

ROMANS 8**THERE'S MORE TO BEING A CHRISTIAN THAN JUST SAYING
YOU ARE ONE**

Does anyone remember how we ended last week's message?

True salvation Produces lovers of God!

People who are truly saved don't just believe in God, they love God. I don't care if someone tells me they're a Christian, or they're an elder, or they're a pastor, or a bishop, because none of that means anything to me if they don't demonstrate, by the way they live their lives, that they love God. And it won't take you very long to know that a person loves God. It will radiate from the very core of their being. They will never hesitate to express that love for God no matter what type of hostile situation they might find themselves in. Their love for God does not embarrass them, and they don't care if they're not accepted into a certain social group because they're viewed as religious fanatics. They are like the martyrs in the early centuries after Christ. They would be willing to die for their faith. God is their Father and fellow believers are their brothers and sisters, family bonded by a common faith, a faith that is unshakeable.

Does that describe you? When Paul writes in Romans 8:28:

*We know that God causes **everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.***

Is Paul talking about you in this verse? Are all things that happen in your life, good and bad things, going to ultimately work out for good because you are one who loves God? Or are you a fence walker? Do you feel you can make your own decisions and chart your own course without God? Are you someone who says, "*I believe in God,*" but feels that all religions have the same God and we should be tolerant of everyone's beliefs? Or are you one who claims to be a Christian and won't help the homeless person who may need a meal; or the neighbor who has cancer and lives alone; or the elderly person who went to your church and now is in a nursing home and is very lonely. Maybe a friend's wife or husband died and you just feel very uncomfortable about calling or visiting him or her. Maybe there's someone that you're gossiping about or that you want to see humiliated because you can't stand them. Or maybe you're like the pastor who once told me, "*Our church really isn't able to relate to those kind of people.*" People who think like this can't love God. Such people may be saved, but I wouldn't bet on it. When a person accepts Jesus Christ's death on the cross for their sins through faith in what Jesus did there, they receive eternal salvation and the Holy Spirit immediately sets up residence within them to begin helping that person be reborn and begin a new life with the power of God available to change them into what they were meant to be.

Based on our knowledge of the Bible, we do not believe that a person can then go on living their lives as they had before and not follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit of God. As we read last week, James wrote in James 2:14-20:

14 Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone.

15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, 16 and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

17 So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.

18 Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." I say, "I can't see your faith if you don't have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds."

19 Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God?

Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror!

20 Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?

I'm sorry to say that in the several churches I've been part of, I've seen little evidence of the love of God we've been discussing. Many churches are nothing more than religious social clubs where people come each week to confirm to one another how good and righteous they are, and there is little if any indication that the Holy Spirit is alive and well in the members of these churches. If you think God is pleased with the way people have been caring for His Church over the last two thousand years, I would suggest you read the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation. There are only two of seven churches that Jesus commends for their deeds. The other five are found lacking in many aspects.

We must recognize that a true believer in God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, is one who loves God. In Luke 6:46, Luke quotes Jesus as asking those of His followers:

46 "So why do you call me 'Lord,' when you won't obey me?"

Here Jesus is saying in effect, "Look, if I look at your life and don't see any obedience, then your calling me 'Lord' doesn't mean anything. If I don't see obedience, which is the natural by-product of love, then there is no love there." And how many people behave in such a hypocritical way toward God today? They flood the churches of this country going through all kinds of rituals, lighting candles, singing hymns, taking communion, being baptized, and any other number of other outward religious expressions, but when they leave the building they take with them no more than a thimble full of spirituality, and most of them spill even that on the church steps before reaching the parking lot. There's

no real love for God in these churches. There's no substance.

There was a Wendy's hamburger commercial many years ago that I'll never forget. At the time all the major hamburger chains were advertising all the things they put on their hamburgers, and Wendy's simply had this cute, feisty, little old lady come out and say, "*Where's the beef?*" That's what I'd like to direct at most churches. I'd like to ask them, "*Where are the deeds that show you love God? Where is the evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your work as a church? Where is there evidence of the love of God toward others?*" True faith is to love God so much that you believe in His Word and follow its instructions all of your life. Anything else is meaningless chatter. And anyone who doesn't feel motivated to live this way, because of their faith, had better take a reality check. Because you may be headed for a place that you don't think you're headed for, and when you get there, there won't be any turning back. And of course I'm talking about your eternity.

There is only one thing in all the world that you can totally believe in. There is only one thing in all the world that you can trust, and that is God and His Word found in the Bible. If your pastor says something contrary to what's in the Bible, he or she is lying. Don't believe them. If your friends, relatives, co-workers, or anyone else gives you an interpretation of Scripture that isn't compatible with the whole of the Bible, they're lying to you. Don't listen to them. Surround yourself with a group of believers who you can trust to study God's Word together, helping and building one another up in the faith, and speaking the truth in love. Anything else is meaningless rhetoric.

Loving God is a basic element of genuine redemption. Some of you may be wondering, "*What kind of love is this? What are its qualities, and how can we know we have it?*" Well let us suggest several possibilities, and although we won't read each Scripture passage, we'll tell you where you can find them if you want to look them up.

- 1) The kind of love we're speaking of meditates on God's majestic glory. It's the kind of love that is just thrilled by who God is (Psalm 18:1-3)
- 2) It is a love that trusts in God's great power (Psalm 31:23,24; Psalm 63:1-3; 2 Chronicles 16:9a).
- 3) It is a love that seeks communion with God. All love seeks to commune with the object of its love (Psalm 63:1-3;42:1,2).
- 4) It is a love that secures the peace of the soul. People who do not have that kind of love relationship are anxious, upset, troubled, and seeking after it constantly. When they find the perfect object of their love, their soul finds peace. When we come to know God and experience His love, we enter into a peace like we've never experienced (Psalm 119:165; John 14:27; Isaiah 26:3).
- 5) It is also a love that is sensitive to God's feelings. You cannot injure God and feel no pain. We enter into the pain of the one we love. When God is dishonored we feel the pain (Psalm 69:9).

6) It is a love that loves what God loves (Psalm 119:97,103; Matthew 19:29; John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Luke 5:32) .

7) It is a love that loves whom God loves (1 John 5:1-3; 3:16).

8) It is a love that cannot tolerate evil (sin) any more than God can (Matthew 26:75; Psalm 97:10; Romans 12:9,10).

9) It is a love that rejects the things of this world (1 John 2:15-17).

10) It is a love that longs for Jesus' return (2 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:13).

True believers love God like this. But there's one more that should head the list:

11) It is a love that obeys God's commands (John 14:21,23; Romans 7:22; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 40:8; Psalm 119:97, 103).

It may be a battle to conduct ourselves like this at all times, but if a person is truly a believer, the desire will be there, for the believer loves God even though he or she may fail.

Now let's go on to the next two verses in Romans chapter eight, Romans 8:29,30 (NAS):

*29 For those whom He foreknew, **He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;*

*30 and **these whom He predestined, He also called**; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

Here we're introduced to one of the world's oldest theological arguments. Theologians have probably been arguing over these verses and this doctrine since the first or second century. We wouldn't be exaggerating if we were to say that the greatest number of theologians who have studied this doctrine agree that it means that people were pre-selected by God to be saved or condemned. In other words God chose George and Laura, but excluded John and Teresa.

I believe with all my heart that those theologians are wrong. I wrote a paper during my masters program here at Wheaton supporting my position based on what the Bible teaches. God is a God of love consistently throughout the Bible. I do not believe it possible that the God I know and love could have developed such a policy. I do believe He may have chosen any number of people to serve Him in various capacities and as such they would receive salvation, but I do not believe He selected who was to be saved and who was not as a matter of general policy. I believe God predestined **everyone** for salvation, that's why He sent Jesus to die on the cross as a payment for the sin of all human beings. Exodus 32:32,33 suggests that perhaps everyone's name was originally

written in God's book, but by their unbelief they left God no option but to remove their names. That would seem to be confirmed in Deuteronomy 29:19-21 as well. Then we find this verse in 2 Peter 3:9:

*9 The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time **for everyone to repent.***

God doesn't want anyone to perish. He wants everyone to be saved. I believe my masters level paper fully supports this position and I'd be happy to give anyone a copy of it.

We are now going to look into the mind of God, into His purpose for salvation. One thing we all need to realize at the outset is that we are all going to be way over our heads. It is going to be impossible for us to totally get our arms around these concepts. So we need to affirm the fact that we believe the Bible to be the Word of God. We accept what we cannot fully understand, and we accept it by faith. Somewhere along the line you are going to jettison your reason and say, "By-by" to your logic and human wisdom. Because we are going to be plunging into unfathomable depths of truth. We will be entering into a state of divine infinity which to us is incomprehensible. And we emphasize, do not jump to any conclusions until we are finished.

God's purpose, the way He wants things to be, is that when we accept Christ as Savior and are redeemed, from then on **all things work together ultimately for our good** and glory, and nothing can change that. Let's read from Ephesians 1:1-11:

1 This letter is from Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. It is written to God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.

2 May grace and peace be yours, sent to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

3 How we praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we belong to Christ.

4 Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.

*5 **His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.** And this gave him great pleasure.*

6 So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son.

*7 He is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son, and **our sins are forgiven.***

8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

9 God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure.

10 And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth.

11 Furthermore, because of Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us from the beginning, and all things happen just as he decided long ago.

Salvation is based on what God decides. Let's begin our adventure in John 1:12,13:

12 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

13 They are reborn! This is not a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan—this rebirth comes from God

THE PURPOSE OF SALVATION is that we would be conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus. All of life is moving towards that goal. **GOD'S PLAN WAS TO SAVE PEOPLE IN ORDER TO MAKE THEM LIKE JESUS. THAT IS GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE.**

It is God's desire to forgive sin, remove guilt, provide the gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. But all of those things are only a part of the reality of salvation. Even heaven is only a part of the real goal, **that we be conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus.** In other words, God is redeeming an eternally holy, Christ-like, glorified race of human beings. When a believer first believed and accepted Christ as their Savior, the process of being conformed to Christ began, and it must be fulfilled.

When you become a child of God, you are a joint heir with Christ. We are going to be like Him and inherit all that belongs to Him, Philippians 3:20,21:

20 But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior.

*21 He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and **change them into glorious bodies like his own**, using the same mighty power that **he will use to conquer everything**, everywhere.*

This means that our body in Heaven is going to be just like the body of Jesus. Believers will be made in the exact form of Christ's post-resurrection body. But that's not all. We are going to be like Him in the spiritual dimension as well. **Residing in the believer will be the very holiness of Jesus Christ.** We will be free from the restrictions of humanness which we now possess.

How many of you ever longed to be like your hero? You know, that great looking movie star, or sports star, or whatever. Well, just think about it, if you're a believer you're going

to be made just like the greatest hero that ever lived. This is described so beautifully in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

18 And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.

When you come to believe in the saving work of Jesus Christ, you are no longer blind. You now can see. When you become a believer, the process of taking you from one level of glory to the next level of glory to the next begins. It continues little by little until you move towards Christ's likeness, until the day you see Him and become exactly like Him

Jesus did not have to make us His brothers and sisters. He could have made us His servants. Through Jesus, God gives us joy, peace, and Heaven. So if you are saved, God will bring you glory because that is why He saved you.

Now if there is anyone hearing this who is not a believer, I don't expect you to understand all of this. Even believers are probably having a hard time with this concept. But we would just like to encourage you not to worry about being chosen. Don't go around saying, "*I wonder if I'm one of the chosen ones.? Maybe the Lord didn't choose me.*" That is not a factor that you should be concerned about. Just know this: if you find in your heart a hatred of your sin; if you find in your heart an emptiness in life; if you find in your heart a desire for something better, a desire for God, a desire for righteousness; if you find in your heart a desire to turn from your sin and embrace the Lord Jesus Christ and you do it, then you can be sure of one thing. **You are saved and guaranteed a place in Heaven.**

Have you ever thought of God as one who will damn you to Hell for your sins? Nowhere in the Bible is that even suggested. Most likely with tears in His eyes Jesus said, "*Why do you not come to me?*" Listen to Jesus words in Matthew 11:28:

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

There couldn't be a better verse to dwell on as we close for today. Next week we'll conclude our study of chapter eight and the security of our salvation.