

Eternal Insecurity?

Part II

Romans 3:21-31

Introduction

Paul declared, in Romans 1:16-17,

... I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

A set of parentheses could be put at the end of verse 17 and after chapter 3 verse 20 to set off a parenthetical statement by the apostle Paul. In this statement, he is proving that we need the gospel. He states that,

... it is the power of God for salvation ...

Then, Paul pauses for a couple of chapters to prove to us and, in fact, to all the world, that the gospel is exactly what we need.

There is no way, as we discovered in our last session, that salvation can be earned by anyone. It can only be found in Jesus Christ.

Let me borrow an illustration that I heard recently along this line. I will use the state of North Carolina for this illustration, since that is the state in which we happen to live. If you dig a hole that is ten feet deep, you could sit in that hole, but you would still be in North Carolina. You could rent a helicopter and go a couple of thousand feet in the air, but you would still be in North Carolina. The only way to get out of this state is to cross the border.

Now let me use this illustration to demonstrate this text in Romans. We are born in the state of sin. We may plumb the depths of sin and end up in the gutter ten feet below the surface, but we would still be in the state of sin. We may, by moral ethics or "righteous deeds," ascend a few thousand feet within our own good selves, but we would still be in the state of sin. The only way to get out of this state of sin is to cross the border – to get into another state, we have to get into Christ.

This is the message that Paul is trying to reveal to us – we need the gospel through Jesus Christ.

Today we will study Romans chapter 3. Before we begin, however, let us briefly review the fact that we have, in our tour of Romans thus far, made four stops. Paul has been our tour guide.

- Our first stop was at the altar of a pagan who had idols made of wood and stone. Paul, by inspiration, declared him guilty.
- The next stop was at the freshly painted home of the moral religionist. This is the man who felt that everything was at least, externally good. Paul also condemned him, by inspiration, of course.
- The third stop was in the holy city itself, where Paul took us to the temple. There, all the Jews, in their righteousness, were declaring themselves, by the fact that they were Jews, children or sons of Abraham. They were circumcised; they were righteous, but Paul said, "You also, are guilty before God."
- Now, Paul, as we studied in our last discussion, is taking us on a stop that by some kind of miracle, has allowed us to view all of humanity in the wretchedness of their sin. After taking a look at that, we have left that particular tour stop and our shoulders are stooped and we are depressed.

You may remember how terrible the picture of sin was. Everyone is guilty; every mouth is stopped; no one is righteous; no one seeks after God, and so on, until we come to the end of that.

As one writer said, "We are left before the judgment bar of God, trembling and silent."

So we discovered:

Salvation – we cannot earn it.

Now, in the section before us, we are going to discover:

Salvation – we cannot lose it.

We are going to begin in Romans chapter 3 verse 21 today. I do not think there has ever been a sermon

in which I have needed to be clearer than this one because there is much confusion. Yet, there has never been a week that I have struggled more with a passage of scripture. In fact, I have read this paragraph time and time and time again. I have come to the conclusion that it is no wonder that I do not read Romans for devotions because it is a very difficult book. But I will give, by the grace of God, the overflow from my study and hopefully, make it clear.

Paul Defines the Gospel

Look at Romans 3:21. Paul begins with the words, “But now . . .,” which bring us back to Romans 1:17. He is talking about the gospel.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

Underline the phrase, “the righteousness of God”. We frequently mistake the meaning of this, not realizing it is a reference to the gospel.

Turn back, in fact, to Romans 1:16-17, in order to better understand this. When Paul talks about the righteousness of God, he could have one of two things in mind. He could have the character of God in mind; that is, that God is righteous, or he could have the gospel of God in mind. Note Paul’s words in Romans 1:16-17 again,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed . . .

In other words, this is the revelation of the righteousness of God.

What is the gospel? Let us define it. The gospel is the good news, the “euangelion”. It is the good news that God has provided a way of redemption through Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

In Romans 3:21, Paul says this righteousness; this gospel “has been manifested”.

It is interesting that the word “manifested” is in the perfect tense, which speaks of something that happened a long time ago, one time, yet has ongoing effects or results. The gospel happened a long time ago.

What is the gospel? It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It, in perfect tense, occurred, but has ongoing effects; ongoing results in

the lives of all who believe in that once-for-all historical fact.

So the gospel is the good news that God has provided a way of redemption through Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

Two witnesses to the Gospel

Paul then says, in Romans 3:21, that the gospel is “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets”.

Understand that the reason that Paul says this is because he is speaking in legal terms. It is as if he is an attorney and he is trying to prove his case.

In the Old Testament, two witnesses were required to make anything legally valid. So Paul says, “I have two witnesses, by the way, that the gospel is manifest.”

1. Paul’s first witness is the Law.

The Law manifested the fact every time someone went to the priest and brought a pigeon or dove or lamb or oxen or whatever animal for sacrifice. They would slaughter the animal and the priest would put his hands on its head and then, shed the blood and pour it around the altar. Every time this occurred, this ceremonial Law was pointing to a day when Christ would die as a sacrifice.

So Paul says, “All along, we have had a witness to the gospel – the Law.”

2. Secondly, Paul says, “I have another witness – not only the Law, but the Prophets.”

We could look at hundreds of examples, but perhaps Isaiah would be enough. Isaiah tells us that,

All of us . . . have gone astray, . . . (Isaiah 53:6)

In other words, we have all sinned.

Isaiah also talks about the One who will die being the,

. . . lamb that is led to slaughter, . . . (Isaiah 53:7)

This is obviously a reference to Jesus Christ.

So Paul has two witnesses; that is, “the Law and the Prophets”.

Paul has just defined the gospel as “the righteousness of God”.

Paul Declares the Gospel

Paul will now declare the gospel.

Look at Romans 3:23-24. Paul begins with the words,

for all have sinned . . .

Let me stop at this point and give a definition of sin. Sin, in the original, could literally be translated many ways. It could mean, “missing the mark,” or “coming too late,” or “failing to reach”.

I read this past week, a story of two young, frustrated applicants. These men were in the recruiting office in London, wanting to join a guard regiment. The minimum height requirement of a guard was six feet, and both of the men failed to meet this requirement. One was taller than the other, but both were officially refused. The first man was five feet, seven inches. The second man was five feet, eleven and a half inches. Although the second man was taller than the first, he was still officially refused. Why? Because he had failed to reach the required mark. He could take a deep breath and perhaps inch up as much as possible, but he would still fail to reach the mark. Though he was taller, he was still refused.

Suppose, to illustrate this further, I asked all who are in the sanctuary today, to stand in front of your chairs. Then, suppose I said, “When I count to three, jump to the stage in one jump.”

The spry young man on the front row might make it five or six feet. The ones sitting in the back would be lucky to make it to the first tier. The point is that none of you would make it. Some of you would come closer, but none of you would make it.

Paul is saying that God is viewing all mankind and though some people pull themselves up; though some people take a great leap, in the final analysis, everyone comes short; everyone misses the mark; everyone fails to reach. This is a result of sin.

Let us continue in Romans 3:23-24.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

There are some ten cent words in these verses that we need to define.

- “Justified” is a key word in understanding eternal security. “Justified” means, “to pronounce and treat as righteous”.

Picture yourself fictitiously standing before God. He is the judge and is sitting at the bench viewing your sin. You can just see the gavel coming down on

that bench, “Guilty! The death penalty.” But instead, because you are in Christ, the gavel reaches the desk and He says, “You are justified.”

What does this mean?

God is not acquitting you, since only the innocent are acquitted, He is justifying you. In other words, He sees you in your sinning state, yet He declares you righteous.

This does not make sense, does it? Not only does God declare that you are righteous, but He says, “I will now treat you as a righteous person in Christ.”

This, in no way, makes logical common sense. In fact, later in the passage, Paul is going to handle an argument that comes as a result of the fact that this does not seem to make any sense.

However, understand that if you have trusted Jesus Christ at some point, it is, in fact, at that very point of conversion that many things happened. One of these things is that God justified you.

This is a declaration; a judicial act. God’s gavel hit the desk and once and for all, He says, “You are just as if you never sinned. You are just as righteous as My Son.”

It is as if God views us as perfect in Christ.

- Paul not only says we are justified, but he says we are also “redeemed”. Let us define this. The original word gives us the proper understanding.

“Redeemed” comes from the first century slave market. In Paul’s day, a slave would be stripped and then stood on an auction block for all the slave traders to come by and view. The traders would look at the slave’s proportions to determine whether he had strength in his body. They viewed him like a piece of meat. They could buy the slave, take him home, and cut his throat – it did not matter. The slave was just a tool for trade or for work. To purchase the slave, a slave trader would redeem the slave – that was the original Greek word.

This word “redeem” is the word God chooses to illustrate what Jesus Christ has done for us. We are on the auction block as slaves to sin. Jesus Christ comes along and redeems us; He pays the price for us. What is the price? His death. Then, He takes us off the auction block; He pulls us out of the slave market, and He says, “Now, I want to set you free.”

So Jesus adds even more color to this – we are set free!

. . . the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:36)

“Justified” means that God has declared us, as believers in the courtroom of His holiness, to be perfect; righteous. He has not declared us to be innocent, however. God sees our sin; He has not winked, but in our sinning state, He declares us to be righteous.

The courtroom, by the way, is closed. We could go back to that courtroom and say, “Hey God, I want You to reverse the verdict,” but our voices would just rebound on the empty walls. The jury of His holiness is gone. The courtroom is closed; it is finished. This is a once-for-all act that cannot be reversed any more than God can lie.

“Redeemed,” means that we have been given freedom from the auction block of sin.

Paul uses another word in these verses that is quite powerful.

- Romans 3:24 says, “being justified as a gift”. The words “a gift,” in the original, are the word “dorean,” which means, “justified without a cause or a reason”.

Those who have little children or have reared children know that many times, when the child does something wrong and is asked, “Son (or daughter), why did you do that?” they say, “Because.” You are waiting for more because you think there should be a comma after that. However, he is putting a period; that is all he is going to say.

“Because” is a biblical answer! When we go to God and ask, “God, why did You redeem me? Why did You justify me?” He says, “Because.”

There is no cause, no rationale from our end. God just says, “Because.”

- Paul gives an inkling of God’s reason in the next three words of Romans 3:24, “by His grace”. “Grace” is “unmerited favor”.

We have been justified; we have been given a position, not based upon performance. That position is perfection; that position is sainthood; that position is in Christ. God views us as He views His Son – righteous, redeemed, set free.

Why? Because He wanted to; because He decided before we were ever born that we would be part of His family. This is mind-boggling, but it is a result of grace.

Paul Demonstrates the Gospel

Now Paul gives another word as he demonstrates the gospel. Note Romans 3:25.

whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

This is an exciting verse, isn’t it? Did you catch this?

Let us define one of the words that makes this verse difficult.

- The word “propitiation” is a word we could simply translate, “satisfaction or satisfied”.

Now God, in a way, turns the table with this. He now views the gospel or salvation from His perspective. He says, “I displayed Christ Jesus publicly as a satisfaction in His blood through faith.”

In other words, for those who accept Christ, not only are they redeemed, not only are they justified, but God is satisfied.

Salvation has a benefit to the Father. Perhaps this could be explained with a story.

I recently heard Chuck Swindoll giving an illustration of a man with whom he worked. This man, because of safety factors being too lenient in the tool factory where he had previously worked, was injured. As a result, part of his body was paralyzed. He decided to sue the company and took them to court. He sued for a million dollars and the court granted it to him. However, Swindoll mentioned that even though this man had won his suit in court; even though he had a million dollars in his grasp, he was still so bitter, so resentful that he was never able to enjoy the fact that he had won in court; he was never really satisfied.

One of the interesting things about salvation is found in God’s word in Genesis. God says, in Genesis 6:7,

. . . I am sorry [resent the fact] that I have made them [man].

It seems that after day one, man sinned. And God had, in a sense, resentment that He had created man. That resentment was there until the cross when Jesus Christ died for our sins. Then, when we accepted Him, God, in effect, released His resentment; His

bitterness. He is free from any resentment that He has against us.

By the way, do not be mistaken in the fact that a person apart from Jesus Christ is an enemy of God. God hates sin and, in effect, hates the sinner. We frequently miss the mark when we do not realize the wrath of God in His holiness.

When we come to Jesus Christ, God no longer has resentment; He no longer views us as an enemy to be a recipient, one day, of His wrath. He is satisfied.

This is the meaning of Romans 3:25,

whom God displayed publicly [on the cross] as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

In other words, God is satisfied. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the past, in the Old Testament, He patiently looked over the sin by the sacrifice that was never permanent.

Now, however, in Romans 3:26, we read,

. . . I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God might still condemn the sinner; might still judge the sinner, but we are told in this verse that He can justify those who are in Christ; who have faith in Christ.

Paul Illustrates the Gift of Salvation Apart From Works

Paul will now illustrate the gift of salvation apart from works. Skip to Romans chapter 4, which we will not completely cover today.

I love what Paul does in this text. He camps out at the doorstep of the Jew and is going to make perfect sense.

Paul begins to think in his mind, obviously being born along by the Holy Spirit, "Now, who can I choose to illustrate the gospel apart from works?"

Then, he thinks, "Oh, I know, I'll take the greatest heroes of the Jewish nation – Abraham and David."

- Paul begins with Abraham, in Romans 4:1-5.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Abraham was not performing before God, but believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness. Continue to Romans 4:4.

Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due.

In other words, if we could work our way to heaven, Peter could stand outside the gate as we are all ushering in, and say, "Yeah, you deserve it. Yeah, you deserve it. Yeah, you deserve it. No, you don't deserve it, you go the other way. Yeah, you deserve it. . . ."

This would not be a gift. We do not work for it. Otherwise, it would not be a favor, but would be what is due. Continue to Romans 4:5 and note who God justifies.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,

Is it the righteous that God justifies? No, the ungodly.

So Paul uses Abraham as an illustration.

- Paul then looks at David, in Romans 4:6-8.
just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered.

"Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

Paul is dredging up something the Jews would just as soon forget; that is, the fact that David was a murderer. He says, "Take David, for example. He was, in effect, justified by his faith in God. How did he live? He was a murderer and an adulterer, yet he was still justified."

Now do not forget, as we discussed in our last study, this does not mean we are to go out and sin; to live it up because God is going to forget. The point Paul is making is that David was justified even though he was ungodly. Abraham was justified, not because

of his godliness; not because of his works; not because of his performance, but because of his faith in God.

Is this clear? We are eternally secure.

Why? Because the conditions to acceptance in salvation are all the work of Christ.

Someone once wrote, and I have never forgotten this, that if God had allowed us to sew into our garment of righteousness one little piece of cloth, we would spend all of eternity viewing that piece; looking at that piece; admiring the stitching in that piece; taking a look at all that we did. We would say, "Do you see that right there? Isn't that something?" and would forget the fact that the rest is from God.

This is the reason He does not allow us to sew in even a stitch; even a piece of thread. The qualifications for acceptance are all the work of Christ.

Attitudes Changed by Eternal Security

Now let me give several attitudes that should be erased by eternal security. These are attitudes that we should not have in understanding that we are justified once and for all, that we are eternally secure in Jesus Christ because of what He has done, not because of what we do. I am going to lift these right from the text.

1. First, a proper understanding of eternal security leaves no room for pride.

Paul says, in Romans 3:27-28,

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

In other words, there are no peacocks in heaven, strutting and admiring their fan.

Salvation is completely apart from works; we did nothing to earn it, so we cannot be proud; we cannot boast. Do not forget that we were on the auction block as ungodly sinners when God came along and, in His grace, redeemed us by the blood of His Son.

In what areas are we boasting? In what do we have to boast? Ourselves? Absolutely not. If we boast at all, it should be in Christ.

2. Secondly, there is no room for prejudice.

Look at Romans 3:29-30.

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

Since no one deserves salvation, then literally, the little barefoot boy has just as much opportunity to accept the gift of God as the senator in Washington; the illiterate worker who does not know how to read a book, is just as qualified to come to Christ as the university scholar.

God is not prejudiced. We will discover, probably to our shock one day, that the body of Christ includes many people from many backgrounds.

3. Thirdly, there is no room for presumption.

The last verse in this chapter, Romans 3:31, says,

Do we then nullify the Law through faith?...

In other words, now that we are justified apart from works of the Law; now that we are declared righteous and independent of our sinning, do we just get rid of the Law; nullify the Law?

Paul answers with the strongest negative, using it for the third time in this chapter.

... May it never be! ...

"That is ridiculous," he says, "absolutely not!"

... On the contrary, we establish the Law.

What does Paul mean by this?

God upheld the Law in condemning His Son. His Son died. His Son experienced the wrath of the Law. But we, in Christ, can be free from the penalty.

Questions Concerning Eternal Security

I had planned to stop at this point, but I have been asked some questions and the Lord has brought to my mind that perhaps, I should answer four questions that arise concerning the subject of eternal security. These questions are from believers and are all along the same line. They are questions you may be asked and these answers might be helpful, especially if you are dealing with someone who is a believer, but believes we can lose our salvation.

1. The first question is, “What happens if I sin and forget to confess it?”

Have you ever heard this question? Another way of wording it is, “Will God hold me accountable to the unconfessed sin that I commit after salvation?”

Remember, the understanding to the answer is theological; that is, I am justified in my sinning state; I am declared righteous, not because I am good up to a point, but then, “Uh-oh, I’ve fallen,” and now, I am no longer justified. I am justified once for all. That means, all of my sin – past, present, and future – is forgiven.

2. The second question is, “Won’t God judge me one day for the sins I fail to confess?”

In other words, “Isn’t there something in the Bible that talks about God getting the movie projector and putting up the screen and then, when we all get to heaven, to our mortification and chagrin, putting on the film marked with my name? Everyone will then see everything I have ever thought or done.”

Let us suppose for a moment that we are standing before God. Now this may be clear as mud to you, so I will keep talking until the light bulb comes on. If God saw one speck of sin in us, what would He have to do?

No sin can be in the presence of a pure God, especially for eternity. If we, in some way, slipped through the cracks and ended up at the judgment seat of God, but “oops,” there was one sin, it would not matter whether it was one or a billion, God would still have to do the very same thing – He would have to send us to hell. But, as He sent us to hell, He would have to apologize because we were not supposed to be at the judgment seat of Christ, being in Christ.

The judgment seat of Christ is for believers. The great white throne is for the unbeliever. These are two different judgments. When we stand before God one day, sin will not enter into the picture.

3. The third question then, is, “Why do I confess sin that I commit?”

In other words, “Why bother to confess sin? We’ve got it made.”

First let me say that you should quit specifying everything and hoping that if you did not say it perfectly, God would bring it to your mind.

There are people – perhaps you have done this; I know I have – who have spent time on their knees

praying, “Lord, bring to my mind any sin that I have committed this day.”

Why do they pray this? Because internally they are afraid that if they forget to specify one, God is not going to forgive it. They think they had better spell it out for God; that He is not really all there and may not have caught it. This is what they are really saying when they ask this.

Why do we confess sin? Because it has to do with our personal relationship and fellowship. In other words, we confess sin so that there can be a clean sense that we are a pure vessel that is usable by God.

We can quench the Holy Spirit. We can fill our lives with ourselves; our sinful natures. We can be so dominated by pride; by all of the other things that block the perfect dynamic of God in our lives. Fellowship has gone out the window and there are believers walking around with unconfessed sin.

This does not mean that God has no longer justified them. This does not mean that God no longer views them as righteous. It does mean that God views them as unusable.

4. The fourth question, which is probably the one we hear the most, is, “Can a person give back the gift of salvation?”

In other words, “The reason I don’t believe in eternal security is because there could come a time one day, when someone might change their mind and give back this gift. It is a gift, so we could keep it wrapped and then, give it back.”

Let me try to illustrate this attitude. It is kind of like a crippled person who cannot walk and is about to undergo a surgery that will make it possible for him to be able to walk, run, and play. However, let us suppose he gets into the operating room and asks the surgeon, “Sir, there’s a chance that one day, I might want to be crippled again. Would you fix this surgery so that it’s not permanent; so that if I change my mind, I can have you turn something so that I will go back to being crippled again?”

What would we say about this crippled person? We would say he never really wanted to walk.

This is the answer – this is merely pointing out a person who never had the gift. Someone who comes along after ten years and says, “Lord, You can take it back, I don’t want it,” is a revelation of the fact that they never experienced it.

Those who have genuinely received the gift, the genuine item, would never, as this crippled person, say, “God, make this a temporary thing because one day, I may change my mind. I want to go back to the auction block as a slave to sin. I want hell to be my home.” Someone who would say this has never experienced the saving grace of God.

Conclusion – We Cannot Lose Salvation

Salvation:

- we cannot earn it;
- we cannot lose it.

Let me close with an illustration. An evangelist from England at the turn of the 20th century had just finished a series of meetings. He was taking down the tent and as he was doing so, a young man came up to him and asked, “Sir, what can I do to become a Christian?”

The evangelist very wisely said, “You’re too late.”

The young man said, “What do you mean? Because the meeting is over? Because you’re taking down the tent? What do you mean, ‘I’m too late?’”

The evangelist replied, “It’s too late because Jesus Christ has already done it all.”

This is a powerful thought.

What do you and I do? We cannot earn it. The very fact that we cannot be good enough to earn it implies that we cannot be bad enough to lose it.

It is all by the grace of God – Jesus Christ has done it all. In the words of the song, *Jesus Paid It All* (based on Isaiah 1:18),

Jesus paid it all,

All to Him I owe;

Sin had left a crimson stain,

He washed it white as snow.

Let us thank the Lord for something that we probably fail to thank Him for; that is, our salvation.