

Woodland Baptist Church
 July 25, 2018
 Romans 8:18-30, Future Glory

Verses 18-30 Our Present Suffers and Future Glory

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. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And 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. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Introductory Thoughts

This passage develops the reference to suffering and glory in v. 17b, continues the overall theme of assurance that dominates chap. 8, and brings us back full circle to the opening paragraph (5:1–11) of this major section of the letter. **(Moo)**

Paul proceeded to expound on the thought that he introduced at the end of verse 17. This passage gives a very wide perspective of God's great plan of redemption, which is the heart of Paul's theology. **(Constable)**

Having mentioned in v. 17 the suffering that accompanies membership in the family of God, Paul laid out three grounds of encouragement: (1) the glory that will be revealed (vv. 18–25), (2) the help of the Holy Spirit (vv. 26–27), and (3) the fact that all things work together for good (vv. 28–30). **(Mounce)**

Verse Exposition

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.

18 (Constable) In the light of eternity, we should view the cost of suffering with Jesus Christ now as insignificant ("not worthy to be compared"), in view of "the glory" that lies ahead for us (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17). Paul again used a word, *pathemata*, which means "sufferings"—for any reason and in any form—because we are His sons. By "glory," Paul meant the glory that we will experience at our glorification (v. 17). Our glorification is the third and final aspect of our salvation, in which God will deliver us from the presence of sin forever. **(Constable)**

18 (Morris) There is suffering that is the direct result of our sinning and there is suffering that we endure for Christ's sake, suffering that arises directly from our Christian profession in a world that rejects Christ. But beyond that, there is suffering that arises simply because we are in this imperfect world. Paul is realistic; there is no reason to think that Christians will be free from troubles in this present life. It is important, therefore, that they learn how to bear them. Paul sets these sufferings over against the coming glory, saying that they are not worth comparing with it. Troublesome as they are to us who experience them, they are of no weight when set over against the glory that awaits God's people. Paul also has this idea elsewhere; he speaks of "our light and momentary troubles" as "achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:17). So here he looks forward to the glory that will be revealed. **(Morris)**

18 (Mounce) First he contrasted the sufferings of believers characteristic of the present evil age with the glory that will be theirs (cf. 2 Cor 4:17). To the Corinthians he wrote that he was thoroughly acquainted with hardships of every kind—beatings, imprisonments, sleepless nights, and hunger (2 Cor 6:4–5; 11:23–28). Yet he considered these trials not worth comparing with the glory that was about "to burst upon [him]" (v. 18, Goodspeed). As a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20) he realized that his earthly life was but a moment in time in comparison with eternity. Not only that, but the glory of the coming age will be qualitatively distinct from the trials of the present. If we allow the difficulties of life to absorb our attention, they will effectively blot out the glory that awaits us. Our focus needs to be on things above (Col 3:2), spiritual concerns of eternal significance (cf. 2 Cor 4:18).

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

19 (Constable) Paul broadened his view of glorification to include all of "creation." He personified it as leaning forward eagerly (intensely or longingly straining or looking) in anticipation of the great day when God will fully redeem it too (cf. Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 9:28). Then God will reveal His sons ("the sons of God") as such, whereas now we appear simply as Adam's sons. Paul mentioned the creation here to emphasize the certainty of future salvation for Christians.

19 (Morris) This expectation he ascribes to the creation, a term which has caused a good deal of discussion. It is broad enough to include everything that God has created, but not many see such a wide meaning here. Thus it is hard to envisage good angels as being included, for they were not subjected to the "frustration" of verse 20. Evil angels are surely not eagerly anticipating the revelation of the sons of God. It can scarcely be a reference to believers, for they are distinguished from "the whole creation" (vv. 22–23), nor to unbelievers, for they are not looking for the revelation of the sons of God. This makes it probable that Paul means the whole of **sub-personal creation**. He personifies it and pictures it as looking for the consummation of all things (which should not surprise us too much; the Old Testament also contains passages which speak of nature as rejoicing, such as Ps. 96:12; 98:8; Isa. 35:1; 55:12). Paul uses two unusual double compounds (NIV, waits and eager expectation) which together give a vivid picture of the hushed expectancy with which the whole creation awaits the disclosure of the coming glory. Creation waits for "the revelation of the sons of God." Sonship to God is a reality. There is such a thing as membership in the heavenly family, even though creation as a whole does not know the sons as such. Paul is saying that in due time all will be made plain.

19 (Mounce) The creation itself is pictured as eagerly awaiting that time when the glorious future of the sons of God is realized. The personification of nature would not sound strange to those who were at home with rivers that “clap their hands” and mountains that “sing together for joy” (Ps 98:8; cf. Isa 55:12). Because Adam disobeyed by eating the forbidden fruit, God had cursed the ground (Gen 3:17–18; cf. 5:29). The full redemptive work of God includes the reversal of this curse.

20 (Constable) Because of the Fall, God subjected the whole creation to “futility” or “frustration.” Consequently it never reaches the perfection that He originally intended it to achieve. Probably God is in view as the one “who subjected it,” though Satan and Adam were instrumental in that action.

20 (Morris) Paul is saying that sin, which affected the divine purpose in man, affected also the entire nonhuman creation. Lacking the purpose for which it was designed, it has no purpose. As Bruce puts it, “Man is part of ‘nature’, and the whole ‘nature’ of which he forms part was created good, has been involved in frustration and futility by sin, and will ultimately be redeemed.” The creation, Paul says, was subjected to this futility, and that not by its own choice. The aorist tense of the verb looks to a single occasion, which is not likely to be creation. Rather it is the fall, which Paul sees as cosmic in its effects. This subjection was not by creation’s own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it. Who is it that subjected it? Most agree that Paul means God, but some see a reference to Adam (Robinson, O’Neill), whose act was responsible, to Satan, or to Adam or Satan (Godet). But Scripture never assigns to Adam or to Satan the power to bring about such a far-reaching change. We must think of God (cf. Gen. 3:17). And this accords with the note of hope on which the verse ends. There is no reason to think of Adam or of Satan acting in hope for the future of the race, but hope is characteristic of God, who may indeed be called “the God of hope” (15:13). The cosmic fall is not the last word; the last word is with hope.

20-21 (Mounce) Paul spoke of the creation being “subjected to frustration” (v. 20). That was not because of some inherent fault in creation but because that is what God decided. In punishment for his disobedience, Adam was to garner his food from ground cursed with thorns and thistles. But the curse was not permanent. The physical universe was frustrated by Adam’s sin, yet there is hope. Verse 21 states the content of that hope. The day is coming when the created order will be set free from its bondage to decay. Freed from corruption, it will share in “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (literal translation). The scene is eschatological. Some have suggested that this points to life during the millennium, but it is better to see it as the entire created universe celebrating together the glorious state of final redemption and restoration. Paul’s use of personification is striking. As sin brought the curse of death to the physical universe, the day is coming when a new heaven and earth will be in place (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1). They will take their place with the children of God in the perfect freedom of a sinless universe.

21 (Constable) In view of prophecies concerning creation’s restoration during Messiah’s earthly reign, that time was probably in Paul’s mind (e.g., Jer. 31:12-14; 33). Paul did not have the annihilation of the present earth in view, which will happen at the end of Messiah’s earthly reign (cf. 2 Pet. 3:11-13). He was writing of its transformation at the beginning of that reign.

21 (Morris) Creation will in due course be freed from this bondage to decay. It will share to some extent in “the liberty of the glory of God’s children”. The creation will be liberated into the glory that then will

be (for the coming glory of creation cf. Isa. 11:6; 32:15–16; 35:1–2, 6ff.; Col. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21, 22).

22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And 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.

22 (Constable) The “whole creation” (excluding man, v. 23) acts as though it is going through birth “pains,” in that it is straining to produce its fruit. Its sufferings are both a result of past events and a portent of future deliverance (cf. v. 20; Matt. 19:28).

23 (Constable) The saints share this sense of groaning and anticipation that Paul described the whole creation as feeling. God will fully redeem both it and us finally. However, only the saints have the “first fruits” of the Spirit. God commanded the Israelites to present a portion of their harvest that ripened first (“first fruits”) as an offering to Him (Exod. 23:19; Neh. 10:35). This offering acknowledged that the whole harvest was from Him, and was really His. It was an offering that the Israelites made in faith, confident that the rest of the harvest would follow. Like the first fruits, God’s gift “of the Spirit” at the commencement of the believer’s Christian life is His pledge that He will complete the process of salvation. Even though He has redeemed and adopted us, there is more of redemption and adoption for us to experience in the future (Eph. 1:13–14; 4:30; 1 John 3:2). When will that take place? It will happen at the Rapture, when He glorifies our bodies by making them immortal (Phil. 3:20–21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:44; John 14:1–2). The judgment seat of Christ will follow, when we will receive more of our glorious inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3–4; 1 Cor. 3:12–15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

22 (Morris) What is a matter of common knowledge among believers here is that creation is in trouble. The whole creation is involved; Paul is not referring to some tiny segment, though “Not only so” at the beginning of the next verse shows that believers are not included. Paul uses the words “groans together and travails together”, a vivid expression for the troubled state of nature (cf. Moffatt, “the entire creation sighs and throbs with pain”). But Paul sees not only an expression of pain, but of meaningful pain like the pain of childbirth. Creation is not undergoing death pangs, but, as Calvin pointed out, birth pangs. Some remind us of the Jewish idea of “the birth pangs of Messiah” and suggest that Paul is referring to pain as the precursor of the coming again of Christ. This is probably too specific. Paul’s thought is rather that God will produce something completely new (“the freedom of the glory of the children of God”), not that what happens will be an inevitable outcome of the world’s troubles. Right up to the present time brings this right up to date. The world’s anguish is a continuing phenomenon.

23 (Morris) The firstfruits refers to the Jewish custom of bringing the first of the harvest to the temple and offering it to God (Lev. 23:10–11). This consecrated the whole harvest, and it carries with it the thought that there will be later fruits (otherwise there is no point in “first”). The concept is mainly Pauline in the New Testament. Whereas in the Old Testament the word normally refers to what we give to God, Paul usually has it for what God gives to us, with the thought that more is in store. Paul is saying here either that the measure of the Holy Spirit that we now have is but a foretaste of the greater measure there will be in the age to come, or that the gift of the Spirit now is a foretaste of the many other blessings we will have in due course.

Paul speaks of this future blessing as the redemption of our bodies. Redemption (cf. 3:24) is used of the process whereby the sinner is purchased for freedom, purchased to be God's own. It is not generally used in the New Testament of what is physical, and its use here of the body shows that in the process of salvation the values of the body are not overlooked. This does not mean that the body will be resurrected to continue in its present state (see 1 Cor. 15). Rather, it will be what Paul there calls "a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44; cf. v. 51; Phil. 3:21). The apostle is sure that bodily values will not be lost. In the end there will be not the survival of the immortal soul but the resurrection of the body.

22-23 (Mounce) Currently, however, the entire universe is in travail as if it were giving birth. As in childbirth, the pain is not meaningless but "carries with it the hope of new life for all creation." Likewise, we ourselves are inwardly groaning as we await the final phase of our adoption—the redemption of our bodies (cf. Phil 3:21). Christians are those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit," that is, who have the "Spirit as a foretaste of the future" (Conybeare). In the Old Testament firstfruits consisted of the initial portion of the harvest that was given in sacrifice to God (Exod 23:19; Lev 23:9–14). Paul used the term in reference to the gift of the Spirit as an eschatological pledge (cf. 2 Cor 5:5, where the Spirit is given "as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come"). The Spirit is evidence that at the present time we are the sons of God (vv. 14, 16). He is also the "down payment" (the term *aparchēn*, "firstfruits," having essentially the same meaning here as *arrabōn* in 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14) on the inheritance that will be ours as members of the family of God.

24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

24-25 (Constable) In the meantime, we should look forward with "hope" to what God has promised, and patiently endure ("with perseverance") our present sufferings (cf. 5:4). "The point of these two verses is that the attitude of hope, so distinctive of the Christian, implies that there is more in store for him than anything that is his already."

24 (Morris) But while Paul is appreciating what we have already experienced, he recognizes that there is more, and thus he speaks of our having been saved "in hope". We look forward in hope to the full realization of what Christ has done for us. Paul goes on to bring out something of the meaning of hope by telling us what it is not: hope that is seen is no hope at all. The word "hope" may be used for the thing hoped for as well as for hope itself (cf. Col. 1:5; Heb. 6:18), and there is some of that meaning here. Why should anyone hope for what is a present reality? The very existence of Christian hope shows that the full extent and the full riches of the Christian salvation have yet to appear.

24-25 (Mounce) Our salvation involves the hope that our mortal bodies will someday be liberated from the bondage of decay (v. 24). We are not saved "by hope" (as the AV has it), but our salvation is characterized by hope.¹⁸¹ Since salvation, viewed in its completeness, is necessarily future, we wait for it in hope (cf. 1 Thess 5:8; Titus 3:7). But hope that is seen is not hope at all. Why would we hope for that which is in plain view? So since we are hoping for something that is still unseen (cf. 2 Cor 4:18), it falls to us to wait for it with patience (cf. 2 Cor 5:2, 4).