
Sustained by Love's Inseparable Connection

Romans 8:18-37⁶

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Don't you ever wish...

No one got sick...

No one got old...

No had to suffer...

Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and 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.

Brothers and sisters, the Apostle wants you to know this: you have not received a spirit that turns you into fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when the Lord adopted you to recognize you as own children. Now, through the Spirit, we recognize God, not as judge administering Law, but as a dear and precious, Father.

What does the Spirit do in our lives that is so important?

He is changing us by His power to become more and more like Christ.

He is residing in us as the very life of God in our souls.

He is assuring us of our relationship and standing as the children, the sons of God.

But then those last words, "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

We are alive in this world and in the world to come. As Christians we are both. This means that we will experience the splendor of one and the suffering of the other. This is just the way it will be. Let's follow the melodic line here in the symphony of Paul's understanding of the Christian life.

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The Difficulty of God's Children

(v.18-30)

We are now experiencing present suffering while longing for a future glory. What we have here is groaning and glory. There is groaning and glory for creation, in the Christian, by the Spirit for our good and God's glory.

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

You must never minimize the fact or the severity of suffering for the Christian in this age. The key words here for you are *wait eagerly* (v.19, 23, 25) and *hope* (v.20, 24-25). Your evaluation of the present sufferings in the light of the future glory is shaped by:

Its Example in the Creation

(v.18-22)

¹⁸For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing 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 will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

The creation is now subject to the curse because of the fallenness of man. Deliverance from the curse awaits the time when the children of God will receive their glorified bodies. So, creation groans, while standing on tiptoe anxiously anticipating the day of glory for God's people. The world we live in now is subjected by God to the futility of fallenness. And it is awaiting the day when it will enter into the glory of radical transformation of the material universe when all will be made new.

Its Experience in Ourselves

(v.23-25)

We share in creation's groaning and hope.

²³And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

We are groaning now. We have the *first fruits* of the Spirit – an assurance of our adoption – but we are awaiting the fulfillment of the Spirit – our eventual adoption as sons. The fulfillment of being placed as God's sons is in the reception of a glorified body. But we don't have that yet. Here it is: we groan waiting for glory. We are assured and adopted, but not yet.

Most errors concerning the victorious or the victimized Christian life flow from not understanding verses 23-25. You are delivered, but not yet. You are adopted, but not yet. You have the Spirit, but not fully. You groan now in suffering and struggling because there is a splendor of glory to come.

Its Expression by the Spirit**(v.26-27)**

How do we have hope then in the midst of this present groaning? Through the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. The weakness here is that we are living in the midst of fallenness and sinfulness. Often we are just struggling. We don't even know what to pray. But the Spirit Himself, who knows the mind of God, the will of God and the purposes of God, prays in us and for us. Like creation like us, the Spirit is groaning a too deep for words intercession. He is not here alluding to some inarticulate or ecstatic speech that the Spirit produces in us. Rather, the Spirit groans deeply because of our own sufferings and sins as well. So the Spirit's work in us to align our own hearts with the trajectory of God's will.

What strikes me here is how Paul is framing a theology of prayer here for us: Briefly, here are its key points.

Prayer is always in the context of fallenness and futility. It is shaped by our needs, our own groaning as sons and heirs.

Our own weakness and ignorance is assumed. We do not know what to pray for. This stands in stark contrast to our self-confident and long narrated requests for prayer.

The Spirit prays for us according to God's will. His praying is always aligned with God's purposes in Romans 8:28-30.

Its Expectation due to God**(v.28-30)**

Here is one of the most precious and hope giving texts in the New Testament.

²⁸And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

In the midst of groaning, in the midst of struggling with sin while walking in the Spirit, we know that God is at work in all our situations to transform and conform us into likeness with Christ. When we say that God is at work for our good and His glory, we had better understand this in terms of God being at work to change us. It is not merely *for our good*, but that we might be different. When someone says, "I cannot see the good in this," that is a misunderstanding of this text. The good that God is always working toward is your becoming like Christ. So to not see the good in it is to not see how God is at work to change you.

Why is this so? On what is this grounded? It is grounded in the personal and providential sovereignty of God. Those whom God loved and chose (foreknew) He has determined beforehand that they will be like Christ. Then He moves in time and in those people's lives to make it so: He calls them, He justifies them and He glorifies them. These are not potential outcomes, but assured future realities. So we lean towards the glory to come in the present experience of groaning now because God is at work to mold us to be like Christ.

What are we to learn from this? How does this fuel hope and shape affections? God has a glorious purpose for His people and creation at large. But that purpose unfolds through the struggle with fallenness. But God is at work to for our good to display His glory. So, we are free from the power of sin, but not completely until that day. So, there is groaning now until the glory later.

The Surety of God's Love

(v.31-39)

We are now inseparable from God's love while experiencing no condemnation and becoming more than conquerors. This is how we respond to all these truths in Romans 5-8.

In our Answers

(v.31-36)

We are gloriously sure of God's love because there is no condemnation.

³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

SINCE GOD is for us, who can be against us? God's enemies, the fallen world, our sins, Satan – yes. But because God is for us, none of these is against *successfully*.

SINCE GOD graciously gave us His Son, will He not give us all things? Absolutely. The gift of God's Son not only obtained all God intends for us, but it also makes it sure. As Stott puts it, "The cross is the guarantee of continuing, unfailing generosity of God." (Stott, p. 255)

SINCE GOD has justified us, who can charge us? No one. Our right standing before God means there is no lesser court to charge us.

SINCE CHRIST has died and risen and intercedes, who can condemn us? No one. Jesus stands to answer any and all accusations with His perfect and completed sacrificial work.

SINCE ALL THIS IS SO, what persons or circumstances can separate us from God's love? None. Yet the brutal reality is that like Christ, our sacrificial lamb, we are set for suffering as well.

I can only conclude that we will have an ever greater experience of the surety and reality of God's love *in the midst of all the groaning circumstances outlined here.*

In our Affirmations**(v.37-39)**

We are gloriously sure of God's love because we more than conquer.

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In all these adversities (cf. "all things" in Rom. 8:28 and "all things" in v. 32 with *all these things* in v. 37), rather than being separated from Christ's love, believers are more than conquerors (pres. Tense), "keep on being conquerors to a greater degree" or "keep on winning a glorious victory") through Him who loved us. Jesus Christ and His love for believers enable them to triumph. Consider 2 Corinthians 2:14; *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.*

Here is our conviction and our confidence. As Walvord points out: (*here to end of paragraph*) Paul's list of 10 items begins with death, where the list of 7 items in verse 35 ended. These elements in God's universe include the extremes of existence: (1) **death** and (2) **life** (in either death or life, believers are in God's presence); the extremes of created spiritual armies: (3) **angels** and (4) **demons** (angels would not and demons could not undo God's relationship with His redeemed ones); the extremes in time: (5) **the present** and (6) **the future** (nothing known now, e.g., the hardships listed in Rom. 8:35, or in the unknown time to come); spiritual enemies: (7) **powers** (perhaps Satan and his demons; or possibly human governments); the extremes in space: (8) **height** and (9) **depth** (nothing overhead or underneath can suddenly come swooping down or up to sever believers from God's love); and (10) everything in the entire created realm. Absolutely nothing in His **Creation** can thwart His purpose for believers **in Christ**. What a climactic way to affirm the certainty of believers' salvation!⁷

So, we are more than conquerors – over sin, law and self. We have an abiding confidence in God's love for us. Stott wrote, "We need these assurances today...when insecurity is written across all human experience. Christian people are not guaranteed immunity to temptation, tribulation or tragedy, but we are promised victory over them. God's pledge is not that suffering will never afflict us, but that it will never sever us from His love." (Stott, p. 259).

⁷John F. Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

Reflect and Respond

More than conquerors:

- In the midst of groaning...
- Headed for glory...
- Inseparable from God's great love for us.

Let me no more my comfort draw
From my frail hold of thee;
In this alone rejoice with awe -
Thy mighty grasp of me.