

# The Glorification of Nature

📖 Romans 8:18-22

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Last week, having completed the verse-by-verse exposition of sanctification as Paul revealed it in Romans 6:1-8:17, we gave a systematic overview of the doctrine of sanctification covering various points as they relate to the unbelievers position and experience vs the believer's position and experience. Before we leave the topic, sanctification is rooted in the word for holiness or being set apart and so we defined it as the setting apart of a person or object for God's purposes. God accomplishes this setting apart in three phases or tenses; past, present and future. With respect to the past we have been set apart at the moment of faith by justification; justification is the legal declaration of righteousness that God makes of us in His court in heaven and Paul has covered this in detail in Rom 3:21-5:21. With respect to the present we are being set apart as we live by faith in sanctification. Sanctification is the transformation of a justified person into a righteous person. Paul has covered this in detail in Rom 6:1-8:17. With respect to the future we will be set apart by faith at glorification. Glorification is the instant transformation of a justified person who has been in the process of sanctification into a perfectly righteous person by giving them a resurrection body. Paul very briefly covers this tense in Rom 8:18-30 which we will begin to exposit today. So those are your three phases or tenses.

To transition from sanctification to glorification we recall that there are means to living the Christian life. Romans 6:1-8:17 deals with one aspect of the means. We always say that in the larger picture of the doctrine of sanctification the means are two; both law and grace. But when we say law we do not mean what Paul has meant by the term Law. Paul meant the Law of Moses. What we mean by law is a standard. God has revealed standards for Church Age believer in the Upper Room Discourse and the NT epistles. There are thousands of laws. Take for example 1 Thess 5:12ff where there are some 21 commandments to follow. Paul says, "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,<sup>13</sup> and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.<sup>14</sup> We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.<sup>15</sup> See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.<sup>16</sup> Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup>in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit; <sup>20</sup>do not despise prophetic

utterances. <sup>21</sup>But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; <sup>22</sup>abstain from every form of evil." There are many commandments there to follow. And yet Paul has not been focusing on the standards in Rom 6:1-8:17. He has said that our new nature agrees with these standards when it is confronted by them. But he has also said that our new nature cannot do the commandments. He said over and over, the thing I want to do I cannot do and the thing I hate I do. That's the Romans 7 believer trying to obey God's commandments by self-effort, the flesh. That is why 25 times Paul says, 'I.' That was all 'I' trying to live the Christian life. And yet 'I' fail. 'I' cannot live the Christian life. You are deceived if you think you can live the Christian life. Paul tried and Paul concluded, "Wretched man that 'I' am. Who will deliver me from this body of death?" What then are we to do? Who will deliver us so that the Christian life is produced in us? Rom 8. The Holy Spirit. When we live by the Spirit He achieves the righteous requirement of God in our life. So we have a responsibility and it is not to live the Christian life, it is to be led by the Spirit. And when we are led by the Spirit there is a quality of life that is produced through us that is classified as resurrection life because it is the fruit of the Spirit. And that is what God desires to see; us living by the Spirit so that the fruit of the Spirit is produced in us. And as we do we are called a son of God because in this sense we are having His character reproduced in us.

Today we move into the future tense of our salvation which is glorification. No one can be glorified if they have not been justified and in the process of being sanctified. No matter how far along they make it in the process of sanctification they will all be glorified. Paul touches on the doctrine of glorification for the first time at the end of 8:17 where he says, "in order that we may be glorified with Him." So let's review Paul's thinking as he was teaching about sanctification and turned briefly to glorification. What came to Paul's mind is that we live in a fallen world and part of living in a fallen world is suffering. All suffering was introduced at the fall and yet there is help available. Part of the purpose for the suffering is to force us to realize that we can't handle the suffering and therefore we have to depend upon the Spirit rather than our flesh. In 8:15-17 I see Paul giving us motivation to depend upon the Spirit of God in our sufferings by calling upon the Father in time of need. Now if we're ever to do that we have to know that God is for us. You can't call upon the Father for help if you're not sure He is going to be there for you. So in 8:15 he says, "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again," meaning you are not operating in the atmosphere of slavery as you once were when you were an unbeliever. Paul says, "...but you have received a Spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba, Father!" When you believed in Christ the Spirit of God came to indwell you providing for your adoption so that you are just like a natural son; you are in the family of God now and you can cry out to the Father in time of need just as Jesus Christ who was God's Son called out to Him in time of need, uttering in Gethsemane, "Abba, Father!" Those delicate words of intimacy, that cry of help in time of need are yours to utter, you are as much a son as Jesus Christ is a Son; though He is natural and you are adopted. Then in 8:16 there are two witnesses that attest to the truth that you are a child of God; the Spirit Himself bears testimony and your human spirit bears testimony. Every fact must be confirmed by two or three witnesses and there are two witnesses that you are a child of God; the Holy Spirit and your human spirit. In 8:17, since you are a child then you are "heirs also, heirs of God and fellow

heirs with Christ." You are heirs in two senses; as an individual you are an heir of God because you have been adopted into the family of God. As an individual you are a co-heir with the natural Son, Jesus Christ who is also in the family of God. So you are an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ. I would like to point out one more time that there is no condition on being a co-heir with Christ. Some have argued in recent times that being a co-heir with Christ is conditional on you suffering with Him. But the expression "if indeed" is a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition and should be translated, "since indeed." In other words, it's a fact that you as a child of God will suffer with Christ.

Now it's not just this passage that teaches that you will suffer. Several passages teach that all believers will suffer. Phil 1:29, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me." It was granted to Paul to suffer and it is granted to you to suffer. The extent to which you will suffer is not stated, just the fact that you will suffer. 2 Cor 1:5-7, "For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort." So we all share in suffering but also note that we also share in being comforted by God. 1 Pet 4:12-13, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." Now these passages show that there are degrees of suffering that believers face. Not all believers suffer the same amount. There are many brothers and sisters in Christ right now who are enduring very intense suffering. That is God's lot for them and they are to rejoice in it because that is building up a great weight of glory in the life to come, which is the real life anyway. So it's not a question whether we will suffer, all will suffer to some degree and Paul concludes verse 17 with the purpose of our suffering with Him, "in order that we may also be glorified with Him." Our co-suffering is linked to our co-glorification.

Now, if the prospect of suffering might seem undesirable Paul says in 8:18, **I consider**. The Greek word **I consider** means to go through a process of reasoning and arrive at a conclusion. So it means that after careful consideration Paul concluded **that the sufferings** of this present time are far outweighed by **the glory that is to be revealed to us** or "in us." The Greek is debated. More on that later. Now **the sufferings** that Paul considered are all sufferings, not just human suffering. The Greek word *παθηματα* is the word for suffering in general. Man and nature suffer. Think of all the suffering in this world. Man is against man; man is against nature, nature is against nature and nature is against man. There is enmity all around us. Why is this? Why all the enmity? Why all the suffering? The problem of suffering is one of the chief arguments used against Christianity so you better know how to answer the argument. What's the argument? If God is all good and God is all powerful as you Christians say, then why is there suffering? Surely if God is all good He would remove the suffering; but since He has not removed the suffering then He must not be all powerful. Or perhaps God is all powerful in which case He

can remove suffering; but since He has not then He must not be all good. You've got a contradiction in your God! What's the answer? How does a Christian give an answer to all the suffering? God didn't bring in all the suffering but He does ultimately use it for good for those who love God.

But originally it wasn't there. When God created this universe He created everything very good. Genesis 1:31, "And God looked at all that He had made and behold it was very good." There was no death, no suffering, no pain, no tears. Who's to blame? The Bible blames man. Why does nature get caught up in the suffering? Man is not a part of nature. Man is the image of God, he's distinct from nature. But there is a lot of suffering in nature too. So how did that suffering get there? Verse 20 kind of leaves it ambiguous. It just says, "the creation was subjected to futility." It doesn't tell us who subjected it. Then it says, "not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it..." and the translators capitalized "Him" in order to designate the one who subjected it as God. But that's an interpretation, not a translation. The text just says "he who subjected it" and commentators argue over whether the "he" is God or Adam or Satan. So it doesn't really clear anything up. I think Paul left it a bit ambiguous because the explanation for how suffering got into nature is nuanced. Genesis 3:17 says that because Adam obeyed the voice of his wife and ate from the tree that the ground was cursed. In other words, the ground was cursed because of Adam but apparently it was God who cursed it. But if Adam had not eaten of the tree then God would not have cursed it. Vincent says, "Paul does not use the grammatical form which would express the direct agency of God, *by Him* who hath subjected, but that which makes God's will *the occasion* rather than *the worker*—*on account of Him*. Adam's sin and not God's will was the direct and special cause of the subjection to vanity. The supreme will of God is thus removed 'to a wider distance from corruption and vanity' (Alford)."<sup>1</sup> I think that is well put. Adam is held responsible for his sin against God and God cursed nature only because of man's sin against Him. That is the best explanation I can give for why there is suffering in nature. And it is those sufferings which abound that can cause us distress. But Paul said that after careful thought he concluded that all "the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed *to us* or *in us*." The Greek is not exactly clear. It may be some of both. There is a glory that is going to be revealed *to us* and *in us*. In other words outside of us and inside of us; the glory has these two components; inside of us or with respect to us our body will be resurrected and outside of us nature will be regenerated. The glorification extends to both man and nature. So as we go through these verses and Paul uses the term "creation" he's not including man. Man is a creation but he is using the term as a synonym for nature. He deals with man separately in vv 23, 24 and 25. He deals with nature separately in vv 19, 20, 21 and 22 and this is in keeping with the man-nature distinction. So he is talking about a glory that is to be revealed *to us* and *in us*; to man and nature so that our destiny as resurrected like Christ dovetails with the regeneration of nature. When does this occur? In the kingdom. When Christ returns in His kingdom we will have been raised and the world of nature will be regenerated, the wolf will lie with the lamb.

I've used the word regeneration. It's interesting that as much talk as there is about regeneration the word regeneration is used only twice in the NT. The Greek is *παλιγγενησια* and means "again to be born" or "re-born."

One use in Titus 3:5 refers to our salvation. "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration..." There's use one and it's clearly used in connection with our spiritual salvation. The other use is Matt 19:28 where Jesus is speaking to the twelve and He says to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." There's use two and it's clearly used in connection with the physical re-birth of the earth in the kingdom! That is when the sufferings will be lifted. There's going to be a radical change coming in the future; so radical that no evolutionist could envision man reaching this high estate, and certainly not instantaneously. Paul refers to us as shining as the brightness of the stars. And no environmentalist could ever imagine the beauty of nature in the regeneration. Ezekiel refers to the millennial earth as a Garden of Eden. So spectacular are we and the earth during the kingdom that Paul said, "I considered this, I thought very carefully through this and I concluded that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." That is the doctrine of glorification in a nutshell and it is an immense doctrine. It is necessary to think through because it is what we need to endure the suffering we see in us and around us continually at the present time.

Now there's more, much more. Constable says, "This passage gives a very wide perspective of God's great plan of redemption..."<sup>2</sup> In other words, redemption is not limited by Paul to man and the price paid for our sin but extends the price paid as having application to the entire created order. Now I find this interesting in light of the claims of many that Christ died only for the elect. We call that limited atonement and it is one of the five points of Calvinism known by the acrostic TULIP. The L in that acrostic stands for Limited Atonement. Some five point Calvinists don't like the term Limited Atonement and refer to it as Definite Atonement or Particular Redemption but the point is the same. They maintain that God in Christ intended to redeem only the elect, a subset of humanity. And yet here we see that the redemption price paid by Christ is applied to the entire created order. Especially verse 21 says this, "that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." So you see there is a connection between our destiny and that of nature and I can see no other basis for this than God's perfect justice being met in the redemption price paid by Jesus Christ. I find it very telling that even five point Calvinist Louis Berkhof had to admit in his *Systematic Theology* that Christ must have, in some sense, died for the entire created order because ultimately the entire created order is ultimately set free from its slavery to corruption.

Now I would say that the idea that redemption extends beyond man to nature should be no surprise to a student of the OT. And sometimes I wonder if these people ever read the OT. God establishes patterns in history as to the way He works. He doesn't just drop something on you. He does something and it establishes a pattern and then He might add something to the pattern to make it more complex but the basic pattern remains unchanged. What events establish the pattern of redemption in the OT? What are the two great pictures of judgment/salvation in the OT? The Flood and the Exodus. At the Flood God judged and saved whom? Both man and nature. Who was on the ark? Eight men appropriated God's means of salvation in the ark by faith and

representatives of each of the animal kinds. So man and nature were saved. At the Exodus God judged and saved whom? Both man and nature again. Those who appropriated God's promise of salvation by putting blood over the door by faith were saved and the firstborn of every animal. So blood was added but should it be a surprise that God's redemption ultimately goes beyond man and extends to nature? No, and that is Paul's point. He's painting for us a grand view of redemption and what God is going to accomplish through the price Christ paid on the cross.

But in the meantime, before we get to that goal of history when both man and nature are set free from the corruption we have to live in the corruption with all the attendant suffering. And what is he trying to do in verse 18? He's trying to help us see that the sufferings of this present time pale in comparison to the glory to come. This was not a new truth. Paul taught the same thing in 2 Cor 4:17, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison..." You can only come to the conclusion that the present sufferings are light if you have thought through the temporality of the sufferings relative to the eternity of glory. Note that he also makes a connection between the amount of suffering and the weight of eternal glory. In other words, the amount of affliction we endure somehow accrues to the resurrection body. In Rom 8 he does something similar. He contrasts the temporal sufferings with the eternal glory just like in 2 Cor but he makes a slightly different connection showing that the difference between temporal suffering and eternal glory is so great that the present sufferings in their totality are not worth near as much as the eternal glory. It's having this eternal perspective that drives us, impels us and gives us hope.

In 8:19 Paul explains and he's only going to refer to nature in vv 19-22. He'll explain about man in vv 23-25. But for now suffering in nature; there is always the man-nature distinction. He says, **For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.** The word **the creation** refers to "all nature" as distinct from man. Nature is personified as having emotions like **anxious longing** and **waiting eagerly**. The word **anxious longing** is *αποκαραδοκία*, a compound of three words meaning "from" "the head" "to watch." It is one raising his head in suspense as he waits to see something. Nature is viewed as raising its head waiting in suspense. The other word **waits eagerly** is used to emphasize this posture of nature. It is a different compound word, *απεκδεχομαι* meaning "from" "out" "to receive or welcome." It is an intense kind of waiting to receive or welcome someone or something. It is used again in verse 23 and 25 of our waiting for our resurrection body. What nature is patiently waiting for with terrific suspense is **the revealing of the sons of God.** The word **revealing** is *αποκαλυψιν* from which we get "the apocalypse" the older title and first word of the Book of Revelation. It means "an uncovering, an unveiling" which is what the Book of Revelation is all about, the unveiling of Jesus Christ at the Second Coming. So the word presupposes that the object or person is already there but they are being kept hidden. Jesus is being kept hidden in heaven at the right hand of the Father. So an apocalypse is an unveiling, it is taking something hidden and making it known, like a statue that is being unveiled at an induction ceremony. Here what is already there but being kept hidden from nature is **the sons of God.** The **sons of God** are resurrected believers. We will be raised at the pre-trib rapture, then taken to the

judgment seat of Christ where we will be rewarded. After Christ pours out His judgments on earth in the Tribulation we will return with Christ in His kingdom. At that time we will be revealed to nature. Nature is in a kind of suspense awaiting this moment because nature cannot be set free from its slavery to corruption until this revealing occurs. Isaac Watts captured this moment in his hymn *Joy to the World* which enshrines the response of heaven and nature singing when the Lord comes. Not coincidentally, Watts was a dispensationalist. He viewed the kingdom as having two phases; one the earthly millennial reign of Christ and two the eternal state. His hymn was written to depict the Second Coming, not the First Coming. When Christ comes in His Second Coming **the sons of God** will be revealed and all nature will rejoice because it is set free.

In 8:20 Paul explains why creation is yearning to be set free, **For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.** Again, **creation** is being used as a synonym for "nature." Nature **was subjected**, passive voice, meaning the subjection came from outside of nature. The debate is over who subjected it. Some say God, some say Adam, some say Satan. As explained earlier, God subjected it but He did so only because of Adam's rebellion. Why did God subject nature? We think that God cursed nature for two basic reasons. First, to teach man what it was like for something lesser to rebel against someone greater. Since man was put over nature then nature's rebellion against man teaches man what it is like for us to rebel against God. In other words, the lesson embedded in the fact that the thorns and thistles grow up is that the flesh can only rebel against God. Second, to make nature less productive so that we would have to toil in order to make nature productive. All the inefficiencies in nature require us to pour much more effort into our labor in order to make something productive. If we didn't have to work so hard we would spend our time coming up with more evil and crooked distortions of the flesh. The side effect of this is that nature has to suffer. Note that nature **was subjected to futility**. The Greek word **futility** is from *ματαιοτης* from which we get "vanity." It refers to a state of being without use or value. The point is that at the Fall much of the value of God's creation was destroyed. Thorns and thistles are genetic distortions of the original design which produced something of value for food. The same thought holds for all things of little or no value in nature. Sometimes we find a part of nature that serves some good purposes but also carries with it bad qualities. These are the futilities that were introduced because of Adam's sin. Nature is not as bad as it could be, but it was subjected to this futility, **not willingly**, Paul says, that is, not of its own choice. Nature didn't have a choice in the matter, but it was forced upon it.

It was God **who subjected it** but again only because of Adam's refusal to subject himself to God. Therefore God cursed the entire dominion of man. Denny explains, "...the sentence fell upon man, carrying consequences which extended to the whole realm intended originally for his dominion."<sup>3</sup> However, this subjection to futility was not without a firm basis on a future hope. The Greek translated **in hope** is literally "upon hope" and gives the basis for the subjection to futility. The basis of the futility was on the certain future of verse 21, **that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the**

**children of God.** Adam failed in his dominion and we in him but the second Adam, Jesus Christ who was to come, would not fail, and nor would we in Him. This dominion begins with Christ's resurrection from the dead and is consummated with ours and our reign with Him in the coming kingdom. Then we will accomplish God's original will for man which was to have dominion over the face of the entire earth. Then we will be brilliant scientists, brilliant biologists, brilliant economists, brilliant architects, brilliant at everything we do and under Christ who is omnibrilliant and ruling as King. Then we will see what God originally intended for man and nature, a thoroughgoing investigation and knowledge of the design features with all their teleology that God beautifully embedded within each piece of His marvelous handiwork. Solomon is the foretaste. Present advances in every discipline known to man haven't even scratched the surface of what we will discover during the millennial kingdom about His marvelous architecture that surrounds us and is in us that compose this robust physical and spiritual system. There is a whole new world coming. That world is where we place our hope so that we are not crushed by the present sufferings. Even nature has this hope. As verse 21 says **that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption.** Presently nature is enslaved **to corruption.** The Greek word for **corruption** is *φθορα* and means "the breakdown of organic matter, decay, deterioration." Decay is the order of the day presently. We say in the 2<sup>nd</sup> law of thermodynamics that apart from a system order goes to disorder and most energy dissipates because the systems that organize are so scarce relative to space, but not in the kingdom. The kingdom is a supernatural time when decay will not be the order of the day. Systems biological, physical and chemical will be in place in much greater abundance in order to utilize organic materials in a non-decay, totally efficient system. This is what the miracles of Christ were designed to give us a foretaste of, a whole new world in the kingdom. Such a thought is not even conceivable in this present world system but it is the rule and norm of the future world. It is at that time that Paul says that nature will be **set free...into freedom.** How could anything even be imagined apart from One who had total control of nature? The kingdom is the time of freedom because man and nature will be set free by Jesus Christ to function as they were originally designed to function. Genetic abnormalities will be corrected so that the full productivity of man and nature will be seen on a scale the world has never seen before. Present advancements, as wonderful as they may be, will be seen as minor adjustments to a life of inevitable decay. Further, this setting free into **freedom** will be in connection with **the glory of the children of God,** that is, our resurrection. All dovetails in the kingdom when the second Adam reigns and fulfills the dominion mandate never fulfilled by the first Adam.

Paul explains the present futility of nature in 8:22, **For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.** The Greek **we know** is the perfect tense of *οἶδα*, that is, we have come to know by perception **that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.** Paul again personifies nature. Nature **groans** in a way similar to our groaning described in verse 23. Nature also **suffers** what are comparable to **the pains of childbirth.** All of nature in commonality **groans and suffers until now; until** the moment Paul wrote Romans but continuing to this very moment because Christ has still not returned in His kingdom. When He does the sons of God will be revealed in all their resurrection glory

and nature will be regenerated, brought back to a condition of thriving and productivity on an unprecedented level. This is the world that is coming, not one that we are evolving toward but one that will come suddenly with the breaking in of the Son of Man in His kingdom with great power and glory, a Cambrian explosion if you will to radically restructure the cosmos. In that light maybe you can see our present sufferings as Paul saw his sufferings, minor, trivial and yet at the same time fulfilling a purpose of accruing to the weight of eternal glory.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 8:19.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 8:17.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 8:19.