

SUFFERING, GROANING, WAITING, AND HOPE
(SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 2012)

Scripture Reading: Gen. 3:14-24; Rom. 8:18-25

Introduction

God in His infinite wisdom has given to us such a great variety of commands and instruction. Think of the diversity of commands found just in the 10 commandments. Many of God's commands address very immediate and practical concerns.

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Eph. 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right...

Eph. 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Other commands demand we might say more reflection in terms of their application.

Matthew 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

The passage that we consider today has much in it that is applicable for each day, but it has as its focus the much larger plan of God involving all of creation. Romans 8:18-25 is not a passage about how to feel better about your life in five minutes. There are no quick and easy steps that it recommends, but it does give much guidance to you. You are called to consider the glory of Jesus Christ that one day will be revealed in us when all of creation experiences deliverance from sin and the curse for sin.

Have the proper perspective by considering the glory of Christ that will be revealed and that we will share.

We will consider from verses 18-25 three points focusing on this great perspective we are to have.

1. WE SUFFER NOW, BUT WE WAIT FOR A MUCH GREATER, FUTURE GLORY, V. 18-21

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. **19** For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. **20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; **21** because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Let us consider the place of our passage in Romans. Verses 18-30 together are the climax of Romans 1-8. Verse 18 speaks of glory. Verse 30 ends with reference to our glorification.¹ There is too much in these verses, though, to try to cover in one sermon.

The immediate foundation for verses 18-30 comes from verse 17 especially 17b.

Rom. 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Verses 18-30 don't directly show how suffering with Christ leads to glory but there is a sequence; though we may suffer in many ways now, this suffering in no way contradicts our freedom from condemnation, and this suffering is nothing in comparison to the glory that awaits us.²

Verses 18 and following should also be compared with Romans 1. Paul beautifully connects Romans 1 and Romans 8 through the use of several key words.

1:17 – the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel and 1:18 – The wrath of God is revealed now from heaven.

8:17 – glory which shall be revealed in us.

1:20 - For since the creation of the world.

8:20 – For the creation was subjected to futility. This same word **futility** is used in 1:21 – but became futile in their thoughts.

Glory is a key word in Romans 1 – men in their rebellion did not glorify God, they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made

¹ Moo, 508.

² Moo, 509.

like corruptible man. Romans 8, as I already mentioned, speaks of the future glory that will be revealed in us.

Other connections could also be made but I will leave this to your own reflection and study.³

Verse 18 should be understood as a confident declaration based on the gospel message and the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubting that our present sufferings have no comparison to the glory which shall be revealed in us.⁴

Paul in 2 Cor. 4:17 expressed a similar truth.

2Cor. 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,

Both of these great verses do not downplay current suffering. Rather both of these verses give you the perspective that you must have in the face of your current sufferings. What you now suffer is nothing in comparison only to the future glory that we will share with Jesus Christ.

Verse 17 spoke of suffering with Christ. Does that mean that only suffering that is directly the result of living as a Christian is counted here? I don't think it has to be so restricted. Most of what Paul suffered did come as a result of his calling as an apostle and missionary. Our suffering directly for our witness for Christ is for most of us nothing that is going to get us in the Voice of the Martyr's next prayer update.

The suffering of verse 18 can include any suffering a believer is called to endure and that you face while looking to Jesus Christ for strength and encouragement. This could include illness, sorrow, hunger, financial difficulties, and death.⁵

I think it is good to keep in mind there are two aspects of suffering – objective and subjective. The two work together. For example, there are some here who face some real financial challenges, but if you compare them to what Christians for example in Liberia face, you would have to say, well others certainly face worse. And yet this objective comparison doesn't mean that subjectively there is no difficulty you might face just because someone else in the world has it much worse. The most important perspective is what is presented in verse 18.

If you are looking to Christ and are truly trusting in Him, then you are given assurance that what you face now has no comparison with the glory that will be revealed. This is the perspective you must seek to constantly keep in mind.

³ Dunn, 467.

⁴ Dunn, 467.

⁵ Moo, 511.

In verse 19, Paul says that all of creation is also waiting for this glory – the revealing of the sons of God who share in the glory of Jesus Christ.

Both in verse 19 and verse 22, Paul refers to creation and to creation doing things that we know rocks, trees, and animals can't do. It is best to understand that when Paul speaks of creation he is speaking of non-human creation and using what is called personification.

Psalm 65:12b And the little hills rejoice on every side.

13 The pastures are clothed with flocks;
The valleys also are covered with grain;
They shout for joy, they also sing.

The expression **earnest expectation** means to move your head and neck in order to see what is coming.⁶ Our children and grandchildren frequently demonstrate this earnest expectation.

Verse 19 though poetic makes a very important point. Our own galaxy composed of billions of stars is just one galaxy out of billions of other galaxies. David expressed it very well in Psalm 8 that in comparison to God's vast seemingly infinite creation, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him. Even looking closer to home, it is estimated that the total weight of all the ants is equal to the total weight of all humans. And **ants** outnumber humans 1.5 million to one.⁷

In the evolutionary worldview, humans are just another accident of evolution. We are just animals inhabiting mother earth. Some think it would be better if all humans just went extinct, after all we cause most of the problems on the earth.

But what does verse 19 say in direct contrast? All of creation expectantly and eagerly is waiting for the glory of Jesus Christ to be revealed in those who are brothers and sisters with Christ.

Paul's thought is very close to what we read in 1 John 3:2-3.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. **3** And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

In verse 20 Paul explains the main point of verse 19 by speaking briefly of what we read in Genesis 3 concerning the curse and the first gospel promise.

⁶ Moo, 513.

⁷ <http://goo.gl/qNEHA>

If you just studied creation – the natural world – would you come to the conclusion of verse 19? Right now it seems that so much of the created world is a demonstration of frustration and futility. One commentator uses the illustration of a satellite that is spinning out of control.⁸ The frustration or futility that is demonstrated throughout creation is not part of God’s original intent for His glorious universe. God was the one who subjected creation to its futility. But God brought this subjection to creation with hope.

This reference to hope is an allusion to the great promise of Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

The hope of verse 20 is explained in verse 21. Some translations make this clearer. The NKJV begins verse 21 with the word **because** but this could also be translated as that with the rest of the verse explaining the nature of this hope.

And notice again what is the hope that is given to all creation? It is a two-part hope. One, it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption or decay. Two, it will be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

This is an amazing verse. We do not believe that the entire earth and matter will be destroyed in the coming of Christ but transformed and renewed.⁹ Creation will share in the glory of Jesus Christ and those who are united with Jesus Christ. The glory of creation and its restoration is based on the glorification of God’s people.

Humans are naturally self-centered and selfish. You don’t have to teach anyone to be this way; it is the result of sin. But there is in this passage a focus brought to God’s true people. This is not to encourage us in our own self-centeredness, but to help you focus on the glory of Jesus Christ in which we will share.

We now suffer, but we wait for a much greater, future glory. And while we wait, we groan.

2. WHILE WE WAIT, WE GROAN, VV. 22-23.

Rom. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. **23** Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

⁸ Dunn, 470.

⁹ Moo, 517.

One of the important themes that you find throughout Scripture is the assurance of God's blessing while at the same time having to wait for the fullness of that blessing. This is sometimes expressed through the phrase – **already but not yet**. This is not just part of the Apostle Paul's theology but something found throughout Scripture.

For example, Abraham was given incredible promises but he had to wait for them and some of them he never saw fulfilled.

Heb. 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Now we live on the other side of the cross so our waiting is not identical to the waiting of Abraham and other saints, but what we have in common is still waiting for the fullness of God's salvation.

Because of the subjection to futility of verse 20, Paul in verse 22 speaks of the incredible groaning and laboring with birth pangs experienced by creation. He again uses personification to stress that this time of waiting is not easy.

There are some mothers that God allows to give birth to their children fairly quickly but I don't think that labor pains, however quickly they might pass, means the process of giving birth is easy. Creation is not giving birth. That is not Paul's point in verse 22. Rather creation suffers – a suffering that is best compared to the suffering a woman who is in the process of giving birth. It is possible that Paul uses this language again in connection with Genesis 3, though the pain of child birth is found in other passages.

Paul uses two verbs in verse 22 that contain the preposition translated as together or with. The best understanding is not that we groan with creation but that all of creation groans together. In the words of the Phillips translation, it is a symphony of sighs.¹⁰

Our own groaning is described in verse 23. God's people who have been given already the blessing of the Holy Spirit groan within ourselves eagerly waiting for the final aspect of our adoption, the full redemption of our bodies.

There is an important question on translation in verse 23. The NKJV translates to make the point that even we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan. It might be better to understand and translate this phrase as we groan because we have the firstfruits of the Spirit.¹¹

¹⁰ Moo, 518. Moo also cited the translation of what I believe is J. B. Phillips.

¹¹ Moo, 520.

The groaning of verse 23 is not the first thing you say when you have to get up in the morning or when you have difficulty putting on your shoes because your back is hurting you. The groaning, verse 23 states, is within ourselves. It is a groaning that desires the fullness of God's work of salvation including the redemption of our bodies.

Now there are many unbelievers who would love for their aches and pains to go away. There is as you know a huge market for miracle-products that promise to fix all that ails you. But only those who have the Holy Spirit can long for the fullness of our adoption as the sons and daughters of God and the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Only those who have the Holy Spirit can be truly grieved over their own sin and the failure of men and women to recognize the glory of God and desire to see the fullness of His glory. The ministry of the Holy Spirit should be seen in your deepest desires.

While we wait for the glory that shall be revealed in us, we groan. But we also wait with hope and patience.

3. WE DO NOT SEE WHAT WE WAIT FOR, BUT WE HOPE WITH PATIENCE, VV. 24-25

Rom. 8:24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

This section as I mentioned earlier continues through verse 30, but we end with these two verses.

As I asked earlier, is there any indication that you see just studying the created order that it will be one day transformed, that it has been subjected in hope? I don't believe there is. In a similar way, there is nothing you can physically see or anything purely in this life that gives you assurance of the glory that verse 18 declares will one day be ours.

Even the apostle John said it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. **We know that we will be like our Lord and Savior. We know that we will see Him as He is.** We know from the book of Revelation something about the glory of the eternal state but again this is not something that we see now. The hope we are to have is entirely different from the hope of an auto show where you see a bunch of beautiful and wonderful cars and you hope that one day you will drive one of them.

I mentioned in a sermon on Romans 5, that quite often Paul uses the verb saved in the future tense. In Romans 5 we read that we shall be saved from wrath through Him. But here in verse 24, the verb saved is used in a past tense. Here it refers to

those aspects of salvation we already enjoy – regeneration, justification, and adoption. These aspects of salvation already our present possession lead us to wait for that which we do not yet enjoy.

And verses 24 and 25 makes a very important point about our hope and our future glory.

2Cor. 4:18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

The fact that we cannot see the fullness of the blessing of God's salvation is actually a good thing. Because it is not something seen it is part of God's eternal and sure purposes.¹²

It is not something you can see, but it is something that you are to desire. Verse 25 directs you to eagerly wait with perseverance or patience for the fulfillment of our hope. We are not talking about things that are irrelevant or things that you should just have in the back of your mind. No, it is as you often think about the truth of this passage that you also say with confidence, what I suffer now is nothing in comparison to the glory which shall one day be revealed in me.

CONCLUSION:

Have the proper perspective by considering the glory of Christ that will be revealed and that we will share.

As I mentioned earlier, this is not a passage that helps you solve all your problems in five minutes. No, this passage is far more glorious than that. Do you see how relevant this passage is to your current trials? Should not this passage, if properly applied, direct you away from worry and complaining? Though this passage helps you understand the bigger picture, isn't it also the key to dealing with much smaller problems you might be facing?

1 John 3:3 also indicates that the hope of sharing in Christ's glory should encourage you to turn from sin and live a holy and pure life. Only those who truly have this hope will seek to live a pure and holy life.

I think it is certainly the case that we by far have more distractions and things that cause us to focus on the now and the immediate more than any other age. It remains to be seen what will be the outcome of this age in which we live where if we don't have something instantaneously or in the next day or two, it is just too long.

¹² Moo, 522.

We don't like to be told that we will have to wait for something. We want it now. But this passage tells you to wait – to wait with expectation and hope.

Paul's original readers faced a time of tremendous testing. If Romans was written in A.D. 57, then just about 7 years later began a very intense period of suffering for believers in Rome following the great fire in Rome during the days of Nero. The letter of Romans was not just offering theoretical ideas but was preparing God's people for a very intense time of suffering.

If you follow how quickly Western Culture is embracing abomination and paganism, it might not be that long before some of us face greater trial.

You need the perspective of this passage both to fight against the irrelevance of so much of our instantaneous culture as well as to strengthen your resolve to follow after Jesus Christ no matter what may be the cost.

It is the glory of Jesus Christ that much more needs to be our attention and focus. We praise so many other things that we enjoy and like – cars, firearms, beautiful days, sports teams. May our praise for these things pale in comparison to our praise of our Lord and Savior. May your desire be much more for this future glory than anything that you now desire here on earth.

Prayer

Hymn: 236

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.