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Romans 8:17-25 “Victory Over Suffering”

Intro. In v.17 Paul noted that we are children of God, even joint heirs with Christ, and that we will be glorified with Christ. Yet in the same verse he also made reference to the fact that the children of God will suffer with Christ in this life. Paul does not try to hide this reality of the Christian life. This could lead some to question how it can be that God allows *His own* children to suffer. They suggest that suffering is inconsistent with our being children of God. Paul sees no inconsistency. Remember, Paul said that we may suffer “with Him,” that is, Christ. He was God’s Son, but that did not exclude *Him* from suffering. Why should we be exempt from suffering?

So all of us need to know how to face suffering. Most of us do not even like to think about suffering, but it is a part of life, for we still live in bodies and in a world that are under the curse of sin that we read about in Genesis 3:16-19. We enter the world through the suffering of our mothers, and we usually leave the world through suffering. Throughout life we face various kinds of suffering. We will suffer physically with sickness and injury. At times we face emotional pain. Haven’t you suffered the pain of rejection from time to time? Other times we will suffer from a sense of loss, whether the loss of loved ones through death or broken relationships, or the loss of financial security. Sometimes we will suffer by seeing others suffer. When our children get hurt, we hurt with them. I’m sure some of you are enduring suffering of some kind right now. But the type of suffering that Paul is mainly addressing, according to v.17 and vv.35-36, is suffering for Christ’s sake. 2 Tim. 3:12 says, “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (NKJV). The expression of our Christian beliefs, and our Christian way of living, will tend to rub unbelievers the wrong way. Christ said that true disciples would be willing to follow Him by taking up *their* cross (Mt. 16:24), which became a metaphor of self-denial, suffering and death. The apostles warned believers that they would face suffering and persecution.¹ Paul is writing to Christians in Rome. They would face intense persecution under the Emperor Nero within a few years. Today, about 360 million Christians are suffering for their faith worldwide. I believe we are going to face more persecution even right here in our country. We may need this message more than we realize.

How well do you handle suffering? Do you do everything possible to avoid suffering, even if that means becoming reclusive, or denying Christ? Does suffering tend to make you bitter against God and others? Do you complain about your suffering to anyone who will listen? Do you fret and worry in the midst of suffering? Do you panic? Will suffering destroy your will to live and lead to your death? Well in another context about suffering, Paul says in v.37, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” He is talking about the fact that we can be more than conquerors over our sufferings through Christ who loved us. Isn’t that what you want?

Well, I want you to listen to the words of a man who was an expert on suffering. Very few suffered as much as Paul did. He was stoned, beaten, whipped, imprisoned, and run out of town many times. He suffered hunger, shipwreck, and other trials (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-28). Yet he was rarely defeated by his suffering (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-9). He remained faithful to Christ, and often responded even with joy (e.g. Acts 16:25). For the most part, he did not respond to suffering with worry or

¹ Acts 14:22, they were “encouraging [new believers] to continue in the faith, ... saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” Php 1:29, “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”

despair or fear. Suffering did not cause him to doubt God's love. So how was *he* victorious over suffering? Well let me share with you three ways we can overcome suffering:

I. HAVE THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

You can be victorious over your sufferings by how you think and how you view your sufferings. Paul says in v.18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." The word "consider" (*logizomai*) is a bookkeeping term that refers to a mental calculation. How you think about your suffering, how you view it, makes all the difference in the world. If you do not think right about how God is going to work through your sufferings, you are going to be defeated by them.

Notice Paul's perspective here. Why is it "that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us"? He put suffering on one side of the ledger and our future glory on the other side, calculated all the components of each side and then concluded that the blessings of the glory to come far outweigh the burdens of the grief that we bear now. With that kind of perspective, Paul was able to respond to suffering with joy and peace. In another Scripture Paul expresses why he could have such a positive perspective about suffering. In 2 Cor. 4:17 Paul makes a similar comment, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Paul refers to his affliction as "slight" (*elaphros*), or literally "light in weight."² He suffered intensely at times, and yet he viewed it as "slight affliction." Did you realize that the pain of suffering is affected by your attitude and emotional state? If you are down and depressed, your pain will be magnified. But if you respond with joy, hope, and a good attitude, your pain will be less. How did Paul have such a good and positive perspective on suffering? First of all, Paul kept in mind that:

A. Our Pain Is Small in Length – He says in that verse, "For this slight momentary affliction..." When you suffer, you need to keep in mind the relative brevity of your suffering. In comparison to *eternal* glory, any suffering we endure in this life is indeed "momentary." Let's face it, most of the time our suffering *is* only temporary. The next time you have surgery, just keep in mind that your suffering will probably last only a few days. And even if you suffer the rest of your life, compared to eternity it is still only "for a moment."

J. Vernon McGee told of a congregation in Memphis, TN where the pastor asked for some favorite verses of Scripture. One man got up and said his favorite verse was, "And it came to pass." He sat down, and everyone looked puzzled. The pastor asked him how in the world *that* could be his favorite verse. He answered, "When I get in trouble, I turn to where it says, 'it came to pass,' and I know my troubles came to pass. They didn't come to stay."³ How true that is. Every trial and trouble you face as a Christian is only temporary.

Here's something else to keep in mind:

B. Our Pain Is Minimal Compared to the Intensity of the Glory We Shall Enjoy - Paul, writing against a background of recent and (even for him) unparalleled tribulation, had assured his friends in Corinth a year or two previously that "this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." He says something similar in v.18 of our text, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Think of the most intense pain you have ever experienced, like a 9 or 10 on

² The word is found only one other time in the New Testament, in Mt. 11:30 where Jesus said "...My burden is light."

³ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983), 387.

the pain scale. Well here Paul promises that our joy and glory in heaven will be even more intense than any pain we have experienced in this life. So Paul overcame his suffering by taking his mind off his pain, and on the glory that is to come. When a child gets hurt, there is something about the promise of an ice cream cone that seems to make it better. Don't focus your attention upon your pain but upon the good things God has in store for you. For the believer, the best is yet to come! In fact, Paul says in v.30 that glory is indeed our destiny as believers in the plan of God.

C. Our Suffering Leads to Even Greater Glory – Again, Paul says that “affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” Especially when you suffer for Christ, you will be rewarded with the glory of a great reward someday. Jesus said in Mt. 5:11-12, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven....” Furthermore, when you respond to suffering in the right way, you will grow closer to the Lord. You will learn to depend upon Him more. Suffering also builds character, and helps you grow as a Christian. Paul had already stated back in 5:3-4, “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character....” The more you suffer now, the greater will be your capacity for glory in the life to come. The positive spiritual benefits of suffering will lead to greater reward someday.

So as you face suffering, remember that having the right perspective on suffering will go a long way toward overcoming it. Think about the spiritual benefits of suffering. Remember that your suffering is only temporary and comparatively light to the glory we are yet to experience.

So not only do we overcome suffering by having the right perspective, but also:

II. BY EXERCISING HOPE

You can endure suffering much better if you have hope of a better future. That is one reason why Paul makes at least 5 references to hope in this text of Scripture.⁴ For example, Paul said in v.24, “For in this hope we were saved....” We are even *commanded* to hope in 1 Peter 1:13, which says, “...hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (NKJV). A person who faces a serious illness with hope of recovery will fare much better than the person who just gives up hope. Those who had hope were much more likely to survive the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps.

I have good news for you. We Christians *always* have hope. We should never sink into despair. Even if things do not get better in *this* life, we still have hope because of the life to come. We know that everything will be alright in heaven. Yet when unbelievers suffer, they have no hope. 1 Thess. 4:13 speaks of “others who have no hope” (NKJV). In Ephesians 2:12 Paul said that before we became Christians, we were among those who had “no hope and without God in the world” (NKJV). There is no hope in the hearts of unbelievers who live only for the here and now.

Now in this text of Scripture, Paul tells us what we are hoping for. First:

A. We Hope for the Restoration of Our World – Beginning in v.19 Paul personifies creation⁵ and even attributes hope to creation with vivid poetic language. Right now, creation is suffering from the effects of the curse placed upon it soon after Adam and Eve sinned (see Gen. 3:17-18). That is why Paul says in v.20, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because

⁴ I say at least because “earnest expectation” (v.19) and “eagerly waiting” (vv.23 & 25) are similar to hope.

⁵ This is not the first time the writers of Scripture personified creation. In Isaiah 55:12, we read, “...the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (NKJV).

of him who subjected it, in hope.” Man sinned deliberately and willingly; creation was his unwilling victim.

Paul describes the effects of the curse in several ways. Again, in v.20 Paul says, “For the creation was subjected to futility....” “Futility” (*mataiotes*) refers to what fails to fulfill its original purpose; thus, what is useless, fruitless or futile. When God created this world, it was “very good” (Gen. 1:31), beautiful⁶ and extremely productive (cf. Amos 9:13) but now it is flawed in many ways. Nature can’t be what it was made to be. Nature is frustrated. Often the fruit of creation is spoiled by insects, weeds (Mt. 13:7, 22), disease, and bad weather. Furthermore, in v.21 Paul refers to “its bondage to decay.” It can’t break free from this cycle of growth and decay. Have you noticed that just about everything tends to decay? What was once a fine home becomes run down through neglect. There is a law in science known as “The Law of Entropy,” which states that the order of an earthly system tends to become disorganized. The theory of evolution is not true because it is opposite of this law of physics. The universe is not in an upward trend; it’s in a downward trend. We are going from order to disorder and decay, not disorder to order.

As a result of this curse placed upon creation, we read in v.22, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” There are three things that we see groaning in verses 19-27: creation (v.22), believers (v.23), and the Holy Spirit (v.26). “What is everyone groaning about?” Basically, they are lamenting about what it is like to live in this world of pain, decay and bondage. Our world is still subjected to the curse of sin.

Actually, Paul pictures the world groaning from “the pains of childbirth.” This is a fitting metaphor that ties into the concept of hope. Even though the creation is groaning from the effects of the curse, in the end there will be a joyful and blessed restoration. The pain of childbirth is one pain that women can look forward to because it brings a child into the world, and thus has a joyful outcome. Also, in childbirth, the pains become more frequent and more intense. Jesus warned that earthquakes will become more intense as we get closer to that day of restoration (Luke 21:11), and I assume more frequent as well. In Mt. 24:7-8 Jesus said that in the last days, “there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. When the tribulation comes, the earth will go into hard labor, followed by deliverance from the curse, for even though God subjected creation to a curse, He did so “in hope” (v.20) that creation would one day be restored. Paul said in v.21, “that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Praise God, a new day is coming! Someday, this earth will in a sense become born again. Creation will be delivered, and the groaning creation will become a glorious creation! The curse of sin will be removed. The creation will be set free from the consequences of sin. Everything will be the way God wants it to be.

Nothing was more familiar to Jews and other readers of the Old Testament than the idea that the whole world is to be clothed in new beauty when the Messiah appears. Isaiah 65:17 says, “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.” The God says in vv.22-25, “my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity.... The wolf and the lamb shall graze together⁷.... They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain.” All of this will take place in association with the Second Coming of Christ. This world that has been ruined by sin will one day be restored by the Savior.

So while I believe we should be good stewards of the environment, we see from this text that the true hope of creation is not the Sierra Club, climate change legislation, Al Gore, or the U.N. In fact, read the book of Revelation and you will see that our earth is heading for environmental

⁶ In Gen. 6:2 the Hebrew word translated “good” elsewhere (Gen. 1) is translated “beautiful” in reference to women!

⁷ See also Isa. 11:6-9.

disaster in the last days, in spite of all that politicians are doing to “save the planet.” No, the hope of this world is the Second Coming of Jesus!

Notice also that the salvation of the earth is tied to the ultimate and final salvation of believers. Paul says in v.19, “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.” Likewise in v.21 he says, “that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” So we see that nature’s destiny is inseparably linked to the destiny of man. Because man sinned, creation fell. When man is restored to the glorious state that God has planned for His children, creation will be restored.

So we have seen that there is hope for creation. Now let us also see that:

B. We Have Hope for the Completion of Our Salvation - The salvation we now possess is in one sense incomplete, for as Paul goes on to say in v.24, hope is no longer exercised when the thing hoped for is realized. We are not waiting for the salvation of our souls. That has already been completed. However, we *are* still eagerly waiting for the completion of other aspects of our salvation. So what is our hope? One thing we hope for is:

1. Our Revelation as Sons of God – In the last of v.19 Paul makes reference to “the revealing of the sons of God.” This refers to the time when we shall be manifested in our true character and glory as sons of God. Colossians 3:4 says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (NKJV). 1 John 3:2 says, “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” (NKJV). Though the world does not recognize us as sons of God, some day it will! Paul may be alluding to the public adoption ceremony where the father reveals who he has chosen to be his adopted son.

2. The Redemption of Our Body – Paul mentions this in the last of v.23. Our bodies are still under the curse of sin. Our bodies grow older; they need medical attention more often. We often groan from suffering. Then the time comes when in weakness our bodies die. Our bodies will decay. We often ask, “Lord, did you create us to be like this?” Of course, the answer is no! Praise God, we will receive new resurrection bodies which are not subject to pain, decay, and death. Paul refers to this as “our adoption as sons.”⁸ Actually, this is the thrilling climax to the adoption that took place at conversion. When Christ returns, what we read in Rev. 21:4 will come to pass, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” They day is coming when we will be free from all that. That is why Paul mentions in the last of v.21 “the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” We will become totally set free from all suffering and sin. No more bondage of any kind. Aren’t you looking forward to that?

3. Our Glorification - Back in v.17 he says we will be glorified with Christ. Then in the last of v.18 he refers to “the glory that is to be revealed in us.” Our glorification is also mentioned in v.30. Notice in v.18 that this glory is to be revealed “unto [*eis*] us”, i.e. it is to reach unto us, is to be bestowed upon us, so that we become the actual partakers of His glory, not just spectators. We shall share His triumph and glory when He comes again. We will also share in the glory of His resurrection body. In fact, v.29 says that we are “predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...” Elsewhere Paul assured us of the day when God “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body...” (Php. 3:21). Through God’s redemptive work we go from shame to glory! No wonder Paul refers to this hope as “the blessed hope” in Titus 2:13.

⁸ This is an example of the “already-not yet” tension. We are already adopted as children but there is a not yet aspect to our adoption (Moo, p.267).

Our hope should include an element of “eager longing,” as Paul mentions in v.19. The words “eager longing” comes from a Greek word that means to watch with the head erect and outstretched.⁹ It is an expectation that waits until the object is attained. When you go through suffering, is that your attitude? Are you eagerly looking for the fulfillment of our hope?

Think of a couple who have fallen in love with each other. We will say, for example, that it is autumn, and they know they cannot be married until the end of a school year. It is not long before the young man says, “Darling, think! We will be married in just 8 months!” And they will delight to count off the months to 7, then 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Then they count down the days until they say it will be “tomorrow!” All true lovers know this loving groaning toward their day of hope, the consummation of their joy. This was the purpose of their falling in love, that they might be together, that they might be one [adapted from Barnhouse, pp. 138-139].

Is this hope that we have just pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking? Is there any assurance that this hope will be realized some day? Well let me share what Paul says which hints at the assurance we have that what we hope for will surely come to pass. Note the phrase in v.23, “the first fruits of the Spirit.” It is an agricultural term denoting that the first fruits of the harvest was a pledge of the full crop to come.¹⁰ We have received the first installment of what heaven will be like by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. He even gives us a foretaste of heaven when we experience the love, joy, and peace produced by Him. When He displays God’s power through us and shows us His grace and goodness, He gives us a taste of glory. When I see the Holy Spirit give me victory over sin, I get a taste of what it will be like when I have complete victory over sin in eternity. When the Holy Spirit allows me to praise God, I get a sense of what it will be like to praise Him perfectly in eternity. But the main point that I want to make is the fact that the Holy Spirit in us is the assurance that all the rest of the promises of God are sure to be fulfilled. Besides, our Christian hope is solidly founded in God Himself. The fulfillment of our hope is as sure as the faithfulness and love of God.

When you suffer, do you focus your attention on the marvelous hope you have in Christ, or do you focus on your suffering? You will be far better off to focus on your hope, and you will just about forget about your suffering.

So we need to overcome suffering by correct thinking and by exercising hope. Finally, this text shows us another way we can be victorious over suffering:

III. BY PATIENT ENDURANCE

Paul says in v.25, “But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” The word translated “patience” (*hupomone*) actually refers to patient endurance or perseverance. There is a close link here and elsewhere between hope and being able to patiently endure suffering. Perseverance is to continue under heavy trial without quitting or giving up. The link between hope and patient endurance is also found in 1 Thess. 1:3, where Paul expresses gratitude for their “patience of hope.” Hope enables patient perseverance. The believer does not get frustrated as he sees and experiences suffering and pain in this world. We are to patiently endure our suffering. There are so many people who face suffering just want to take the easy way out and quit. They may even commit suicide. But the child of God should face suffering with perseverance. We must not give up or quit. We keep going, trusting in the strength that God provides. We need to be like a football running back. You score a touchdown only after getting knocked down many, many times.

⁹ From *apokaradokia*, from *apo* away, *kara* the head, *dokein* to watch.

¹⁰ “Of the Spirit” is a genitive of identity.

As you face suffering, I want to encourage you to make it your goal to persevere through it, trusting in God to provide the strength you need. Don't sink into despair and quit. Be faithful to the end!

Jesus is the greatest example of perseverance in the face of suffering. He endured the suffering of Gethsemane. He endured the suffering of being arrested, mocked, falsely accused, imprisoned, and rejected by His own people. He endured the suffering of being mocked and beaten by the Roman guard. He endured lash after lash of the Roman whip called the cat of 9 tails. He even endured the suffering of the cross. Through it all He never quit, but persevered, that He may accomplish our salvation. He endured because He kept his eye on the fruit of his redemptive work and the glory that would follow. Heb. 12:2 says of Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

Conclusion: So if you are going through suffering right now, how will you respond in light of God's Word? I challenge you to exercise the right perspective. Don't focus on your suffering. Don't magnify it. Instead, minimize it by focusing on your Christian hope. Don't quit. Don't give up. Persevere to the end, knowing that your suffering is working in you a far greater weight of glory!

If you are not yet a Christian, what hope do you have for the future? You have no hope. Why not put your faith in Jesus Christ, and He will give you hope that suffering will ultimately be followed by glory in His kingdom. He will also give you a better perspective on suffering. He will help you patiently endure whatever suffering you face in life. What He has done for me He will do for you.

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, "God's Heirs" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John MacArthur, Jr., *Security in the Spirit: Study Notes on Romans 8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Leon McBeth, *Exegetical & Practical Commentary on Romans* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1937); Dr. James Merritt, a few notes from his sermon entitled, "From Grief to Glory" (Romans 8:18-25); Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway, Good News Publishers, 2001).

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