

September 11, 2005

**GOD WITH US AND FOR US IN SUFFERING**  
**ROMANS 8.18-30**

**1. THE PRESENT EXPERIENCE OF SUFFERING (18-27)**

**Context: *Suffering with Christ*** - cf. 8.17; we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ *if it is true* that we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified together.

God's sons are those who participate in the sufferings of Christ, the Son. We are those who take up the cross and follow Him, suffering and dying with Him so that we might also be raised with Him.

We suffer *with Christ*. This speaks about our suffering because of our union with Christ. But also, Christ does not stand off and watch us suffer, but He suffers with us. Cf. Ac 9.4

"Where is God?" "He's hurting with us."

**The two ages:** "this present time" and "the coming glory to be revealed into/upon us." This contrast falls along the lines of how history is to be understood (and was understood by Paul.)

History is divided for Paul into two more general eras: the present age and the age to come. The present age is the age before the kingdom of the Messiah, and the age to come is the age of the kingdom of the Messiah. Paul had to re-think what this looks like in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection was supposed to happen at the end of history: the inauguration of the kingdom of the Messiah. But God did this for Jesus when He raised Him from the dead. Now the ages overlap.

The victory has been won by the Jesus the Christ/Messiah, but the people of God (and the creation as a whole) still suffer. BUT, in light of the resurrection of Jesus, our suffering is put into a whole new context. This is foundational for Paul's thought.

**A. THE WHOLE CREATION GROANS (19-22)**

**Non-human creation eagerly awaits redemption:** Paul begins with the cosmic scale of suffering that extends to the entire created order. From here he moves down a spiral of explanation (usually indicated by "for").

Creation was subjected to futility or vanity. That is, creation was made by God for a specific purpose, a future glory. But because of sin brought into the world by Adam, that purpose or goal cannot be reached.

Creation did not rebel. The one who was the guardian, protector, and perfecter of creation became the agent of its destruction.

Subjected "in hope." That is, with the future promise that the effects of sin will be undone.

But why does creation wait for the revelation of the sons of God? And what is this revelation? The revelation of the sons of God is the final resurrection of the dead, the hope of the Christian faith.

What is the connection between the sons of God and the liberation of creation? The son, the image-bearer of God, is to be the protector and developer of creation. He is to rule creation wisely. When all of the sons of God that are joined to *the* Son are raised from the dead, this new creation will be complete. Cf. 8.21

**The groans of birth:** 8.22; "we know" - common knowledge that suffering is a part of this process.

"Groans" - two prevalent images: childbirth and Exodus.

Ex 2.24 - God hears the groans of His people in Egypt (the words are similar here and in the LXX), He remembers His covenant, and He acts to deliver His people from the slavery.

Note God's covenant with the creation (cf. Gen 9; Jer 31.35-36; 33.25-26). Creation is longing for its own exodus, its redemption.

As with a mother in labor deliverance does not come except through suffering. There must be a death of sorts before there can be new life. In order for there to be new creation, there must first be suffering. The suffering is purposeful and ends in joy.

### **B. THE CHURCH GROANS WITH CREATION (23-25)**

**Suffering servant kings:** 8.23 - “and not only this;” there is another who suffers. “We” refers to believers, the Church.

“The firstfruits of the Spirit” - Cf. Eph .14, the Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance. He is the guarantee that the fullness of God’s inheritance will be ours. I.e., His presence with us.

We, as servant kings of creation, like the King we represent, take up the suffering of the world within ourselves. We suffer in the world so that the world might ultimately be brought to new life. (Cf. e.g., Mt 20.28)

Our Christian calling is that of suffering. Cf. Phil 1.29. It is through this suffering, not in spite of it, that we will come into our inheritance, which involves the redemption of our bodies. This means that our bodies will be completely transformed.

**Saved in hope:** 8.24 - called to a life of suffering, taking up the groans of the creation, but this is unto full and final salvation.

Hope = rock-solid hope that is built upon the sure foundation of God’s promises. This hope will come to realization.

This hope is something to which we still look forward. That is, it is not a fully realized present reality. Therefore, we should not expect to escape suffering in the present.

**Perseverance in hope:** Genuine faith—the faith that receives and rests upon the promises of God—is a faith that perseveres through the suffering looking toward that hope, refusing to take cheap imitations proffered by hucksters.

It is the realization that our suffering is not pointless nor endless that we can endure through all of these tough times. God has a purpose—to bring life. And God has an end—the resurrection of our bodies.

### **C. THE SPIRIT GROANS WITH THE CHURCH (26-27)**

**The Spirit helps our weakness:** The Spirit takes up our groans and, thus, the groans of creation.

The flow of thought seems to be something like this: the creation groans in travail or labor pangs and we, the people of God, the kingdom of priests and representatives of the world, take that pain upon ourselves and turn it into prayer. Because of our weakness, we don’t know what to pray for as we ought. The Spirit then as the One sent to us and is here for us, takes up our groans, making intercession for the saints with unutterable groanings.

Note: the Spirit is God *with us* in suffering. God participates with us in our suffering. Cf. Phil 2.5-8. This is not something foreign to God. The point is that this is the way God acts.

**Application: (1)** Prayer in hope is the proper response to pain and suffering.

**Application: (2)** Entering into the pain of others is the proper Christian response.

## **2. THE CERTAIN FUTURE THROUGH SUFFERING (28-30)**

### **A. GOD’S PURPOSE WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM (28)**

Everything in history—good and bad—is working together for the good of God’s people; i.e., the inheritance of the saints, our future glory with Christ. How do we know this (as Paul says we do)? Because God promises the hope of inheritance. If God has promised that this is the goal, then everything must be working toward that goal.

But note something important here: Paul does not say that all things *are* good. He says that all things *work together* for good. There is a vast difference between the two. God works in, with, and through evil to accomplish His purpose (e.g. the crucifixion).

### **B. GOD’S PEOPLE WILL BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF THE SON (29)**

But what does it mean to be conformed to his image? Go back to v. 17: “suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” To be conformed to the image of the Son is to live the cruciform life; i.e., giving your life in suffering and death (at various levels) for the sake of others.

**Application: (1)** Our present suffering has purpose.

**Application: (2)** God is in control of our suffering.