

# The Greatest Chapter Ever Written

## *The Blessing of Unshakeable Assurance*

Romans Series  
PBC 2026

Text: Romans 8:1-11; Ephesians 1:3-14

**Romans 8:1–11** *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. <sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

While I was away, I had three important experiences on our study tour that helped me come to grips with a key dimension of my Christian life – namely my need for unshakable confidence and unwavering assurance that I have in fact been delivered from the penalty of my sin and have received both the present benefit and the future deliverance Christ promises to all who truly belong to him.

- I watched the movie Nuremberg on the flight over to Istanbul.
- I had an eye-opening conversation with a highly educated, spiritually searching, religiously devoted individual in her mid-30s who, since her birth, has been a member of the Greek Orthodox Church.
- I stood before three of four holy doors, and I watched people crawl up 28 holy stairs in Rome.

In every case, I was brought back to the reality that among many of us who were raised with some form of Christianity, ***there is a deep and growing desire for assurance that we are right with God and that, in fact, we do belong to Him.***

1. Nuremberg – the movie details the trial of 24 of the highest-ranking Nazi political and military leaders, who were tried by an international tribunal for crimes against peace, violations of treaties, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. 12 of those men were condemned to death; 3 were sentenced to life in prison without parole; 4 received prison terms ranging from 10 to 20 years; and 3 were acquitted of the charges.

One of those men was Albert Speer – an architect who rose to prominence under Hitler and designed many of the buildings and helped stage many of the national rallies that rallied an entire nation to Hitler’s diabolical ideology. Toward the end of the war, he became the minister of armaments, in charge of producing the arms and weapons used by the German army. In his position, he conscripted many of his workers from the concentration camps.

At his trial, he was the only one to accept personal and collective responsibility for the atrocities committed by Hitler against the nations of the world, against the people of Germany, and, in particular, against the Jewish people. He was sentenced to 20 years in Spandau prison. After his release in 1966, he spent the rest of his life trying to atone for what he and others had done.

He was interviewed by the BBC in 1971, where he stated, *“If I can ever get rid of the guilt, and quite often I think I shall never get rid of it, the burden [of what we have done] will ever last with me.”* The weight of the atrocities of which he was complicit never left Speer until the day he died. He died bearing the crushing weight of guilt.

## 2. A searching Guide looking in the wrong place for truth

Our guide in Greece was a wonderful, engaging, highly educated young woman who knew her country's history and her church's teachings. Yet as we spent time on the trip and as she heard the biblical explanations at each site, it became very evident that she was deeply interested in what she was hearing from us and in what she was seeing in us as a group.

In fact, she said to me, *"Your group is very unusual – they are very well informed about the Bible and are much more interested in biblical history and connections to these sites than almost any other group I have ever guided."*

This led to several meaningful, personal conversations about her life – and it was very evident that she is at a point where she is searching for more than she has found in her career, her relationships, and even her church. This year, she decided to read five books of the Bible and chose the Pentateuch. She said she did well with Genesis and most of Exodus, but she admitted that she really struggled with Leviticus and Numbers and had not yet reached Deuteronomy.

I asked her this question – *"What part does the Bible play in your life personally and in the life of the average member of the Greek Orthodox church?"* She said the Bible does not play a meaningful part in Orthodox worship beyond the reading of certain texts (mainly the Gospels) in the liturgy; it plays even less of a part in the daily life of the average Greek Orthodox church member, beyond being a "sacred, holy book"; and it has only recently become important to her because she is on a search for answers she hopes to find, perhaps in this book she has been exposed to in her role as a guide to people on trips like ours.

**So, if they don't go to the Bible for answers, where do people like our guide go when they need confident assurance that their sins are forgiven and that they are truly accepted by God?** They go to the religious traditions of their church and their own personal experience of those traditions – and that is what I saw next when we arrived in Rome a few days later.

### 3. Four holy doors and 28 sacred steps

One of our first stops in Rome was one of the four basilicas directly under the Pope's authority – the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls – built very near the traditional site where Paul was executed by the sword. This Basilica (along with the other three) has a unique feature – a set of holy doors that are opened only by the Pope during a year of Jubilee, which occurs every 25 years. A member of the RCC who makes a pilgrimage to Rome during a year of Jubilee can earn a plenary indulgence, eradicating the temporal punishment for their sins by walking through these four doors (especially the one at St. Peter's Basilica), visiting the other major basilicas or cathedrals, climbing the sacred stairs on their knees, and making confession and doing penance while in Rome.

And 30 million faithful Catholics came to Rome last year to obtain this indulgence and have the moral slate of their lives wiped clean!

No matter how much an evangelical Catholic priest or a YouTube video might tell you that the RCC really teaches salvation by grace alone, 30 million faithful Catholics came to Rome to earn this forgiveness and obtain temporary assurance by means of their works!

Where does this kind of thinking come from, and on what basis do 30 million people buy it? Many of them have gone back to the doctrine of the church as mediated by the Pope from his sacred seat, supported by the teaching of the four major doctors of the church.

***But almost none of them have gone back to the inspired source God has given us – Paul himself.*** Listen to his words:

*Paul stated very clearly – “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration (not baptism) and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace (not our religious works or human effort) we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-7)*

*And then he said to people like you and me, “Teach what accords with sound doctrine!” (Titus 2:1). “Do your best (be diligent) to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” (2 Tim 2:15).*

*And even more pointedly, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received [from Christ and his apostles], let him be accursed!” (Galatians 1:6-9)*

And so this morning, as we begin the next chapter in our journey through Romans, I want us to go all the way back to Paul for the answer to the question, ***“How can I have unshakable confidence and unmovable assurance that I am right with God, that I truly am His child, and that I have His favor in my life, regardless of my ongoing struggle with sin or despite severe suffering I may experience in life?”***

And the answer Paul gives and the assurance he offers are in chapter 8!

When we left Paul at the end of chapter 7 – we were convinced of three undeniable realities:

- Salvation is from God alone – through Christ alone. (7:25a)
- Salvation delivers us from the power (reign) and penalty of sin, but it does not remove us from the daily struggle with sin, which stems from the battle between our new man (mind and will) and the flesh (the remnant of our old man that remains in us). (7:25b)
- Victory in this struggle will come to those who are in Christ Jesus only through the controlling power (law) of the Spirit who has set us free from the controlling power (Law) of sin and death. (8:1-2)

**Chapter 8 is in our bible to give us unshakable confidence and unwavering assurance of two vitally important things:**

1. There is **no condemnation by God** to those who are in Christ Jesus who – in their ongoing, daily struggle with sin – walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (8:1-11).

*“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus . . . who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:1, 4).*

2. There will be **no separation from God** to those who are the sons and daughters of God, no matter how long or how intense their earthly struggle might be or how devastating their earthly losses might initially appear to be from an earthly perspective (8:12-39).

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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 (8:35:-39).*

**Which brings us to three important questions this morning:**

## **I. Why do we need this kind of Assurance? (7:21-24)**

We need these two assurances because of two realities we did not anticipate would be part of our lives once we became believers.

### ***A. Our ongoing struggle with Sin both in its persistency and in its intensity (7:23-25)***

*But I see in my members another law (controlling power) waging war against the law (controlling power) of my mind and making me captive to the law (controlling power) of sin (the flesh) that dwells in my members (my body).*

*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

*So then, I myself (my inner man) serve the law of God with my (renewed) mind, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin!*

And the longer this goes on in our lives and the more we experience defeat as we are made captive by our flesh to the sins that so easily beset us – the more we wonder how God could continue to show grace to someone like me who sins so often and so deeply no matter how hard I try not to do so!

And over time, I start to wonder if I have really been delivered from the reign of sin and released from the condemnation Paul announced comes to those who break God's law (3:19-20).

### ***B. Our painful experience with prolonged Suffering***

How could this kind of prolonged suffering continue to be the lot of someone who has been fully forgiven by God, who has been taken out of the kingdom of darkness and given permanent

standing in the kingdom of God's Son, who has been given unrestricted access to the throne of grace, who has been made a son or daughter of God, and who has been betrothed to the crown prince of the universe?

***This does not seem to be compatible with those realities – so either I missed something or perhaps I am not really united to God through Christ after all.***

In other words, have we truly experienced salvation, since two of the major benefits we expected to enjoy so often seem absent, temporary, or out of reach – namely, victory over sin and deliverance from suffering?

And that is why Paul states categorically – ***“There is therefore (on certain theological grounds) now (in this present moment) no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!”***

## **II. On what ground can Paul give us this assurance? (8:1-2)**

Where do we go for the kind of unshakeable assurance our souls desperately need? Either we go to our own self-efforts and to something we can experience subjectively – or we go to God's Word.

**Illustration:** As I mentioned earlier, last year 30M people made a trip to Rome to walk through 4 holy doors, climb 28 stairs, and make a holy pilgrimage in an effort to earn a plenary indulgence to wipe away the temporal guilt of their sins and rescue them from the purifying fire of purgatory after death – no matter what an evangelical catholic priest or theologian may try to tell you – this is the doctrine of Rome and 30 million members of that church believe that doctrine and spent billions of dollars to get the assurance Paul talks about here.

And sadly, they will die in their sins – because sins are not forgiven by a pope, cleansing is not obtained by baptism, sanctification is not found by walking through holy doors or climbing stairs on your knees, and grace is not mediated by sacraments and ceremonies no matter how ancient or mysterious.

**At some point, we have to decide whether we are going to believe Paul over what we read in a blog, listen to on a YouTube channel, or pull up as an answer to a prompt we give ChatGPT.**

Paul grounds the kind of confident assurance he offers squarely on something that God alone has done for His glory through the distinct work every member of the Godhead accomplished in order to procure our salvation. And the place where Paul lays this out clearly and definitively is in Ephesians 1:3-14 – a letter the Romans would have known and read.

The Hymn in Eph 1 celebrates an important theological reality by articulating and preserving it in one of the oldest Christian hymns in our Bible. Paul instructs the Ephesian Christians to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs – and this is an inspired example of a hymn. It has three stanzas followed by a chorus, to the praise of His glory (vss 6, 12, 14).

***A. God the Father Sovereignly Designed and Orchestrated Our Salvation (1:3-6)***

- Election (1:4): He chose us for a special purpose – to be holy and blameless before him.
- Adoption (1:5): He appointed us to a special relationship – to all the rights, privileges, and blessings of full sonship.

By accepting and blessing us in His beloved  
For the praise of His glorious grace (1:6)

***B. God the Son Obtains and Procures this Salvation (1:7-12)***

- Redemption through His blood (1:7 – 8)
- Restoration of all things (1:9-10)

To give us an inheritance with Christ (1:11)  
For the praise of his glory (1:12)

***C. God the Spirit Personally Applies, Preserves, and Assures of this Salvation (1:13-14)***

- He secures us in the Father's love – is the seal of our identity and authenticity (1:13)
- He guarantees our inheritance until we possess it when we come into our full sonship at the glorification of our bodies (1:14)

He preserves and assures us in our position as God's children  
To the praise of his glory

**III. What is the nature of this assurance? (8:1, 4)**

Surprisingly, Romans 8 points us to ***an assurance we experience personally***, not just one we receive legally and positionally.

The nature of assurance is such that we want more than theological words – we want to experience the reality of salvation tangibly.

***So where do we go for this experience, and who mediates it?***

We can go to the church and its religious rites and practices **OR** we can go to Christ Himself and the Spirit He sent to mediate it to us.

**Illustration:** There is something awe-inspiring when you enter the Basilica of St Peter and see the immensity of its structure, the beauty of its design, the sense of mystery and other-worldliness as you look

at the immense throne of St Peter, the sheer overwhelming number of religious statuary, the mysterious solemnity and religious pageantry – it is bigger than life; it is other-worldly in nature; it is sensory and it has the appearance of connecting you to something larger, older, and much more significant than your little life or your little Protestant church with all its flaws and simplicity.

And this is why so many people are drawn away – they want to experience something, and they look to the Church to provide that experience. So they look to Rome or to England, to the doctors of the Church who represent the ancient and established doctrine of the sacraments, the magisterium, purgatory, the treasury of merit, penance, saints or icons, the liturgy, the last rites, and, in some traditions, purgatory, and say to themselves, *“I want to experience all of this ancient ritual for myself. I want to enter into an experience that has been going on for 1500 years since the Roman Catholic Church gained ascendancy in the West, or for 1700 years since the Eastern Orthodox Church gained ascendancy in the East, or for almost 500 years since the Church of England was established in the Anglican tradition.”* And truthfully, it is a much easier and less costly way to experience a form of assurance. **BUT easier does not mean it is spiritually sound.**

This morning, we need to return to an even more ancient source to find this important experience – we need to return to Paul, and I want to urge us to listen carefully to him and to the Apostles alone!

And they remind us that the experience that assures us is not found in religious ceremonies or rites we perform to gain forgiveness, righteousness, or merit – that is the easy route, which is why so many people prefer it!

Rather, ***Paul grounds assurance in a work that the Holy Spirit initiates, sustains, and empowers us to do – the hard work of***

***progressive sanctification*** in which we persevere in saying no to our flesh, in which we put to death the works of the flesh in our lives, and we present our bodies as living sacrifices to God in order to discern and do His will in our daily lives – in our marriages and relationships, in our daily walk, in our vocation, and in every area of our lives. ***We must constantly do the hard work of mortifying our flesh and yielding our members as instruments of righteousness.***

- Justification declares us righteous through the expiation and propitiation gained by Christ – it is a positional standing before God, not one we necessarily feel or experience on a personal level.
- Sanctification allows us to ***experience*** this righteousness through emancipation and perseverance – and this is how we know we are justified! This is how we know we are no longer under God’s righteous wrath and just condemnation!

Listen to how Paul grounds this assurance – *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!”* And then he describes those who are “in Christ Jesus” as people who *“no longer walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* (8:1, 4).

In other words, our justification is based on God's declaration about us. ***But our assurance comes through an experience that results in actual emancipation!*** We are no longer slaves to sin, but are living under the controlling power of the Spirit, who illuminates our understanding, enables our will, and energizes our obedience to the righteous demands of the Law we neither wanted to fulfill nor could obey when we lived under the controlling power of the flesh!

This is hard, exhausting work – but in it we find the assurance our souls seek! And this is why the sensory nature of RCC and Orthodoxy is so attractive – it gives people a sense of assurance that does not require the hard work of sanctification. Sins are forgiven,

and their temporal guilt is cleansed by walking through holy doors, participating in rituals, joining in sacred liturgy that focuses on the gospels without the accompanying explanation and application God gave in the Epistles, and in the sense of being part of something ancient, solid, and unmovable.

**Conclusion: *What are the primary evidences of this assurance?***

### **1. God (The Trinity) dwelling in Us**

- ***The Spirit dwells in us (Romans 8:9)***  
*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*
- ***Christ dwells in us (Ephesians 3:17a)***  
*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*
- ***God the Father dwells in us (John 17:22-23; John 14:23; 1 John 4:15)***  
*John 17:22-23 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*  
*John 14:23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*  
*1 John 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*

### **2. The Word of God dwelling in Us (Col 3:16)**

*Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

### **3. The Love of God being mediated to us (Rom 5:5)**

*Romans 5:5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

There were people in Paul's day who were very religious, possessed theological expertise, practiced an ancient religion, and worshipped at a glorious temple for more than 1000 years – and they missed it! They were the Jews, and in Paul's day there was a strong temptation for early converts to return to Judaism and its ancient rites and traditions – and Paul forbade this in Galatians, as did the writer of Hebrews. Let's guard our souls against making that same mistake in our own day!