



Lesson 14

Suffering In Perspective.

Romans 8.18-39

*“...the **sufferings** of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the **glory** that is to be revealed to us.”*

Romans 8.18

In our study of Romans 8.1-17 we focused on the fact that in Christ, everything has changed. Whereas our lives were once typified by sin and condemnation (see 5.18), “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” (8.1). The following verses explain why this is now true:

1. Because Christ has condemned sin in the flesh, freeing us from the law of sin and death.
2. We can now walk according to the Spirit, and not the flesh. The Christian existence is one of his spirit following God’s Spirit. By setting our minds on the Spirit it can be said that the Spirit is in us, and we are in the Spirit.
3. Having our spirits molded in the image of God’s Spirit makes us His sons, and therefore His heirs. Sons and heirs do not fear condemnation, they look forward to the inheritance! Yet, Paul concluded this thought with a word about suffering, that we are heirs “if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him,” (8.17). For many, suffering is associated with condemnation, but Paul has associated it with sonship. How can that be? How could God’s sons, His heirs be made to suffer? Paul puts this into perspective in the following verses.

Suffering Contrasted With Glory (vss. 18-25)

Romans 8:18–25 (NASB95)

18For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

19For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

20For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope

21that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

22For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

23And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

24For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

25But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

1. Suffering causes us to focus on the now. When we are in pain (whether physical or emotional) we have a hard time looking past the moment, seeing that something better is on the horizon. Paul knew that to be true, so if suffering is a part of sonship that could pose problems for weak brethren. But, if they would only look beyond the moment, then their present suffering wouldn't seem so bad. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us," (vs. 18)
2. The next few verses detail what Paul meant by the "glory that is to be revealed to us." Interestingly, Paul begins this discussion by talking about the future glory of the creation. "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." There is much debate over what is meant by "creation", but the most natural reading is that Paul means this world. Once again, Paul harkens back to the Creation account. God described everything He created as "very good," (Gen 1.31), yet on account of Adam's sin the creation was cursed (Gen 3.17). Note: I take the cursing of creation to be the logical consequence of the creation being separated from its Creator, which was necessitated by man's sin. So, God didn't change or corrupt the earth as punishment, rather since man's punishment was separation from God, the earth suffered as well. So, Paul says "the creation was subjected to futility," (vs. 20) that is it could not serve its intended purpose. But, it awaits "the revealing of the sons of God," (vs. 19), the time when it "will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God," (vs. 20).
3. What the creation is waiting for is "the revealing of the sons of God," (vs. 19). What this means is further explained in vs. 23, "we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." The point is this: we are now the sons of God (8.16-17), but there is still a way in which we must be revealed, that our adoption is made complete. This occurs when our body is redeemed, that is when the resurrection occurs. We are saved now, but not yet completely. We are His children now, but not fully. The completion of those things occurs when this body is changed (1Cor. 15.49-57). John speaks in the same way in 1John 3.2, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." His children now, but we are still waiting for our true revelation, when we will be just like Him!
4. Summing up, Paul is setting our minds on the time when everything is glorified. The sons of God will be glorified, and so will the creation. I admit that this poses some difficulty, especially when viewed in light of 2Peter 3.10-13. However, even that text speaks of our looking for "new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." I confess that I do not know exactly what this means or how this will all work out. But Paul's point seems to be pretty clear: we await glory, the creation awaits glory. Glory is coming.
5. And that is the essence of hope (vss. 24-25). We do not have it yet, but we expect it. And since we expect it, we can patiently endure the suffering of now. After all, today's suffering isn't worth comparing to the glory that awaits! "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison," (2 Corinthians 4:17).

The Spirit Working For Us (vss. 26-27)

Romans 8:26–27 (NASB95)

26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

1. But we have more than hope, that is the expectation of good in the future. We have the promise that God is aiding us now! “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness...” (vs. 26). While “weakness” is not defined, given the context it is likely referring to our current state, a state of suffering even though we are children of God. Compounding this weakness is the fact that “we do not know how to pray as we should,” that is we do not know how to fully address our Father when our need is so great. But the Spirit helps in our weakness!
2. Paul doesn’t fully explain this, other than to say that “the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words,” (vs. 26). Some say that the Spirit here is not the Holy Spirit, but our spirit. That may be the case, however it seems that the Holy Spirit is in view. Why does He groan? Some conclude that the groanings here are our groanings (vs. 23), others that the term groan conveys feeling and not just the words. Perhaps.
3. This short passage produces many questions, questions that don’t have easy answers, but don’t miss the forest for the trees! The point is pretty simple: we may suffer now, we may not know how to seek God’s aid when we are under such trial, but do not fear! Since we are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us (the molding of our spirit, see discussion on 8.5-11), we have the assurance that God knows what is on our hearts! The Spirit conveys it to Him!

All Things Work Out For Our Good (vss. 28-30)

Romans 8:28–30 (NASB95)

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

1. What does it mean that “God causes all things to work together for good?” Some conclude that this means there’s a hidden message in every life event, that every conversation or encounter is part of God’s special and specific plan for them. While not diminishing God’s providential power, I do not think that is what is under consideration.
2. The theme has been overcoming suffering, specifically the suffering we can expect in Christ. The promise is that those who suffer with Him, will be glorified with Him (vs. 17). This passage seems to expound on that basic idea. Those who love God, are called according to His purpose. This text has no place for fanciful Calvinistic concepts regarding irresistible grace, etc. The point is plain: those who would love God will accept His call, the very gospel that

Paul proclaimed (1.16-17). God has predestined that it is these that would be conformed to the image of His Son (of course it is! Who else but those who love God and accept His call could be conformed to His image?). But as we've seen, being conformed to His image involves suffering. But don't worry, it works out for our good, because those who are conformed to His image are justified, and ultimately glorified!

We Overwhelmingly Conquer (vss. 31-39)

Romans 8:31–39 (NASB95)

31What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

32He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

33Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;

34who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

37But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

39nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. In truth, this section needs little comment. Its beauty should wash over us, strengthen us, cause us to fall to our knees in appreciation for the victory that God assures is ours.
2. Suffering makes us think that everyone is against us. That may be true, but the Christian's perspective goes beyond the moment to eternity. The Christian can truthfully say, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (vs. 31). Need further proof of this, then look no further from what God has already done for His elect: He gave His Son! (vs. 32).
3. So, we can face every trial with the utmost confidence. We may well experience the ordeal that the Psalmist described in Psalm 44.22, being put to death for His sake, but that suffering will yield to ultimate glory. "In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." (vs. 37). And if that is the case, nothing can separate us from His love! No wonder that Paul considered "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us," (vs. 18).
4. NOTE: we should observe that all of the things mentioned in vss. 35, 38-39 are external factors. None of these things can cause us to be separated from the Love of God in Christ. However, he does not address the inward factors, our own attitude and disposition. Truly, we are the only factor that could cause us to depart from so great a love!