinking, “Lord, I didn’t mean *him*. I meant *me!*” Then, the next summer, I started getting pain in my knee. Over the course of six months, the pain went up to my hip. And now I’ve been experiencing chronic pain in my hip, knee, leg (and other places) since the summer of 2017.

While I’ve experienced other types of trials, this one has tested me in ways I never imagined. There have been times of anger towards God. There have been times when I’ve been silent. Many moments I’ve simply been perplexed while weeping before the Lord, asking “why?” As many of you know, I had a surgery in November to seek to correct the problem. However, the pain is worse today than it was before the procedure and even my surgeon is not happy with the results.

In the midst of all of this, I’ve had moments where I’ve thought, “Is this going to be the rest of my life?” And, if so, am I going to be able to endure? Will there be a moment where I’m just going to give up on the faith and walk away?

Have you ever asked questions like that? Maybe you’re not enduring chronic pain. Maybe it’s the continual temptation that you’ve fallen prey to again for the thousandth time. You’re now wondering, “Lord, am I going to leave you for that sin? What if it gets worse?!” Others of you could have abuse in your past, and thoughts continue to dog you saying that you’re worthless and God doesn’t care for you. You feel the weight of shame and guilt. Still other of us could ponder what’s going to happen in our future. Will persecution rise up in America? I remember a friend of mine telling me that he genuinely feared that he would deny Christ if persecution came because he has such fear of pain. Have you wondered about your endurance in the face of persecution? But, more practically, others of you simply go through the daily rigors of living in a fallen world with a flesh that tempts you – and in the midst of daily life, you wonder, “God, are you there? Do you love me? How do I know I’m a Christian?” Or maybe even more importantly, you ask, “How do I know I’m going to be a Christian next year, ten years from now? Ten thousand years from now?”

We battle the insecurities we feel in this life. The waves of trials come crashing down on the shore of life, and we fear that we will abandon God and will forever be lost. This is the scenario that the text

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

we're studying today will address. "Will I fall away? Where is God in all of this?" And I think the big idea Paul communicates in these verses is that no matter what we face in this fallen world, no matter how we respond or others may hurt us, **God justly and lovingly guarantees our eternal good.**

With this in mind, turn in your Bibles to Romans 8, and I will read verses 31-39 after I pray for us [Pray for Harbor Lights Baptist Church and for the Horns in Bolivia.]

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*<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>2</sup>*

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Verse 31 starts by saying, "What then shall we say to these things?" What things is he talking about? He's, at a minimum, referencing the immediate verses that precede this. Verse 28 says, "<sup>28</sup> **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**"<sup>3</sup> This is an emphatic statement. We know. He doesn't simply say, "We think," or, "We assume," or "We hope." He says, "we know." How do we know it? Because God has told us this! For those who love God, all things work together for good.

I need to clarify what "good" means. The word "good" can have different ideas to it. In our culture, it probably mostly has a relative sense to it. In other words, are you better than someone else or are you doing externally moral things that help others feel nice. But in the context of Romans, that's not what Paul is saying. He's not saying that God is going to make sure that everything in this life turns out the way that you plan. God isn't committed to the American Dream be fulfilled in your life. God is not necessarily committed to you getting that raise or a bigger house. God is also *not* committed to you never experiencing suffering.

As you hear this, you could think, "Well, this doesn't sound good!" And, that's in some ways what I think the readers of Romans 8 could have thought, too. So, if God is *not* committed to these things, what does the word "good" mean? Look at the beginning of verse 29: <sup>29</sup> **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. . . .**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:31–39.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:27–28.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:29.

What is God committed to? God is committed to conforming people to the image of Jesus. God, the Father, who has given us blessing upon blessing upon blessing, has given us all of these things so that we might image forth the glory of Jesus! This is the Father's goal. And, as Paul says elsewhere, his goal is that he would become like Christ, and then Paul also writes that when Jesus comes back, the church (all believers throughout all time) will finally attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (see Eph. 3). Jesus is humanity's Savior, and Jesus is who we seek to become like. God's goal is that we would be like him. Or, to put another way, God's intention is that we would bear the family resemblance. God not only makes you his child, he ensures you'll live like the free child of God that you are.

But when I say that's God's goal, you could think, "Well, I make goals, but I don't always accomplish them." And, as it relates to our lives as Christians, we can tend to think that we could thwart God's goal for us. Or, we can think certain circumstances in our lives mean that God has left us. But verse 29 says that God has *predestined us* to be conformed to the image of his Son. There can hardly be a stronger word than "predestine." The word can also be translated predetermine or preordain. The word "pre" means "before." So, before we even came into being, God determined, ordained and destined us to be conformed to the image of Christ. God didn't simply have a desire to make us like Christ. He determined that we *would be* like Christ!

Now, I need to be careful at this point. Paul doesn't say *everyone* will be conformed to Jesus. He says "for those who love God." And, if we take the entirety of Romans into account, which we have to, Paul is saying that those who trust in Jesus for forgiveness of their sinfulness and for reconciliation with God – those people are given new desires of love for God. This is phenomenal! Christian, think of this glorious love. At some point, you trusted in Jesus, and then you read here that God determined even before you believed, that you would be conformed to Christ's image! Therefore, since this is God's plan, Paul writes that God called you, justified you and glorified you. God will always accomplish what he plans to do – that includes your own growth in godliness, Christian.

So, what shall we say to these things? Paul then asks, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" This is the umbrella-question of these verses. In question-form, Paul is saying, "God is for you; therefore, no one can be against you." But, you could say, "Um, yes, there are a lot of people against me." Paul has even just communicated about the suffering of this world, the groaning of this world, the trials that lead us to groan in prayer and not know even how to pray as we ought. In Romans 7, he talks about the battle against our own flesh. We have things within, people without and situations around that seem to be against us! So, we might be tempted to say, "Yeah, but Paul, look at this!" Paul knew this would be our response; so, he writes a series of questions that could come to our minds. Questions that call into question God's predestination of us. And Paul shows that every "yeah, but" we bring, doesn't change the reality of God's guarantee.

Before Paul gets into the following question, he again reiterates the sacrifice of God in verse 32: **32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**<sup>5</sup>

Do you think God is going to give up on you if he predetermined to conform you to Jesus? Do you think God's going to let you go if he sent his Son to take the wrath you deserved? There was a man alive in the 18<sup>th</sup> century named William Cowper. He battled against seasons of severe depression. He was also the

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:32.

man who wrote, “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood.” In one season, he said that he believed God doesn’t lose any person. . .except him. A sense of despair seemed to overwhelm him, but was he accurate in that feeling? With this statement in verse 32, Paul is commenting on the character and reliability of God. If you think that God can let go of someone he determined to keep, and if you think you can lose a salvation that the Son of God died to grant you, then what does that say about the power of God? You’re actually saying you’re stronger than God! You’re saying God can’t accomplish what he determines to do. May it never be! Humans fail at goals, but God never does.

Jesus’ sacrifice for sinners was complete and perfect. All who are rescued by Jesus are *eternally* rescued. Therefore, Paul says, “how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” So, get the scenario here. Romans 7-8 shows us that we live in a world with trials from within and without. We begin to ask questions and wonder if God has forsaken us or if we’re going to make it. Paul then says that God is for us, so who can be against us? We say, “Everything can be against us.” And then Paul says that God will graciously give us all things. When we piece this together, we realize that when Paul asks “who can be against us,” he’s saying, “Who or what can ultimately tear us down?” Sure, there are obstacles and hurdles in this life, but if God is for us, he has the power over every hurdle. He will carry us and move us through. But what does it mean that he will graciously give us all things? Does this mean that someday when we see Jesus, we’ll have everything, but now we wait? Well, maybe in part. But actually, I think Paul is saying that at every point of our journey, God is giving his children grace. Even in the suffering, God is giving us gifts of grace. He’s not against us. He’s for us. What this world may mean for evil, God means it for good! So, a man named Thomas Schreiner wrote, “**The point is that the love of Christ is so powerful that it turns our greatest enemies into our friends.. . . all things experienced in this age – including sufferings. . .are for the benefit of believers**” (pp. 460-61).

In the difficulty of losing a child, in the pain of a marriage falling apart, in the trials of temptations; we must believe God is for our eternal good – to conform us to the image of Christ. God doesn’t waste your trials. Instead, he works in such a way that every trial will submit to his purpose for your eternal welfare!

Now Paul moves into more questions. These questions bring air-tight reasons why God *will* keep you and ensure your eternal good, which is likeness to Jesus! You can actually break these questions down into two categories: legal questions and then a familial question. And, this is actually how Paul has written in the book of Romans. We are both declared righteous in God’s courtroom, and we are adopted into God’s family through Christ. Justification and adoption then form as the basis of our assurance of salvation and eternal glory. Let’s look at the first set of questions:

### **1. God justly guarantees our eternal good (vv. 33-34).**

**Q&A #1: Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?** Again, we can give multiple answers here. For example, Revelation says that the devil accuses Christians day and night. I think of the story from Zechariah 3 about Joshua, the High Priest. Joshua is standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan is standing at his right, accusing Joshua before the Lord. He’s stating that Joshua is guilty and should be held guilty. And, you know what, in one sense, he’s right. We read that Joshua was clothed with filthy garments – which signifies Joshua’s sinfulness.

Yet, the angel of the Lord rebukes Satan. And then the angel of the Lord says to Joshua that he has taken his iniquity away from him. He calls for the filthy clothes to be taken away and then he’s clothed in pure garments.

Satan himself can and does go into God's courtroom and bring charges against God's children. But, the real question is, "Can any of them stick?" Well, if we did not have Jesus on our side, all accusations would stand. But Jesus, who is the angel of the Lord, stood in our place, condemned, taking the just wrath of God that we sinners deserved. Paul wrote in Romans 3 that Jesus appeased God's wrath so that God would be both just in punishing sin and justifier in forgiving sin! And this is what Paul writes as the answer to the question: It is God who justifies. God, in his heavenly courtroom declares us righteous. There is no higher power. There is no greater word than the one from the Creator God who points at us and says "Not guilty! You're righteous!"

Because of Jesus, no charges against us will stand! Christian, listen. If you have turned from sins and truly love and trust Jesus, no charge can hold against you. Don't waste your time listening to Satan's lies. When he tempts you to despair and tell you of your guilt within, look upward again to Jesus! You are secure. God will not revoke his declaration over you.

The second question is very similar to the first, but based on the answer, there's some more nuances brought out. **Q&A #2: Who is to condemn?** Maybe I'm justified today, but will I be justified 10 years from now? Could something happen that I would be condemned, even though I was declared righteous at one point? Again, the answer is a resounding "no." Paul answers with four realities: Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.<sup>6</sup>

Paul again bases our hope in Jesus. Jesus died. Jesus rose again. Jesus was raised. Jesus is at the right hand of God. Jesus is praying for us. Let's briefly take each point. Jesus died. Well, since Romans 3 teaches us that Jesus was condemned as a sinner in the place of sinners, there's no more condemnation that God needs to bring. Additional condemnation would be pointless and even unjust. So, who's to condemn? Not God!

Another reason we won't be condemned is that Jesus rose from the dead. The Scriptures teach us that Jesus' resurrection vindicated his death. It was a display that God accepted Jesus' death. In rising from the dead, he conquered death. Will death condemn us and leave us in the grave? No. Jesus rose from the dead! As Paul wrote in 4:25, Jesus "was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, Jesus is at the right hand of God. The right hand signifies the place of power and authority. Hebrews 12 speaks of our endurance in this life, and says that we endure by always looking to Jesus who is at the right hand of God. In the place of power and authority, Jesus ensures we will endure! Will something happen in our lives where we will fall away and be condemned? No. Will God the Father condemn us? No. Could Jesus condemn us? Absolutely not! He ascended to ensure we'll endure. Jesus' life and death on our behalf cannot be thwarted by anyone or anything.

Finally, Paul says Jesus intercedes for us. Personally, I cannot express to you the feelings of utter love I feel when I hear these words. If you've ever gone through seasons of greater pain, temptation and suffering, you've wept. You've cried out to the Lord. You've prayed and prayed and prayed. Paul says, "And, Jesus does, too." The word "intercede" means to speak on our behalf. Jesus speaks for our

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<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:34.

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 4:25.

welfare before God, the Father. And, will the Father reject the prayers of Jesus, who is in the place of power and authority?

The only prayer God denied was Jesus' prayer in the Garden to have the cup pass from him – but even in that, Jesus was praying for perseverance to endure the punishment we deserved. Now, exalted to the highest place, Jesus prays for our endurance, giving us what we don't deserve – grace upon grace. Who can condemn us if the exalted Jesus is praying for us? No one. And since Jesus is praying for us, not only will we not be condemned, but our eternal good is guaranteed.

On this note of prayer, Paul's argument transition from the legal reasons for our assurance to familial reasons for assurance. God isn't simply a Judge sitting on his courtroom chair, making declarations about us. But God, when he declared us righteous, got off the chair, came to us and served us papers to adopt us into his family – so he could call us dearly loved children. Therefore, we will endure and we see that God has guaranteed our eternal good because he's the just Judge and he loves us.

## 2. God lovingly guarantees our eternal good (vv. 35-39).

Christian, do you know that God doesn't simply tolerate you, but he loves you? The emphasis of the word "love" in these verses is clear. Three times, in obvious spots, Paul says God loves us. How could a God who loves us leave us?

In the midst of suffering, we could be tempted to believe he doesn't love, but that's a temptation – a lie. There's a poem written by William Cowper, who also wrote, "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; The clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy and shall break In blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. Blind unbelief is sure to err And scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, And He will make it plain" (*God Moves in a Mysterious Way*).

Blind unbelief will always make error in evaluating God's work in our circumstances. But know this, behind the sorrowful circumstances, God is smiling for your eternal good! He loves you.

This moves us to Paul's next question. **Q&A #3: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** From this point, Paul asks no more questions. This third question propels him into a litany of situations that we could imagine which may remove us from God's graces.

And Paul shows us that God's love for us in Christ is the strongest argument for our security. Let's reread verses 35-39 again:

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*Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor*

*depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*<sup>8</sup>

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What could pull us away from God's love? Paul uses strong terms here. When I read these words, I think of the Christians a couple years ago who were beheaded by Isis. Or, I think of a man named Haralan Popov, who was a pastor in Bulgaria, imprisoned for 15 years, tortured for his faith. Some professing Christians renounced the faith and were set free, but he endured grotesquely creative tortures.

Where is God in the midst of these types of injustices? Where's God when a pastor is ripped from his family, and the next time he sees his daughter, she's around 20 years old. Where is God in the famines? Where is God when Christians are beheaded or burned at the stake? Now, we can ask these questions about "Where is God" in the general world problems, but Paul's specific here. If we are God's children, wouldn't these things mean God has forsaken us?

Paul then quotes from Psalm 44: For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. The context of this verse in the psalms is the psalmist lamenting that the righteous suffer. They have not left God's glory. They're faithful, and yet they're being mocked and humiliated. Paul then affirms that this is the case for Christians today. Those who are God's children cannot skirt around the inevitability of suffering and temptation. So, we are in a long line of righteous people who suffered. Did God give up on them? Did Isaiah's sawing in two mean God was gone? What about Samuel's rejection by Israel? What about Jeremiah's ministry of continual weeping? The world may say we're hopeless. The world may mock us – and honestly, I can't help but wonder if these days will increase in America sooner rather than later.

But even if the world thinks we are fools. Even if we're mocked. God hasn't left us. Paul continues in 37, saying, "<sup>37</sup>No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."<sup>9</sup> The Greek word behind the word "no" can have the understanding of "no," however, I think it'd be more helpful to translate this as "But in all these things." When I read the word "no," I think it sounds like Paul is saying Psalm 44 doesn't apply to us. Yet, many Christians are regarded as fools. There is suffering.

The point Paul is making is that it's actually in the midst of the suffering that Christ makes us conquerors! You can't be a conqueror over nothing. In order to conquer, there must be an enemy. There must be pain, trial, difficulty, temptation in order to be a conqueror. And Paul says that each and every person who turns to Jesus for salvation is *more than* a conqueror!

By the way, what's *more than* a conqueror? You're a conquering conqueror. And, notice here that the victory isn't attributed to you! You're not going to get to Heaven and say, "Well, I'm here because I did this and that. I was really disciplined over here and did that thing over there." Sure, godliness takes grace-driven effort. But that effort is grace-driven! Paul attributes our conquering to the love of Christ! If Jesus removed his love from you, you'd fall away. But Paul essentially is saying, "Is that the kind of Savior we have? Do we have a Savior who will remove his love?" NO! So, in the most dire of circumstances, we will conquer. Therefore, we can face the smaller circumstances (and everything in between) in grace, too.

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<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:35–39.

<sup>9</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:37.

And that's what Paul highlights next: <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>10</sup>

In all these statements, Paul's highlighting all circumstances we can face. Death and life relates to our physical lives. So, from birth to grace. Will anything that happens between birth to death separate us from God's love? What about the angelic realm – angels, rulers and powers? Can the angelic realm pervert God's love for you? What about timelines? What if something happens down the road? Have you ever wondered that? What if this happens, will God's committed love change? Then Paul says "height or depth." This is a poetic phrase to refer to anything within spacial dimensions. Wherever you travel, wherever you go, will God's love change?

Then, in case we have any questions, Paul asks, "nor anything else in all creation." After reading this list, some people will say, "Ok, nothing in creation, except me. I can separate myself from God's love." Really?! Are you part of creation? Paul's intention in this passage is to address the fact that we could be tempted from within or tried from without – to lead us away from God. But Paul says that God's love is so gloriously powerful that there is no way God will let us go. If God predetermined before we existed and then Jesus died before we came on this earth, then why would God allow us (or anything else) to destroy his workmanship?

Why? Because God justly and lovingly guarantees our eternal good. So, think of your life. Maybe you're like my friend who feared what may come in the future? How will you respond? That's not the right question. The right question is, "How will God respond?" Maybe you're fearful you're going to fall again into that similar temptation. What if you fail? That's not the right question. The right question is, "Is God strong enough?" Or, as I think through my chronic pain, I can wonder, "Will this be the rest of my life?" That's not the right question. The right question is, "Will God be with me for the rest of my life and eternity?"

Oh, if we lived with these truths in our minds, we would be full of joyful endurance every day. We have God, and he loves us! He's committed to our good. So, come what may. Satan and sin seeks to destroy us, and they will try in this life. But because God guarantees nothing is wasted in our lives, we can persevere for God's glory. Ventura, think about this letter that Paul writes here to the Roman Christians. Within 10 years, I imagine some (or many) of these Christians died under persecution of Emperor Nero. Paul himself died as well. I can't help but imagine that God's Words of love towards the Romans strengthened them to keep pursuing Jesus. Now, they are in the Lord's presence. Similarly with us – we don't know what the future holds. Some of us are enduring painful trials today. But in the pain, we can rest. God is good. God loves us. And someday, we will be home! Our eternal good is guaranteed.

**God's powerful determination, his justice and his love give all the comfort and peace that a believer needs, guaranteeing our endurance. Though the world may say we're forsaken and though we may be tempted to believe we're forsaken by God, we are assured through Jesus' death and sacrifice that God guarantees our eternal good.**

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<sup>10</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:38–39.

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