

## **Suffering and Sanctification**

**Romans 8:18-30**

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**FBC Waynesboro**

Does Romans 8:17 bother you at all: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (Rom. 8:16-17). It is as if we go from such glorious heights where we are declared by God on the basis of His dwelling by His Spirit in our lives to be His children and heirs of His rich inheritance which comes to us in and through Christ to the depths of despair where it is declared that the way of entry into this glorious inheritance is through suffering. But if we had the eyes to see as God sees we would know that it is the suffering that is glorious for it is our participation in suffering to the praise and glory of God that is the proving ground of both the validity and integrity of what we say about who we are as the children of God. Romans 8:17 is a connective verse; we don’t see this as clearly as we should since almost every translation separates verse 17 from verse 18 when in fact they are inextricably linked. God sanctifies us by His Spirit and through His Word and it is seen in our living out our lives under the dominion of the Spirit. Our lifestyle in all that we are and do is led by the Spirit of God through the Word of God. And it is the Spirit of God who leads us into suffering where our witness to the glory of God and the grace of God shines most brightly.

Paul begins verse 18 with an accounting term, “for I consider that” translates one word in the Greek that comes straight out of the world of accounting. It refers to someone who has done the computations and calculations and reached a conclusion based upon the facts of the numbers. So Paul is saying that he has done the hard logistical work as it relates to suffering and he has reached a clear conclusion: the suffering of this present time is not even worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed in us. Now it is important at this point to recognize that the New Testament speaks specifically of four kinds of suffering for the believer. John MacArthur speaks very plainly and pointedly to suffering in the lives of nonbelievers: “Those who do not know Christ have no hope when they suffer. Whatever the reason for their affliction, it does not come upon them for Christ’s sake or righteousness’ sake, and therefore cannot produce for them any spiritual blessing or glory. Those who live only for this life cannot

look forward to any resolution of wrongs or to any comfort for their souls. Their pain, loneliness, and afflictions serve no divine purpose and bring no divine reward.” But this is not the case with believers who live out our lives in the context of various kinds of conflict.

First, the word that is used here for suffering has to do directly with pain that comes to us because of our profession of faith in Christ. It has to do with those things that are going to come to us because of our commitment. Listen to how Paul speaks to this issue in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. And Paul prays in Philippians 3:10 to know the fellowship of His suffering. The truth is that if we live in a culture where the majority are not believers without real cost to our commitment it is most likely because there is no real commitment. Second, the Bible speaks of tribulation. The word refers to the world trying to squeeze us into its mold and the flesh crying out for us to satisfy its longings. We are pressured from every side by the world and the flesh. Jesus would teach us that we will have tribulation in the world but we are to be encouraged because He has overcome the world. Thirdly, Paul speaks of persecutions which are the active and aggressive judgment of our faithfulness to Jesus by a world that is pagan. Now don't ever forget that the essence of a pagan world is the practice of a religion that includes attendance at church but does not give attention to the way we live our lives. Such people will persecute true believers actively by attack and passively by ignoring. Fourth, trials come to believers through testings and temptations which James says we are to consider as joy since their presence is proof of the legitimacy of our profession of faith. And about all of these the New Testament is clear that they are inevitabilities in the lives of those who truly are the children of God. And Paul tells us in these verses how God uses them in our lives and what we can know in the midst of the sufferings and trials of life.

So, how does God use our sufferings and trials? What do they accomplish? First, the glory of God is revealed in our suffering. The contrast that Paul establishes in verse 18 is both real and radical. There is no comparison in the extent and intensity of our suffering to the glory of God that is about to be revealed. It seems that the “to be revealed” glory of God has to do both with this life and with the next. In this life our sufferings take us to places in our experience of the presence and power of God that we would not go otherwise. So we can speak of suffering then as a gracious gift of God but our suffering here also makes us long more and more for home. We love the experience of the glory of God but we want to see the glory of God shining in the face of His Son. Second, our

suffering connects us with the goal of God in creation, 19-23. This one is harder for us to see and understand. But remember that one of the most powerful prophetic pictures of the fullness of the Kingdom of God manifest upon the earth shows us the wolf and the lamb resting together and a little child playing with a snake. It is a picture of the created and the creation living in harmony with one another. All of creation we know was made by God and belongs to God, from the tallest mountain peak plunging into the deepest desert valley: it is His. But in this time it is under the ravages of sin, the rule of Satan and the ruin by sinful humans. It cries out for restoration by the God who made it and the sign of that coming restoration is the redemption of the people of God. And Paul here uses twice the word for “waiting” which also has the sense of “welcoming” as he teaches us that the created world is waiting to welcome the full revelation of the perfected sons and daughters upon the earth. Thirdly, the grace of God in redemption is revealed in our suffering, 23-25. We look forward to the completion of our adoption and the fullness of our redemption when we will dwell in eternal perfection in the presence of our Father who has adopted us and His Son who has redeemed us. Our sufferings now cause us to look forward in hope to that day that is coming. Take suffering away from sinners who are saved by grace and we might settle down here too much, show ourselves more like the world than we should, and even begin to see suffering as that from which we seek to be delivered rather than that through which we demonstrate our devotion to Jesus. So, Paul says that God is at work in the suffering of His children to reveal His glory, to reconcile His creation, and to redeem fully His children whom He has by grace adopted through Jesus into His family.

We are sustained in our suffering and strengthened even to experience joy in the midst of the suffering by what we know. And what we know is that which God reveals to us by His Spirit and through His Word that gives us confidence. We know first the power of God that it is at work in prayer. Paul begins this section in verse 26 with an assumption and an affirmation. The assumption is that nothing moves us more to prayer than pain; the affirmation is that we do not know how to pray. It is more than interesting that this section is moved along by the verb “to know” but it begins with an acknowledgement about what we do NOT know. And what we do not know is how to pray in the midst of suffering in accordance with the Word and Will of God. Paul just puts this out for us to see. And it is so encouraging. He simply admits that when we are hurting, we don’t know how to pray in a way that would truly honor and praise God. SO, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us both to agonize with us before the Father and to bring to us the comfort and

consolation that comes from the Father through the Holy Spirit to our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who intercedes FOR THE SAINTS in accordance with the will of God so that when we do not know how to pray, the Spirit goes to God for us and brings us from God what we need to know, what we must know. And there are two things that we must know.

We must know the presence, power, and purpose of God in the midst of our pain, 8:28. We know is a communication of absolute assurance and complete confidence. What we know with absolute assurance and complete confidence is known only by those who love God. This love for God is not merely a feeling but a faithful commitment to the Word of God and the way of God as revealed in the living out of our lives among the people of God for the praise of God. It cannot be reduced to, "well, I love God." The words that are used here simply will not permit that understanding. We who are truly committed to God can know with absolute assurance that all things good and bad, painful and pleasurable work together. The word that is used here is "sunergo" from which we get "synergy" or a cooperative partnership for a common purpose. And that purpose is "the good." The word that is used here points more to God than to us. So that the proper understanding of "good" is that which honors and glorifies Him which is ultimate good and thus is for our good. And this powerful purpose of God is at work among His people: to those. This cannot be read by an individual in isolation from a community of faith. For the good that God is working is not focused only on you but on others so that your pain may well be used of God for several purposes in the body: to give ministry opportunities to others, to encourage another, to exhort another, to bring a lost soul to Jesus. And this powerful purpose of God in our pain is worked out for His glory among those who are called out by Him and are committed to His purpose. But Paul wants us to be clear about who these people are. So, he spells it out very plainly in six steps: three that have to do with His purpose and three that have to do with His power.

First, those who belong to God are those who were known by God beforehand. The term speaks to the absolute omniscience of God. He knows before any child of His comes to Him who is and who is not His child. If that is not how you see it you have two major issues to confront: the first is this text and many like it and the second is to explain what God doesn't know and when He doesn't know it. Second, he predestined those whom He knew before hand. The word means to establish the boundaries for living from beginning to ending, from start to finish. Thirdly, His predestination has a purpose and that purpose is that

we might be conformed to the image of His Son who was the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. So, God's purpose is to save us through His Son and then to shape us to become like His Son and that would include suffering. He knows beforehand and predestines those who are His so how does He do this work. Fourthly, He calls us. He calls us through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the great and profound mystery of Scripture that I will never ever attempt to resolve for you or for myself: God knows those who are His from before the foundation of the world and has predestined them as His but He calls them through the Gospel and this call of the Gospel must go out to all and those who are His respond to the Gospel through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and are saved by the grace of God. God calls us through His Word and by His Spirit and He could be calling you today? Will you say "yes Lord" to Him? Will you trust Him and surrender your life to Him? What happens when we do? Fifthly, He justifies us. This holy and awesome God declares a miserable ruined sinner like me to be right with Him on the basis of the shed blood of His Son. God allows me to come into a relationship with Him through His Son. This is grace. This is great grace. And then finally is the promise of glorification both here and hereafter. Some scholars say that Paul leaves out sanctification here but he doesn't because what is sanctification except the work of the Spirit of God to glorify God through the sanctified lives of sinners who have been transformed by grace. Is this you? Then you can walk into this year knowing that whatever happens in your life the Holy Spirit is at work in you and through you to work out what is the will of God and you can walk in confidence because all that God does, God does for the glory of His Name and that is always good.