

A Study in the Book of Romans

18

Romans 8:17-25

Key Verse

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

Read Romans 8:17

Having just revealed the wonderful truth that we are heirs of God, it seems as though Paul suddenly writes out of context. Why would he, having just shared of all the glorious inheritance that is now ours in Christ, now suddenly speak of us sharing in Christ’s sufferings? For many Christians it has been difficult to see how these two truths could possibly go together. How can we be heirs of all the “great and precious promises” of God (**2 Peter 1:4**), yet share in his sufferings too?

Because it has been so difficult to grasp how these two seemingly contradictory concepts can be reconciled, many Christians have tended to take one side or the other, creating an imbalance in their Christian view:

- ➔ **Extreme One** – Some emphasize our inheritance. But without the balance of the other, this tends to develop selfish Christians, who are interested only in the goodness they can get in life now. Their faith is exercised mostly in improving their own lot in life.
- ➔ **Extreme Two** – Some, on the other side, emphasize our suffering. But without an understanding of our inheritance, this tends to make Christians perfect targets for the enemy’s attacks. They live with a “poverty complex” or a “sickness complex” or a “problem complex,” believing that this is their “cross” in life. Weighed down with the troubles of this life, they become

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introverted (and perhaps a little proud of the things they suffer) with no power to help anyone else.

It is very important for us to understand what Paul is saying in **8:17**. For it was the *balance* of these two truths operating in the life of the early Church that made it the dynamic power it was. And so, keeping in mind the wonder of our heirship in Christ (which we explored in the last lesson), let's now look briefly at the *other* aspect of our inheritance – sharing his sufferings!

Sharers of His Sufferings

We need to understand that Paul is not speaking of suffering in general. He specifically speaks of sharing *his* sufferings. It is Christ's sufferings that we share, not just the sufferings of day-to-day life. What, then, were Christ's sufferings? **Philippians 2:5-8** (as translated by J. B. Phillips) gives us an indication:

“Let Christ Jesus be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal...”

Though he was heir of all things, Christ came down to earth and became the servant (slave) of all. His obedience to the Father was such that he was willing to die on a cross like a common criminal. He laid down his life for two reasons – because of his love for the Father (expressed in his obedience) and because of his love for us (expressed in his willingness to share his throne with us, for through the Cross he made it possible for us to become co-heirs with him). **Hebrews 2:9-11** tells us:

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers”.

Paul says: “Have the same attitude!” The Lord Jesus identified with us to the extent that we, too, are now seated on the throne of heaven with him – heirs of all of which he is an heir! Now we are to identify with him – to see ourselves in this world as he did – here to fulfill the Father's will and to be the servants of all. Because of our love for him and desire to see others receive all that he has accomplished for them, we offer our whole lives to him. In this way, we too will experience the same kind of sufferings he experienced. We will know rejection by people around us and a loss of reputation in the world's eyes (**Isaiah 53:3**). We will be persecuted (**John 15:20**). We will be misunderstood and suffer shame unjustly (**Hebrews 12:2**). We will have tribulation (**John 16:33**).

This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Take up your cross and follow me” (**Matthew 16:24-25**). As sons and heirs we live to bring the Gospel to others as he did! That is how the apostle Paul lived. When he said, “I die daily” (**1 Corinthians 5:29-32**), that is exactly what he meant. For the sake of the Gospel he literally faced death every day. We are to live always ready to die for him (**Philippians 1:29; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:11-12; 2:8-12; 3:12; 1 Peter 3:14**).

But rather than this being a negative experience for us, it is exactly the opposite. James says: “Consider it pure joy” (**1:2**). The early disciples “rejoiced” because they were counted worthy to suffer for his name’s sake (**Acts 5:4**). Paul and Silas “sang praises” to God as they sat in the dank, filthy prison cell with backs bleeding from the beating they had received (**Acts 16:19-26**).

So the understanding of these two truths goes hand in hand. It is only as we realize that through Christ we are children of God (knowing our loving Father in intimate relationship) and that we are co-heirs with Christ (seated in righteousness, power and authority with him upon the throne) that we can then “take up our cross” as he did and share the fellowship of his sufferings. As Paul wrote in **Philippians 3:10-11**:

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Sharers of His Glory!

Read Romans 8:18

But now Paul takes this a stage further as he unfolds the wonder of all that is now ours in Christ, for just as Christ’s obedience to the Cross resulted in his exaltation (**Philippians 2:9-11**), so glory awaits us too! And, says Paul, on the eternal scales of heaven, the sufferings we experience now can’t measure up to the glory that is going to be revealed in us – it doesn’t even come close! “I consider ...” Paul says in **8:18**. If anyone’s scales would tip heavily on the side of persecutions and sufferings Paul’s would have. But, says he, compared to the weight of the glory God has in store for us in the future, our sufferings aren’t even worth putting on the scales, they are so “light” in comparison!

Read 2 Corinthians 4:17

The Great Hope

Set free! Made righteous! Filled with his Spirit! Children of God! Co-heirs with Christ! How could there be anything more in all the wonder of what God has done for us! But Paul goes on! Not only have we received all of this now in Christ, but also there is still more to come in the future! Paul says we are eagerly waiting for four things, all of which are closely connected and take place at the same time: at the Second Coming of Christ.

- ☞ Glory to be revealed in us (**8:18**)
- ☞ Sons of God to be revealed to creation (**8:19**)
- ☞ Our adoption as sons (**8:23**)
- ☞ Redemption of our bodies (**8:23**)

We have already been delivered from sin's *penalty* (**3:21-5:11**) and sin's *power* (**5:12-8:14**). But when human history comes to its great climax at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will then be delivered from sin's very *presence* (**8:18-25**). At present, we have the limitations of a mortal body. At Christ's return, however, our physical bodies will be transformed to be like his glorified body.

Read Philippians 3:20-21

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-57

Now we have the firstfruits of the Spirit (**Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:13-14**). Then the fullness of his glory shall be revealed in us (**Colossians 1:25-27; Jude 24**). Now we are his children (**Romans 8:16**). Then we shall be even as he is – fully mature sons! As John exclaims in **1 John 3:1-3**:

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!...Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is...”

Read Ephesians 4:15

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18

Our Adoption as Sons

Once again, Paul illustrates all that is awaiting us with the picture of Roman adoption. In **8:15** he made two definite statements:

- ☞ We have *already* received the Spirit of adoption
- ☞ We are *now* the children of God

Why does he now, in **8:23**, say we are eagerly waiting for our adoption as sons? The answer lies in the two different phases involved in adoption in Roman society – the first, a private arrangement between the parties, and the second, a formal and public declaration of the fact.

The private adoption

We have already seen how, in **8:15**, Paul illustrates our new-found relationship to our heavenly Father as being like the adoption of a slave.* Having decided to adopt a slave, the adopting father would go to one of the Roman magistrates and present a legal case for his transference into the family. This was all done before

* According to Roman custom, if the one being adopted had not been a slave, the father would first have had to purchase him symbolically from the “power” of his true father in order for him to legally have the right to adopt him. In the same way, with the price of his Son's blood, God the Father legally “purchased” us from the power of our “father” Satan (**John 8:38, 44; 1 Corinthians 6:20**), setting us free from all ties and connection with that heritage, in order that the transaction of adoption may legally take place, the “Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit” (**8:16**, KJV).

witnesses. For us, says Paul, this has *already* been done. The private transaction of adoption has *already* taken place. We are *right now* God's children and co-heirs with Christ!

The public adoption

But then, in Roman society, the glorious day would come when the father would hold a grand celebration and before all the friends and neighbors would publicly declare that this was his new son and heir. The son was not now being adopted into *relationship* – that was already his. This adoption ceremony was for *public recognition of his rank and position*. It was the day he entered into the full expression of all his new father had planned for him as his son and heir.

In the same way, we too, as God's children – already legally “adopted” and born of the Holy Spirit – have this “glory” awaiting us! It is the day when the entire world and all of God's creation will recognize and acknowledge that we, through God's wondrous grace, are the sons of God (**Ephesians 3:8-11**). It is the day we enter into all that God has prepared for us throughout eternity.

Read Ephesians 1:4-6

Sons of God Revealed

After saying that the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are already God's children, Paul goes on, in **8:19**, to declare that “creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” Paul uses two different Greek words here. In **8:16** he speaks of us being little children (*tekna*). In **8:19** he is speaking of adult sons (*huioi*). Thus the Spirit of adoption that we have received (**8:15**) also speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit within us, which causes us to grow in Christ and brings us ultimately to maturity.

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

On that great day of universal declaration, we shall be revealed to all as the mature sons (*huioi*) of God. Thus the Cross of Christ and the work of the Spirit shall be manifested as totally sufficient and victorious.

Our Glorious Hope

Hope is one of the most wonderful attributes that the Holy Spirit gives a Christian. It is the ability to see beyond the experiences of the moment to the time when God's promises to our hearts will be fulfilled. The promise of future glory with the Lord is the Christian's greatest hope.

The word “hope” runs like a golden thread down through Paul's letter to the Romans. Just take a look at these verses:

- **4:18** – “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations...” – Abraham, our great example of faith, is

also our great example of hope. Do you notice that it was the hope (read “sure expectation”) of the fulfillment of God’s promise that inspired Abraham’s day-to-day faith? Want three guesses what the hope of your future glory does for you?

- ☞ **5:2** – “**And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God**” – An infusion of hope sparks great joy (see **12:12**). This hope-inspired joy is described by Peter in **1 Peter 1:8**: “Though you have not seen him...you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”
- ☞ **5:5** – “**And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us**”^{*} – We have a hope that will not disappoint. It is no mirage, this hope, but is validated by the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
- ☞ **8:24** – “**For in this hope we were saved...**” – Little did we realize it, but our salvation, from the very beginning, had a set direction – the hope that Paul is describing in **8:18-30**. It is for the hope of what Paul calls in **8:23** “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” that we were saved!
- ☞ **15:4** – “**For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope**” – The truth of God’s Word brings encouragement in the hope we have in Christ. Do you notice, even as you are studying **Romans**, how the encouragement of the Scriptures is bringing hope?
- ☞ **15:13** – “**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit**” – The “overflow” of hope happens simply because of the mind-numbing magnitude of the hope that we have, and this overflow of hope results in you being filled with “all joy and peace as you trust in him.”

This is the wonder of the hope that is revealed in **Romans**. Not only has God, through Christ, wiped out our sinful *past*. Not only has he given us, by his Spirit, his life and strength and joy and victory and power in the *present*. But he has told us something of the glorious *future* that awaits us in eternity.

The Second Coming of Christ

There is a special day on God’s timetable that will usher in for us that glorious future. It is the day when Jesus Christ will return to the earth to claim his purchased possession. The Scriptures declare that Jesus will descend from heaven to the earth. A shout shall be given for the dead in Christ to arise. Those Christians who are alive on the earth at that time will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 24:27,30-31; 26:64; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:9-11**). Paul calls this “our blessed hope” in **Titus 2:11-13**.

* This expression “hope does not disappoint us” was probably drawn from **Psalm 22:4-5**.

The gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit to the believer is God's "seal" upon this hope. In Bible days, when a man purchased something he planned to collect later, he would mark it with his personal seal or stamp. This indicated to all others that that article was now his possession. Paul says in **Ephesians 1:13-14**:

"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance *until the redemption of those who are God's possession* – to the praise of his glory."

At his Second Coming, the Lord Jesus will return to "collect" that which he has already purchased with his own life. In **Ephesians**, Paul likens the Holy Spirit to a "deposit" or "down-payment" of all that is to come. In **Romans** he describes the Holy Spirit as the "first-fruits" (**8:23**). In other words, all the wonder of that which we are experiencing now in Christ is only a foretaste of that which awaits us. As Paul says in **Colossians 1:27**, "Christ in us" *now* is our hope of glory *in the future*.

The Day of Redemption

Read Ephesians 4:30

The Scripture calls the Second Coming of Christ "the day of redemption." This is not speaking of our salvation – the redemption of our souls – for that has already taken place when we received all that Christ did for us on the Cross. What it is speaking of is the redemption of our bodies – when even our physical being will be transformed. Paul describes what is going to take place on that day in **1 Corinthians 15:51-52**:

"...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..."

In the surrounding passage of **1 Corinthians 15:12-58**, Paul describes what our new transformed body will be like.

- **It will be raised imperishable** – "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality..." (**verse 53**).
- **It will be raised in glory** – "...The body that is sown is...sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory..." (**verse 43**).
- **It will be raised in power** – "...it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power..." (**verse 43**).
- **It will be raised a spiritual (or supernatural) body** – "...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body..." (**verse 44**).

Our pre-resurrection bodies are in the likeness of our first father, Adam; our glorified bodies will be in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ's resurrected body (**1 Corinthians 15:47-49; Philippians 3:20-21**). Read the description of the Lord Jesus Christ as he really is, as the disciples saw him on the Mount of Trans-

figuration (**Matthew 17:2**) and as John saw him on the Isle of Patmos (**Revelation 1:12-18**). In **1 John 3:2**, John proclaims:

“We know that when he appears, *we shall be like him*, for we shall see him as he is.”

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

Glory Revealed!

In **Romans 3:23**, Paul had capsulated man’s great problem:

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Now, having painstakingly shown how God himself came dramatically to man’s aid through Christ, Paul encapsulates the glorious end result of that work in **8:18**:

“...glory...will be revealed in us.”

As the *New Century Version* translates **8:18-19**:

“The sufferings we have now are nothing compared to the great glory that will be shown to us. Everything God made is waiting with excitement for God to show his children’s glory completely.”

In **1 Peter 1:10-11**, we discover:

“The prophets *searched carefully and tried to learn about this salvation*. They prophesied about the grace that was coming to you. The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets, *telling in advance* about the sufferings of Christ and *about the glory that would follow those sufferings*.”

In **1 Corinthians 2:9-10**, Paul himself quotes one of those prophets, Isaiah:

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”

But Paul adds in wonder:

“But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”

It is difficult for us, with our finite minds, to comprehend anything that could be more glorious than all that we have now in Christ. Yet, in the Spirit, we glimpse the wonder of what is to come and, with the apostle Paul, long for the Day when we will be released from the limitations of this physical body, and will, like liberated eagles, soar to the heights of that glory.

Creation is Groaning!

Read Romans 8:19-22

Having spoken of the wonder of the glory that is awaiting those who are in Christ, Paul goes on to reveal how all creation is waiting in eager expectation for that day

– not only waiting, but groaning as in pains of childbirth. It is crying out for the birth of a new day!

It was not by its own choice, or through its own fault, that nature was subjected to the curse that came upon it. “Cursed is the ground *because of you*,” God said to Adam after he had sinned (**Genesis 3:17**). God had given man dominion over the earth (**Genesis 1:26-30**). When Adam sinned and rebelled against his Creator, he not only lost his relationship with God, and the glory that was to be his throughout eternity, but he also took with him all that was under his control. The earth, with its teeming life, was yoked to mankind in its fall, experiencing all the consequences of man’s sin. But, declares Paul, creation too has a hope. As J.B. Phillips translates **8:19-21**:

“The whole creation is on tiptoe to see the wonderful sight of the sons of God coming into their own...it has been given hope. And the hope is that in the end the whole of created life will be rescued from the tyranny of change and decay, and have its share in that magnificent liberty which can only belong to the children of God!”

Since Adam’s sin, this earth has been waiting with a great longing to be set free from the decay and death brought upon it. That freedom will come when the “sons of God are revealed” (**8:19**), when God publicly declares before all that we, in Christ, are his sons. This creation is, after all, part of the inheritance of Christ and of those who are his co-heirs! (see **Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2; Isaiah 65:17,25; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-5**).

We are Groaning!

Read Romans 8:23-25

The inward “groan” Paul speaks of is the same kind of “groan” he has just referred to creation being involved in. We, too, live with that deep inner yearning for what is to come. As the psalmist so beautifully expresses it in **Psalms 84:1-2**:

“...My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

There is a yearning deep within us to experience God in all his fullness. This is what God has intended for us from the beginning – to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (**Ephesians 3:19**). And so, like creation, we too are crying out for the birth of that new day. Like a young woman, engaged to be married, is happily in love and enjoying the presence of her loved one, yet is longing for that wedding day, so we are enjoying all the wonders of the Lord’s presence now, yet yearning for that ultimate day (**2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:6-9; 21:2; 22:16-21**). David expressed it in **Psalms 17:15** (KJV):

“As for me...I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

It is having our eyes firmly fixed on the ultimate goal that has a tremendous effect on our attitudes now:

Our attitude to life

It was because Abraham and the Old Testament men of faith had their hearts focused on a “city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (**Hebrews 11:9-10: Revelation 21:2**) that they lived as pilgrims and foreigners here on earth.

Read Hebrews 11:13-16

It is living with eternity in view that keeps our priorities in life now in right perspective. It is seeing, with the eyes of faith, the glory that is going to be revealed in us that enables us to take up our cross and spend our lives for him. It is when Christians today become consumed with the realization of the victory already won for them by Christ, and see the wonder of the glory that is awaiting them, that they “throw off everything that hinders” them (**Hebrews 12:1**) and plunge themselves into winning this world for Christ with a zeal equal to that of the early believers.

Our attitude to ourselves

After describing all that is to come, Peter admonishes his readers in **2 Peter 3:14**:

“You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming...since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

And John, after declaring in **1 John 3:2** – “...Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” – goes on to say in **verse 3**:

“Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”

The deep yearning within us for our ultimate destiny makes us like pliable clay in God’s hands now. It is hope (seeing God’s goal) that releases faith (**Hebrews 11:1**). And it is our faith that releases God’s grace (his enabling power) to work in our lives. Then, in turn, it is God’s grace that produces his glory within us! **2 Corinthians 3:18** tells us:

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

No wonder Paul, in the light of his declaration in **Ephesians 3:19** that we will be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God,” goes on in the next two verses to declare:

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”