

THE GLORY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Romans 8:18-39

Key Verse: 8:18

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

In the previous passage we learned that we can live as children of God by the Spirit of God. In verse 17a Paul says, **“...if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...”** We will inherit God’s kingdom! How glorious this is! Paul goes on to say in verse 17b, **“...if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”** The theme of today’s passage is the glory that comes through suffering. This glory can be our true hope. This hope is grounded in God’s good will and his unwavering love. We have the hope of glory!

This is a great Bible teaching, and when we hear it we say, “Amen!” But practically, we are often so overwhelmed by sufferings that we lose sight of the glory to come. Instead of glorious children, we feel like the defeated. We need hope - not false hope or imaginary hope - but genuine, true hope. Let’s consider our hope of glory and let it fill our hearts.

First, God’s great hope (18-27). In order to plant the hope of glory, Paul did not give theological arguments; he shared his personal testimony. Let’s read verse 18: **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** In truth, Paul had suffered a great deal. He wrote, **“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods”** (2Co 11:23-25). These are just some of the things he suffered. When we hear about Paul’s suffering, it sounds overwhelming. But Paul testified that his suffering was not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. To him, present sufferings were light and momentary; future glory was weighty and eternal. Here we can learn from Paul. If we focus on our sufferings, we easily become frustrated, discouraged and helpless. But when we see the future glory, sufferings diminish and we find strength to persevere.

To help us perceive this future glory, Paul tells us specifically what it is. **First of all, God restores the creation (19-22).** As heirs of God, what is our inheritance? Is it a broken, sin-stained, corrupted world? If so, it may be better to

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forfeit our inheritance. Our inheritance is not like that. It will be beautiful, harmonious, fruitful and glorious. How does it come about? According to God's plan, first, human beings need to be redeemed. Then creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay. The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed (19). The creation is planning a "reveal party" for the children of God. Here, the creation is personified. We often think of creation with a scientific bias as an object to analyze and use. But God's creation is more dynamic, mysterious and amazing than we realize.

When God created heaven and earth, they were very beautiful, a perfect paradise where there was no discord, pain or death. Rather, everything worked in perfect harmony and life was fruitful and abundant. God crowned human beings with glory and honor and made us rulers of his creation (Ps 8:5-6). Creation was happy to serve us as we served God. However, this all changed when we rebelled against God. The relationship between God and people was broken and creation was cursed. This happened not by the creation's choice, but by the will of God (20). It was part of God's judgment on people who had sinned. God did not remove human beings to preserve creation. Rather, he caused the creation to suffer together with us. Because of human sin, the creation is frustrated and in bondage to decay. So the creation waits in eager expectation to be liberated and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (21).

In verse 22, Paul tells us, **"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."** Groaning is the emotional expression of indescribable pain. Such groaning shows a desperate longing for hope. The creation looks beautiful, peaceful and free. However, when we examine it carefully, it reveals a fierce struggle for survival. Although a flower is beautiful, it may have insects gnawing away at it. A frog eats insects, a snake swallows a frog and an eagle devours a snake. Although there are beautiful forests and singing birds, the creation is not at all the Garden of Eden. In fact, the whole creation has been groaning together. However, these groans are not meaningless or the moaning of useless despair. They are like those of the pains of childbirth, the meaningful suffering that bears new life. The universe will not remain in bondage forever; it will be liberated and transformed with the glory of God.

Secondly, God redeems his children's bodies (23-27). Not only creation, but also believers groan inwardly. Verse 23 says, **"Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies."** Believers have the first

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fruits of the Spirit. This means that the indwelling Holy Spirit is a foretaste of future blessings. However, our bodies are not redeemed yet. Sinful desires remain in our bodies and cause us trouble. We suffer with physical problems, such as handicaps, arthritis, weight gain, hair loss, and more. This is true not only for older people, but the young too - body image is such a serious matter to many. Then there is the power of death. In these sin-sick, weak, mortal bodies, we groan. These groans express present pain and future longing. We long for the redemption of our bodies.

God promises to redeem the bodies of his children. The ultimate destiny of our body is not death but resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 say, **“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”** What will our new bodies be like? They will be so glorious that they are beyond our imagination. Paul taught that we will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. This will happen when Jesus will come again. Jesus will appear in the clouds with great power and glory. There will be a loud command, the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God. Then our bodies will be changed to glorious ones in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye (Mk 13:16; 1Th 4:16-17).

This coming glory gives us hope and the indwelling Spirit gives us joy, but the interim suspense gives us pain.¹ How should we live in this world? Verse 24a says, **“For in this hope we were saved.”** “This hope” is that the whole creation will be redeemed. As Isaiah foresaw, **“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them...They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea”** (Isa 11:6-9). God wants us to inherit this kind of creation in resurrection bodies. This is God’s great hope. We hold on to this hope, not to the hope of visible things which perish (24b). When we have this hope, we wait for it patiently to the end (25). This hope strengthens us to go through sufferings. Let’s not give up God’s great hope, but hold onto it always. As I began to prepare this message I felt tired from a heavy load of work, hard-pressed by the responsibilities I carry, and disappointed with myself and others in various ways. But through this word, the hope of glory has come into my heart. My

¹ Stott, John, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), p. 242.

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strength is renewed and my joy is restored. May this glorious hope strengthen us all.

Though God's hope sustains us when we suffer, we also need practical help. The Holy Spirit helps us, not just occasionally, but constantly. Verse 26 says, **"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."** The groaning of the Holy Spirit is that of intercessory prayer. John Murray says, "The children of God have two divine intercessors. Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven... while the Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theater of their own hearts."² We often do not know what we ought to pray for, especially when we are in trials. So we cry out, "Lord, Lord!" or "Have mercy on me!" Then the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. He is like a mother who hears her baby cry and meets his or her needs. Since he intercedes for us, our prayers are heard (27). He comforts and strengthens us in the midst of trials.

Second, God's great will (28-30). God's hope is certain to be fulfilled because it is grounded in his great will. What is his great will? Before revealing his great will, Paul tells us how God works. Let's read verse 28. **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** It is important to know what we know. Paul repeats the word **"know"** 33 times in Romans,³ including here. The knowledge he refers to is not "head knowledge"; it is "experiential knowledge." The essence of this knowledge is that God works for the good in all things. Many people do not know God truly and speak about God based on their own ideas. Some people think that God is cruel like Hitler. Others think that God is indifferent. But we believers know that God is good and that he always works for good. Yet this is not generally true for everyone. It is true for those who love him and have been called according to his purpose. We can love him because he first loved us (1Jn 4:19). We can truly know him because he called us. Even though we love him, we sometimes wonder how God can be working for our good. Tragic things happen. We experience failures and humiliation that we cannot understand. Sometimes, due to our weaknesses, we make mistakes. But God uses everything for a good purpose. With his almighty power, great wisdom, deep love and good purpose, God weaves everything together to fulfill his perfect will for us. God never fails.

² Murray, John, The Epistle to the Romans, in The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1959-1965; single-bound, two-volume edition, 1968), vol. I, p. 311.

³ 1:19,32; 2:2,18; 3:17,19; 5:3; 6:3,9,16; 7:1[2],7[2],14,18; 8:22,26,27,28; 9:22,23; 10:3; 11:2,34; 14:16; 15:14,20,29; 16:26.

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Then, what is the good God accomplishes? Let's read verse 29. **“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”** Here the key point is that we are conformed to the image of his Son. This is “the good” God accomplishes. He does not necessarily make us famous and rich, prosperous and healthy. But he definitely transforms our inner being to be like Jesus. Jesus is our big brother, and we are all his brothers and sisters who imitate him. This does not happen in a day, and there are many ups and downs along the way. But Paul wants us to know that our growth in Christ is governed by God from the beginning to the end. Paul mentions here five stages: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification and glorification (30). Paul is very clear that God governs this process, not us. Some people misunderstand this teaching as deterministic, thinking that everything is destined according to God's plan and we don't need to do anything. However, as Romans shows us, God does not want us to live according to a formula, like robots. God wants us live by faith. Living by faith is relational, active, dynamic and vibrant. Paul's point is that God guarantees our salvation. Our salvation is planned and fulfilled by God himself. This gives us assurance of our salvation. We can fully trust God, knowing that God is good, his great will for us is good, and he never fails.

Third, God's great love (31-39). As we suffer in this world, it is not enough to know God's great hope and God's great will. We need an unshakable conviction in God's great love. When Paul understood God's perfect plan for his children, his heart was filled with God's love, and a poem of love began to flow. This love inspired him to ask five rhetorical questions in verses 31-35. He is not seeking answers, but rather planting conviction. No one and nothing can harm those whom God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified. Here, the premises are important: **“God is for us,” “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all,” “those whom God has chosen,” “It is God who justifies,” “Christ Jesus who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”** Since these premises are based on truth, the five questions plant confidence.

The first question is: **“Who can be against us?”** There are formidable enemies against us: the unbelieving and persecuting world, indwelling sin, death, and the devil. These seemingly invincible powers arrayed against us cause us to withdraw, or even fail. At such moments, it's easy to think that God is not going to help us, and has even abandoned us. However, God is for us; he is always at our

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side and helps us constantly. When we are sure of this, we can stand against all the enemies. **“The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”** (Ps 118:6)

The second question is: **“...how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** Sometimes we suffer from a sense of loss, thinking that living by faith has been too costly. We may ask, “Who can compensate my sacrifice of time, money, and youth?” We become hardhearted. But consider what God has done. God did not spare his beloved one and only Son, but gave him up in order to save sinners. God has already given us his greatest gift. Will he not also give us lesser gifts? When we think of the great love of God who gave his Son for us, all sense of loss melts away, like snow in springtime.

The third and fourth questions are: **“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?...Who then is the one who condemns?”** When we make mistakes, Satan accuses us: “How can you be a child of God? Do you really think you are a servant of God?” He wants us to fall into self-condemnation. However, it is God who has chosen us and justified us. Nobody can bring any charge against us. I cannot even condemn myself. Jesus knows my faults and weaknesses more than anyone, and he bears with me. Jesus was raised to life and is at the right hand of God interceding for me (34). There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus.

The fifth question is: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”** There are factors which tempt us to doubt God’s love: poverty, sickness, failure, and rejection. We may ask, “If God loves me, why does he allow me to suffer like this?” When we doubt God’s love, we fall into the deep pit of darkness. However Paul was convinced that nothing in the world can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are held in his strong, everlasting arms. When we know this we live as victors. We can say, **“We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”**

There are not just hardships, but also many good things in the world. Sometimes these things threaten to separate us from the love of God. If we fall into temptations, such as the desire for wealth, power, honor and fame in this world, the life of faith becomes burdensome and God’s love gradually fades from our hearts. Nevertheless, Paul was convinced that **“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the**

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love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (39). God’s great love assures us that we will not be abandoned, even if mountains fall or the heavens and the earth are turned upside down. We are more than conquerors in the love of God.

Today we have considered God’s great hope for us. It is truly glorious. It is God’s good will to fulfill this hope. God’s love assures us that we will inherit his glorious kingdom in resurrection bodies. Let’s trust God and live as victors by faith.