

PROLOGUE TO PRISON

Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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Chapter 16 -

UNSHAKEABLE FOUNDATIONS

Romans 8:31-39

Four of the most beautiful and profound assurances to be found anywhere in the Word of GOD close the 8th chapter. These are not, however, simply assurance for the believer, but, in addition, they constitute a strong defense of the integrity of GOD.

It is very important for us, especially in times of transition like today, to remember that the ground of our faith is the integrity, the character, the faithfulness of Almighty GOD. When we are inclined to fear, to hysteria, to panic, to doubt, to preoccupation with concerns which are in the Father's hands; we remind ourselves through passages such as these that GOD is absolutely faithful, that for Him nothing is too hard, nothing is impossible. As we consider these four wonderful promises, which are really one, bear in mind that Paul is emphasizing the absolute trustworthiness of the GOD in whom our faith rests. Here are four unshakeable foundations for confidence in any age or time.

In the middle of the eighth chapter Paul points out that there has been built into the very cosmos a frustration in which the whole created universe joins, including the children of GOD. This frustration is not final but will be resolved at the return of CHRIST when the sons of GOD, bought by His sacrifice, are revealed to the world. At that time the whole cosmos will participate in the emancipation of the sons of GOD. Now he crowns this profound view of history with these remarkable assurances.

The first begins with the 26th verse where Paul points out that one reason for Christian assurance is the faithful intercession of the SPIRIT of GOD, who prays for the saints according to the will of GOD. Prayerlessness is one of the sad symptoms of twentieth-century Christianity. Some years ago a survey was made of the time that preachers spend in prayer, and it was concluded that the average pastor spent about two minutes a day in prayer! If this be true, what do you suppose is the average of the people in the pew, inasmuch as there are at least certain inducements to prayer among pastors which may not be true of laymen.

This does not mean, of course, that we measure prayer in terms of length as though one who prays twenty minutes is obviously twice as prayerful as one who prays ten minutes. But certainly this is an indication that prayer is not taken very seriously. As a matter of fact, many sense

impotency and powerlessness in the Church of JESUS CHRIST, much of which can be attributed to prayerlessness.

GOD sends the rain and the sun upon the just and the unjust. He is indiscriminate in certain of His gifts; they are for all of us, however good or evil, however righteous or unrighteous. But there are certain things which GOD does not give His people, except they pray. James says, "**Ye have not, because ye ask not**" I suppose that one of the major tragedies of the Church, perhaps in every generation but certainly in our century if they could be measured, would be the things that remain undone, the terrible poverty in the Church simply because of prayerlessness. How much remains undone because we do not ask GOD?

But there is a ray of light in this black prayerlessness; Paul declares that the "**Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of GOD.**" What a remarkable fact that the SPIRIT of GOD is interceding for us even when we are prayerless ourselves! In verse 34 Paul reminds us that the SON also intercedes for us. A fact upon which the author of Hebrews bases the believer's security. "**He is able also to save them to the uttermost them that come unto GOD by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.**" GOD the HOLY SPIRIT is interceding for us even when we are inarticulate in prayer, interceding for us even when we in our infirmity do not know for what to pray.

There is a significant phrase in the Acts at the instance of electing the deacons when the apostles, encumbered with the temporal affairs of the Church - widows, orphans, and the like, urged the Church to elect seven men "**of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,**" and charge them with the temporal responsibilities; in order that we, the apostles said, may "**give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.**" There is this 'giving one's self to prayer,' that the HOLY SPIRIT may use that "given" time, that "given" surrender to intercede through the believer according to the will of the Father and to the glory of the Son of GOD. Even if you feel inarticulate in prayer, even if you are prone to be prayerless because you do not know how to pray, you may set apart a time in the day 'given to prayer' and to the Word, a time when you allow, if only for ten or fifteen minutes, the SPIRIT of GOD to pray in you and through you.

Actually, words in prayer are not for GOD but for man inasmuch as the Lord knows our thoughts before we think them. He knows them "**afar off,**" in the words of the Psalmist. He knows what we are going to think about tomorrow or the next day or ten years from now. We do not use words of prayer in order to inform GOD of that which He does not know. Words aid our concentration, our conscious relationship to the FATHER. Give yourself to prayer, reserve a time in the day, however small, that is "given" to prayer and the Word. Let it be a time when you have the sense of allowing GOD the HOLY SPIRIT to pray in you according to the will of the Father even though it may be to express a burden of concern which you cannot even verbalize.

The second remarkable foundation for assurance to the Christian is what we commonly call providence, in which I suppose almost everybody believes. The trouble is that we believe in providence when circumstances go well; we find ourselves disbelieving when circumstances are contrary. Here is one of the most profound promises in GOD's Word, "**We know that all things**

work together for good to them that love GOD, to them who are the called according to His purpose." No matter what happens, GOD is in it for good to His own glory, and the profit of those who love Him and are called of Him.

If you have responded to JESUS, you are called of the FATHER; about this there is no doubt whatsoever. In this the Word of GOD is quite explicit; JESUS said, "**No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.**" If you come to CHRIST you have been drawn there by the Father. JESUS said, "**Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.**" If you have responded to the Gospel of the Lord JESUS CHRIST you have been taught of GOD. The very fact that you come to JESUS indicates you have been taught by GOD and drawn by the Father to Him; therefore, you qualify for this promise; you are one who is "**called according to His purpose.**"

This is not to say that everything that happens to Christians is good or that Christians are immune to unfortunate circumstances, but GOD uses whatever happens for good. "**All things work together for good**"! Circumstances may be evil or evil intended, but GOD is able by the catalyst of His grace to turn it to profit and benefit and blessing in the life of a believer.

Paul reinforces this promise in verse 29 following: "**For whom He did foreknow, He did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified**"! Reformed theology asks this question, "What are the decrees of GOD?" The answer is, "The decrees of GOD are that GOD foreordains whatsoever comes to past."

Predestination* is not a humanly contrived dogma; it is derived from the Word of GOD. Calvin did not invent this word nor the doctrine which it describes; he discovered it in the Scriptures: the sovereignty of GOD, His Providence in the affairs of men, His care of men in the microscopic details of life is clear Biblical teaching. Of course we have difficulty with this doctrine just as we have difficulty with the doctrine of the Trinity; how can GOD be three-in-one? When we try to resolve that paradox, we generally emphasize the unity of GOD at the expense of His plurality or the plurality of GOD at the expense of His unity.

The same result often accrues when we try to rationalize the sovereignty of GOD in the affairs of men and reconcile it with man's freedom; we end up rejecting GOD's sovereignty and believing in man's freedom or vice versa. The Word of GOD teaches that GOD is sovereign and man is free at one and the same time; nothing takes GOD by surprise; He has not relaxed His controls. Nothing happens anywhere, any time, ever will - the bad as well as the good - that GOD does not control. He uses all things for His purposes. Paul recommends that we rest in this glorious reassurance.

It is a matter of history that much of the great art, or poetry and literature, the great music and drama have come out of suffering; the man of character is usually the man who has suffered; the life that is free from suffering is often the life that is empty or shallow or superficial or unsympathetic. Suffering and tragedy introduce into life a dimension which nothing else can. The righteous do suffer; the most righteous man who ever lived, the perfect man, suffered more than any other; but in the words of the author of Hebrews, He was made "**perfect through**

sufferings." GOD works in everything for good to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose. This is an irrevocable promise upon which our confidence is based.

The third unshakeable foundation is the sacrifice of His Son. Paul asks this question, "**What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?**" How do we know that GOD is for us? He demonstrated this by the death of the Son upon the Cross of Calvary and His resurrection again from the dead. Note the statement that GOD is for us is based not upon anything existential or subjective but upon objective fact, upon historical events; CHRIST died on the cross and rose again from the dead; therefore, we know that GOD is for us. Now if GOD be for us, who can be against us? Who is there to oppose the one whose defense is Almighty GOD? Paul continues, "**Who shall lay anything to the charge of GOD's elect?**" Who dares to condemn a child of GOD when the Judge Himself died on the cross for that child? What irresistible logic, what an unshakeable foundation for faith and hope and assurance! If you are ever inclined to wonder about GOD's care, GOD's sovereign overrule in your life, no matter what the circumstances may be, remember the Son of GOD on the cross is risen from the dead!

Finally, the fourth unshakeable foundation, which is really the ground for the others, "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**" Can anything separate us from the love of GOD? Anything you mention, in heaven, on earth, under the earth; anything at any time, any force, and evil; can anything separate us from the love of GOD? The answer is "No!" Nothing, nothing, nothing! No matter what happens, and this is just another way of putting Romans 8:37, we are "**more than conquerors through Him that loved us.**" It is significant to notice here that there can be no victory where there is no battle.

In my first pastorate during World War II, there was a young man, the only 4-F in the church who belonged to the young adult group. I approached him one day and asked him if he would serve as president of the young people's society. He said he would think about it for a week, after which he replied, "You know, I never like to fail at anything; and lest I fail as president of this department, I would like to decline."

What virtue is there in not failing if one never tries? The reason some people never fail is because they never do anything! The reason they have no victory is that they never have any battle. The Word of GOD declares "**In all these things**" we are super-victorious, "**more than conquerors through Him that loved us.**" *Every? thing that happens to you, ever will happen, that is happening now, however tragic, however difficult, however impossible, however hopeless, however inexplicable; in everything that has happened, will happen and is happening to you, GOD leads in victory to His own glory and to your eternal benefit.*

The sum and substance of these remarkable assurances is simply this, that the Christian cannot lose! He is utterly, totally, irrevocably secure in JESUS CHRIST. Whatever happens to him GOD turns to blessing and profit by the miracle of His grace. This is the realism of the Christian faith, you see; GOD does not spare the Christian trouble. He does not insulate him against tragedy and difficulty; but He is with him in it and brings him through it and out of it more than a conqueror!

We are living in dark, unpredictable days; and it is not inconceivable that unprecedented catastrophe will come when those who have disregarded the Word of GOD, ignored the Church

and gone their busy ways without prayer nor Bible nor Christian fellowship will be like animals.

Panicked by circumstances, groveling in the dust, they will run in all directions, beside themselves with fear. But there will be others on that day, thank GOD, men and women who are rooted and grounded in assurances such as these, who will manifest poise and equilibrium and leadership. We may come upon a time like this. GOD grant that when those who knew not JESUS are beside themselves with fear, distracted by distractions, there shall be about them those who are firm because they are in CHRIST, secure now and forever.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

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