

OZARK CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

ROMANS 8:18-30

THE ROLE OF SUFFERING IN CONFORMATION TO CHRIST

SUBMITTED TO

DOUG WELCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

ROMANS, NT 450

BY

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11/14/13

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Thesis: The promise of complete redemption is only fully accomplished in the church's conformity to Christ, according to the will of the Father, by the empowerment of the Spirit.

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ASSIGNMENT PROMPT

The student will write a 15-page exegetical paper on a passage from the epistle to the Romans. The paper must be based on a central thesis statement from the text, with appropriate exegetical research to support such a thesis. This paper should not follow a verse-by-verse, commentary style model.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

While it is acknowledged by the author that there has been considerable discussion in recent scholarship about the theological tension that is in this letter to the Romans, one cannot fully understand this presentation of this passage without seeing the progression of Paul's argument through a narrative lens. Paul cannot even introduce himself in the opening lines of the letter without referencing story. The understanding of the narrative of the Scriptures and specifically the letter to the Romans is the foundation this paper will build off of. Romans 8:18-30 is part of a larger pericope that emphasizes from different perspectives what it means to be put right with God. Chapter 8 serves as the climax to all that has been said previously. This paper shall hold in the balance the Jewish background of Paul and the obvious rabbinical argument he presents as well as the climate of imperial cultism found in the Roman Empire.

The Story of Suffering

“It is not our work, but God's gift, that we now hate [our sinfulness] and follow after love.”
–Martin Luther¹

“Romans 8 is one of the most comforting texts in all of Scripture. It assures the believer that all "tragedies" are ultimately blessings. It does not declare that all things that happen are good in themselves, but that in all the things that happen to us God is working in and through them for our good. This is also firmly grounded in His eternal purpose for His people.” –R.C. Sproul Jr.²

Paul writes to the Roman church to establish a doctrinal standard creating a unified theology and identity. Since the church is undergoing an identity crisis and from which have undergone sufferings and transitions, Paul chooses to encourage the believers by reminding them of their inheritance of glory. For the Jewish Christians, from the very first verse, the eighth chapter of Romans shows the difference between what life is like in Christ, compared to what life was like under the law. Here Paul states confidently, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This contrast to how things were and how things are now is brought to its climax in verses 18 through 30. For the Gentile Christians, this passage highlights God’s sovereign agenda to shed his mercy on everyone. All in all, Paul maps out the purpose of suffering and groaning for all Christians; creating an argument from creation, that this promise of redemption has been part of God’s plan from the beginning, as well as considering the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers.

It is clear throughout scripture that it is the plan and will of God to graft in all peoples to the promise of redemption; this adopting of God is the work of the entire Trinity. This promise of complete redemption is only fully accomplished in the church’s conformity to Christ, according to

¹ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1954).

² R. C. Sproul, *Loved by God*, (Nashville: Word Pub., 2001).

the will of the Father, by the empowerment of the Spirit. The issue this paper will address is the eschatological hope that the fate of the children of God and the fate of creation are somehow intertwined as read in Romans 8:18-30. We will also highlight Paul's encouragement to the believers in Rome that the Spirit of God is amongst them. Finally, we will consider how these two issues tie into the theme of the letter as a whole.

Setting the Stage

Eschatological Hope

The Epistle to the Romans was undoubtedly written by Paul. As the title of the epistle alludes, the famous "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13)³ wrote it to the church in Rome, the Gentile capital of the known world. Paul most likely wrote Romans in the mid-to-late 50s, (56-57).⁴ In his letter, Paul approached a community somewhat unknown to him, living in the heart of the Empire in Rome. The letter appears to have been both an introduction to his character and theology as well as an effort to secure support for his missionary trip to Spain in which he would have needed help from them, both with a financial gift of support and as a supportive sending church (15:24). He therefore has to show himself as a friend of Christ and the church.⁵ He writes this letter as an encouragement to the believers, because though there is strife among them and persecution and division, there is a hope of righteousness given in the age to come.

Following the Emperor Claudius' persecution of the Jews in AD 49, and his subsequent death in AD 54, the Jewish population in Rome began to expand. Jews who were banished under

³ All English Scripture is from the English Standard Version. Greek words and references are from the SBL version of the Greek New Testament.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1985. 39-49.

⁵ Richard N. Longenecker, *Romans*. (Dallas, TX: Word, 2011,) 274.

Claudius were now welcomed back into the city.⁶ As the Jewish community grew, so did the church, however their return also brought disputes among the fellowship of believers regarding Jewish laws and customs.⁷ It was a common rabbinic belief that in the last days the gift of righteousness would be given by God to his chosen people. Paul throughout the letter of Romans thus far has made the case that this gift has been given and his chosen people is now open to all people, for those who accept Christ.⁸

God with Us

Paul's purpose was to remind and teach the believers that God had not forgotten about them, nor had he given up on them. God is present and at work amongst them, through their suffering (past, present, and future) and their divisions and problems. Through Jewish symbolism Paul enlightens the believers on their purpose, which invites the presence of God into their lives. It becomes evident after a serious understanding of this text that the entire trinity is at work within the church. In the end, from his personal presence in the lives of the believers through the Holy Spirit

⁶ Claudius' famous decree in AD 49 expelled all Jews from the Roman city limits and forced the shutdown of the synagogues. According to Roman historian Suetonius, the decree was issued to resolve public disorder, namely the public disturbances that seemed to surround the Jewish people regarding "Chrestus" or perhaps as some scholars guess could have been a mistake by Suetonius and was actually "Christus" or "the Christ". In "The Life of Claudius 25.4", we find the statement, "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome." This is plausibly a reference to the expulsion of Jewish Christians from Rome. Luke makes mention of this same expulsion, which occurred in 49 CE according to the fifth century church father Orosius, in Acts 18:2. "There he [Paul] met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome." The decree held no legitimacy after Claudius' death and so the Jewish people began to repatriate to the city. We know that Priscilla and Aquila did in fact return to Rome after Claudius' death and were two of the many to repatriate and take up leadership within the church because Paul greets them in his letter (Romans 16:3-5)

⁷ A. C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 890.

⁸ Kirsopp and Silva Lake, "Chapter VI: The Epistle to the Romans" *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1937), 104.

the Christian can still claim today, “Immanuel, God with us,” because through the presence of the Spirit, it is God’s will that they be conformed to the likeness of Christ.

The Original Plan

The Bible’s message clearly takes a narrative form, (obvious once pointed out). The Bible tells the grand narrative of God's dealings with the world from creation in the beginning, through sin and salvation, to the renewal or perfecting of all creation at the end. In the book of Romans, Paul engages in explaining and defending his retelling of this narrative, a narrative of what God has been doing from the very beginning to now. However, he does not entirely neglect the fact that in the Hebrew Bible, there is another key character in the grand narrative: the non-human creation. In Romans 8:18–30, “the position of which in the letter is at once indicative of its strategic importance and also illustrative of the letter’s intent,”⁹ Paul explains from creation up to now what God has been doing. Firstly, as the climax of the discussion in chapter 8 and of 8:17 in particular, it builds on themes he has already presented throughout the letter as a whole. Secondly, it is also the culmination of Romans 6–8 and even of Romans 1:18–8:30 as it provides an argument on the reversal of human failure and restoration of people, the ‘cosmic outworking of salvation in strong Adam terms’¹⁰ of faith. Thirdly, Romans 8:18–30 sets the tone for Romans 9–11 with its argument on God’s faithfulness explained according to traditional Jewish motifs.

Futility of Creation and Hope of New Creation

A central element in Romans 8:18–30 involves the portrayal of the cosmos, its current state as well as its anticipated future. A portrait is presented of an overpowered, subjected creation that

⁹ Genesis 1:1

¹⁰ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans*. (Waco, TX: Word, 1988).

groans for redemption and whose remaking is emphasized by Paul.¹¹ From Genesis onward we understand the Bible as the story of God, “In the beginning God created...”¹² the focal point of all scripture is the work and person of God, but it also tells the minor story, the story of us, specifically the story of God’s people.

It is clear throughout scripture that sin has plagued history and tarnished our purpose as humans on earth. It is the fault of this fallen world that there is suffering and pain and dissatisfaction in humanity, however the root of this fallen world can be traced back to humanity’s failure. When God finished His Creation, there was a satisfaction and joy in what was created. It was a good Creation (Gen. 1:31); but in Paul’s day and until Christ returns, it is a groaning Creation, describing the sufferings of this present time as all of creation crying out in anguish since The Fall of Man. Since that fateful day in Eden there has been suffering and death; there is pain, all of which is, of course, because of sin and the cycle that Paul just finished describing in Romans 7.¹³ In Romans, we learn something else about the story of God, and that is the purpose of creation. Paul points out that creation is waiting eagerly for our redemption, that until then it is bound to corruption and groaning with labor pains.

Parallel to Jewish tradition (1 Enoch 7:6; Ps 65:13–14; Is 24:4, 7; Jr 4:28; 12:4) and Roman imperial use, Paul personifies the entire creation (or rather cosmos, *πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις*) as a range of inanimate and animate objects on the earth and in the heavens, a holistic, interdependent system with life and development of its own. From this he symbolizes the tension of The Fall by the sounds and activity of groaning, a discomfort and suffering. Creation is agonized and crying out for

¹¹ Punt, “Negotiating creation in imperial times (Rm 8:18–30)”, HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies 69(1), Art. #1276, 2013, 8 pages.

¹² Genesis 1:1

¹³ W. W. Wiersbe, *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 540), (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996) Electronic Ed. Logos.

redemption as a whole (συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει). From Paul's perspective, humanity and the rest of creation share both the groaning and the longing for this redemption, or new life. Paul assumes some acquaintance among the recipients of his letter with the idea of the corruption of nature (οἴδαμεν γὰρ).¹⁴

The nature of creation's groaning, it is generally agreed, is evident from the two verbs that Paul employs in verse 22: "συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει". The expression is usually translated as, "groaning in travail," or "groaning in labor pains."¹⁵ Most recent English translations reflect this understanding. Note the words that Paul used to describe the plight of creation: suffering (Rom. 8:18), vanity (Rom. 8:20), bondage (Rom. 8:21), decay (Rom. 8:21), and pain (Rom. 8:22).¹⁶ However, this groaning is not a useless thing: Paul compared it to a woman in travail. There is pain, but the pain will end when the child is delivered. While writing this passage, Paul's mind was on Genesis, specifically the protoevangelium of Genesis 3.

Braaten argues,

The reason for creation's groaning, can be found in verses 20-21a: God has subjected creation to futility, but not without hope that it will be set free from decay. Since the verbal forms for "subject" are in the aorist tense (ὑποτάγη, υποταζαντα), Paul, it is argued, must be referring to a onetime event: the cursing of the ground of Gen 3:17, which the Apostle understands as the fall of creation. Furthermore, a few interpreters have recently claimed that Rom 8:22 is also directly connected with this Genesis passage. Paul, it is said, associates the birth pangs assigned to the woman in Gen 3:16 (LXX: τον στεναγμού σου λύτρωις τέκνων) with the curse on creation in Gen 3:17.¹⁷

¹⁴ Groaning that lasts 'until now' (ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν) excluded the long-held Augustan premise of a golden age, as inaugurated by the Secular Games of 17 BCE, the purpose of which was to celebrate the birth of a new age in which specifically the fertility of Mother Earth played a prominent role. At the time of Paul's writing of Romans, cosmological groaning complicated the notion that Nero ushered in a golden age of undisturbed peace. For more on this see Punt.

¹⁵ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994,) 160.

¹⁶ Wiersbe, 540.

¹⁷ Laurie J. Braaten, *The Groaning Creation: The Biblical Background for Romans 8:22*.

As a Jew, Paul shared the Jewish notion that creation is subjected against its own will (Rm 8:20)¹⁸ and described its position as characterized by destruction or corruption (φθορά, 8:21) and futility (ματαιότης, 8:20). The word, creation (κτίσις), refers to the world and all of its inhabitants.¹⁹ The emptiness evoked by ματαιότης depicts a situation reminiscent of Ecclesiastes 1:2, broader devastation than the resulting corruption alluded to in Romans 8:21. The Hebrew Bible told the story of how idolatrous desires for unlimited dominion over the garden destroyed the original purpose of creation which was to express goodness (Gn 1:31) and reflect divine glory (Ps 19:1–4), a gift to humanity to enjoy and marvel at the works of God. The only possible way to regain that purpose is found in Christ’s redemption of this world, by his death and resurrection.

In the life of the Spirit we get a peek, so to speak, of creation as this gift. Thus creation is a specific theological category, a perception of the world and existence opened up by faith, not just a generic name for nature and its beginning. But In a fallen world, creation becomes nature. It becomes our or its own project that is groaning for completion and perfection. The core of The Fall is the attempt to have creation without the creator. But creation without the creator is futile. As

¹⁸ There is no gnostic view here of the world as innately frustrating and evil: The futility of human creation was ‘not willingly’ (οὐχ ἐκοῦσα, 8:20).

¹⁹ Most commentators take κτίσις to refer to ‘the subhuman creation’ (Moo 1996:514), ‘the nonhuman world’ (Fitzmyer 1993:506) while some, following Luther’s translation, interpret it as ‘creature’ in the sense of human body rather than ‘creation’. A full range of options includes all of creation with humans and angels, all of humankind, only believers, only non-believers, only angels, sub-human nature and angels, sub-human nature and humankind, sub-human nature only, Gentile world excluding Jews and the body as either humans generally or believers in particular (Cranfield [1975] 1982:411). Given the contrasts in Romans 8:18–30, the broadest understanding of κτίσις appears to be most feasible, namely the cosmos (‘sum-total of sub-human nature both animate and inanimate’, Cranfield [1975] 1982:141–142). Elsewhere κτίσις refers to created things (e.g. Rm 1:25; 8:39). For the purposes of this paper I believe this word encompasses all of the created order.

fallen beings, therefore, we can get creation back only through the redemption of God and participate in it only through the Spirit conforming us closer and closer to the image of Christ.²⁰

But what does it mean to say that we get creation back again through faith as a gift? Or that our trouble is only that we lost the faith? That would mean that God, though perhaps a success at redemption, leaves something to be desired as a creator. Then we would be playing them off against each other. As Forde states,

We do not penetrate to the heart of the mystery here, nor will we understand Paul at all unless we grasp that in matters pertaining to God we have to do with an absolutely free gift and thus not with "necessary" or "needed" additions, or completions. God the Creator, Redeemer, Spirit does not want to be "needed" as though he were the missing piece in the puzzle of life or the final guarantor of success for our projects. God is not necessary, nor is redemption needed in that sense at all. God does not need us nor does he want us to need him. The Word of absolutely free justification cuts through all that and opens up the possibility of an entirely different vision: the glorious liberty of the children of God!²¹

If reading from the angle of this kind of justification, we get an alluring sight of the fact that what God wants is not a creation which "needs" him, but a creation which loves him and enjoys him in absolute freedom. What the Creator wants is to be rid of a creation which refuses to be his free creation and is everlastingly groaning about its "needs" and trying to entangle him in its false work of trying to be him. So God acts to redeem his creation. He repeats himself. He justifies freely for his own name's sake. He wants his creation back. He wants to set it free. The goal is the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The language of pain and suffering in Romans 8 comes close to lament. As a form of speech which begins in pain and ends in praise, lament always begins in a context of suffering and always

²⁰ Gerhard O. Forde, "Romans 8:18-27." *Expository Articles* (n.d.): 283.

²¹ IBID, 285

functions as an appeal.²² Here, the Christian is faced with this fact, we are not alone in our suffering, but creation is groaning with us. Groaning is not tantamount to resigned patience but participatory resistance aimed at the future realization of new reality. It means that creation is to be re-created, to be made over!²³

What then finally about creation? What is wrong with it? Is it somehow totally corrupt and dismantled? If we follow Paul's argument, we begin to sense that such formulations are misleading. As if echoing from the previous chapters we can hear Paul shouting, "By no means!" If we have some sense for that glorious liberty, the freedom to love and to enjoy the Creator for his own sake, then perhaps we can see that creation in and of itself lacks nothing by virtue of which it could have been done better. Creation simply reflects what it is wanting in us: freedom in the Spirit. There is indeed worthlessness, futility, decay, and death. But there is no perverse will in creation. We are not saved from creation, but with creation. It was not subjected to futility of its own will; this world is not corrupt in that sense. Creation does not desire the bondage to decay and death. Creation was subjected to this bondage, however, the Apostle says, by the will of him who subjected it in hope. The Creator, that is, wants the liberty glimpsed in the redemption and will settle for nothing less. The creation itself, therefore, waits, longs, and strains toward that goal. Creation wants nothing more than to be set in liberty. The problem is in humanity, and it always has been. When Adam and

²² Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Paul and His Story: (re)interpreting the Exodus Tradition*. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1999,) 97-135.

²³ Paul's metaphorical descriptions of creation and recreation are not very elaborate but included the biological ideas of birth and children. Developing a notion found in Romans 8:18 already, believers were included in the suffering of creation (Rm 8:23). Even though believers are 'having' the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit, they are nevertheless 'waiting for sonship' as future fulfillment. Believers participate in the suffering of the world, yet they treasure the hope that the full and undistorted dominion of God's children will one day manifest itself in context of the restored creation. It is telling, though, that Paul put the emphasis on the 'redemption of our body', which saw the body claimed as the basis for communicating and interacting with the world. His thought holds no redemption from the body as some form of individual sense of detachment. Rather, he proposes redemption of the body as part of the socially transformed creation, no longer subject to 'corruption' (Jewett, 45).

Eve fell, they lost faith; creation was not good enough for them. From that dreadful day on humanity has always been on the way somewhere else. Like in the garden mankind has succumbed to the temptation, "You shall not die, you shall be like God." By seeking the immortal, the eternal, the perfect paradise, the classless society without the richness of the creator, creation cannot support them in their impetuous quests. At any rate, where we do not care for creation but exploit it in support of our rebellion, futility reigns.²⁴

It is Paul's argument throughout this passage, that the Creator himself has subjected all of his creation in meaninglessness in order to put a limit to our endless ambition. There is an anxiety here. There can be no mistake about that. Creation will not support humanity's projects for self-redemption, nor can it be played off against God's redemption. In and of itself creation has no more redemptive power than mankind does. Since the goal is the glorious liberation of the children of God, creation can only wait, long, and groan until Christ sets all things right with his return. Apart from that goal of eschatological liberty it is simply futile. To attempt to have creation without its goal, to set the Creator against the Redeemer, is a road which leads nowhere. Therefore, it is uniquely the redemption of Christ Jesus that endows creation back to us in hope, a creation however that groans in anguish for the time being, waiting for that glorious freedom which will set it free to be God's creation. Christ must reign now until that is consummated. So the Apostle is ready to conclude this part of his contention with the thundering climax of verses 28 to 39. There is nothing in all creation able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. This hope is admittedly shocking, but who hopes for what he sees? All the signs which enthusiasm might take as evidences or proofs are at best only indications of a lack, groanings in suffering, straining toward

²⁴ For more on this topic see: "An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest In Romans 8:19-23 And A Modest Proposal For Its Narrative Interpretation" by Cherryl Hunt, David Horrell, and Christopher Southgate.

that which is not yet. Hope that is seen is not hope. It settles for too little. All creation waits and longs for the glorious freedom of the children of God. By such hope we are saved.

One day creation will be delivered, and the groaning creation will become a glorious creation.²⁵ This is the eschatological hope of the believer. Creation will be restored back to Eden. A new Jerusalem will come down, the tree of life will be present (Rev. 22:2), and life will cease to be a struggle. The believer does not focus on today's sufferings; he looks forward to the coming glory (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:15–18).²⁶ Paul's vision was not limited to the current sufferings of believers or of creation, however. As he contrasted these with the future glory, followers of Jesus share in eschatological harmony with him (8:18). The groaning bondage will be exchanged for glorious liberty yet to come when creation will witness the revealing of the children of God.

Immanuel, God with Us

As hope is the sustaining factor in the believer's life, so, in like manner, is the Holy Spirit the sustaining power in the believer's life. The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit gives the church the divine energy needed to overcome the inherent evil in the flesh. Paul just finished admonishing the believers in Rome with the hope they must cling to. A hope that is not seen, but a hope we are sure of and wait for with patience. Now the Apostle switches gears as he compares the hope we have in

²⁵ Glory here probably refers not so much to the Greco-Roman version amounting to opinion or reputation, ascribed by public opinion. It is more likely the Hebrew sense of innate weightiness, honor, beauty, fiery presence, splendor and power that is at play here. The glory of God in the Hebrew Bible concerns the fiery phenomenon of radiance and brilliance (cf. Ps 8:1, 5). The connection is also made between glory and restoration as is found in prophetic and post-exilic traditions (e.g. Is 24:23; cf. Dunn 1988). God has subjected creation to decay and futility in order to achieve the ultimate goal of divine glory (Stowers 1994:283).

²⁶ Wiersbe, 540.

our faith, the hope we see in the groaning creation, the hope that sustains our very existence, so the Spirit of God also comes to our aid.

According to Moo, the word that is translated, “come to the aid of” brings with it an idea of “joining with” or “bearing the burden along with.”²⁷ The Holy Spirit of God is bearing the sufferings and groaning of this world with us. The Spirit is our helper in this case because without his help our own weaknesses disallow the growth or the redemption of our bodies. Thus, the Apostle concludes that we do not know how to pray as we ought, even if we have been commanded and instructed about what to say. The contrast offered by Paul in this verse is between our inability to know how to pray and the effective prayers of the Spirit himself. There may be more involved in the concept of weakness, however, the primary reference here is to mental ignorance.²⁸ We know not what to pray. We do not know what is necessary for our good. We may ask the wrong thing at the wrong time. We may ask for something that leads us into more problems and difficulties. The Spirit himself has to intercede to carry our mutterings through to God.

As Moo finely states,

This inability to know what to pray for cannot be overcome in this life, for it is part of our “weakness,” the inescapable condition of imposed on us by our place in salvation history. Therefore Paul does not command us to eradicate this ignorance by diligent searching for God’s will or by special revelation. Instead, Paul points us to the Spirit of God, who overcomes this weakness by his own intercession.²⁹

This statement brings to mind what Paul had just said a few verses earlier in the chapter, “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do...”, though Paul is speaking of Jesus coming to atone for sins, the verse can easily be applied to this idea too. God is making a way in the

²⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000,) 523.

²⁸ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay. Allen, and H. Wayne. House. "Romans 8." NKJV Study Bible: New King James Version. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007,) Rom. 8

²⁹ Moo, 524

wilderness; what we could not do because of the law and our sinful flesh, He is doing from his mercy and grace.

Though believers have been given glimpses and have the first fruits of the Spirit, the church cannot yet fully understand what should be talked about when we talk about God, so the Spirit intercedes.³⁰ It is not yet evident. The hints, the first fruits, are not to be taken in enthusiastic fashion as proofs. For who hopes for what he sees? Hope that is seen is not hope. So we wait in patience for the glory. It is by such hope that we are saved.³¹ The intercession of the Spirit even struggles with the carnal nature of the believers, the flesh, for as stated in verse 26, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” The “unutterable” groanings are what reaches the Father.

Among all of this talk about intercession, we are left with the question of what the nature of this intercession even is. Specifically, is it an intercession that comes about through our prayers, aided by the Spirit? Or is it an intercession solely completed by the Spirit on our behalf?

It is interesting as Mills summarizes, that the Greek gives a second meaning to this word translated “unutterable,”... It is used by various other writers with the meaning of a shout of victory, a war-cry, or battle-shout. This could make the phrase mean that the “groanings” of the Holy Spirit are considered shouts of victory in this war against the flesh. God is invincible; therefore, the victory of the Holy Spirit is assured,³² and so this intercession could be seen as a battle cry.³³

³⁰ Shane J. Wood, "What We Can Know About God...and How We Can Say It." Doctrine of Christ, (Ozark Christian College, Joplin. 20 Aug. 2013.) Lecture.

³¹ Forde, 284

³² Sanford C. Mills, *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Dunham Pub., 1968), 272.

³³ For more on this topic see Käsemann in his commentary and, more fully, in his article, “The Cry for Liberty in the Worship of the Church,” in *Perspectives on Paul*, pp. 122-37. This view is hinted at also by Chrysostom (who confines the phenomenon to the apostolic days) and defended by Balz, *Heilsvertrauen*, pp. 80-92; and Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, pp. 577-86.

Finally, the Spirit also searches hearts and minds, but this isn't a one and done deal. The Greek word for 'searches' (ἐρουνάω) is a present active participle, and so there is a continuation happening. As long as the Christian is living, the Spirit is searching their heart and mind in order to make appropriate intercession according to the will of God. The searching of the heart can only be done by God, for he not only searches but also knows what is in the heart of humanity (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Kings 8:39; Jer. 17:9,10). The fact that God knows what is best for humanity makes these groaning prayers by the Spirit all the more important. The Trinitarian God through our living is having a conversation with Himself, about what is best for us. The one who created all things, subjected creation, and is presently re-creating all things cares about what is in our very hearts and is speaking to Himself about those things. This is why the Apostle urges the saints in Philippi to, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:5). In other words, the saint should think as Christ thinks, and the prayer of the Spirit within will enable that thinking in a very real way, for this is the will of God. The phrase that the Apostle just throws in the middle of this section "according to the will of God," shows this thinking to be in our best interest. To be in God's will is the most important thing in the Christian life, and it is kept at the forefront of the believers mind and heart by the Spirit.³⁴

In the lives of believers the Spirit does not conceal his work, but makes Himself known in various ways. It is in these moments where we see the work of sanctification in the lives of believers. It is the Spirit's purpose and desire to see our lives shaped into looking more and more like Christ Jesus. It is through the prayers of the Spirit that the believers are sanctified as they, "set their minds on the things of the Spirit," (8:5) and "put to death the deeds of the body," (8:13).³⁵

³⁴ Mills, 273

³⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity, 1994,) 641.

From this section on the Spirit, one general point stands out that we cannot gloss over; the purpose for this lesson on pneumatology from the Apostle is to remind the believers that God is among them. He is very much present ($\pi\rho\acute{o}\theta\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$) in their lives, because of his purpose ($\pi\rho\acute{o}\theta\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$). In the Greek language this word is defined both ways. It is most commonly referred to as purpose in the New Testament, however when it is describing presence it is usually associated with the Table of Presence Bread, the symbol of God's presence in the Tabernacle/Temple.³⁶ God's presence is our sustenance, because the suffering they face is "caught up" in God's purpose and becomes redemptive.³⁷

They are not facing these struggles or hardships alone. The very fact that God has promised believers' redemption is because he has a purpose for His church: to be known by Him and for them to reciprocate that into intimate knowledge of Him. This is accomplished through the Spirit's indwelling work within the believer and his shaping and carving of them through the groans of creation as well as sufferings of the age into the image of Christ (8:29).

Tying the Knot

After exploring the futility of creation and reminding the believers of God's presence with them Paul finally hits the core message of the book as a whole, that God's righteousness is being imparted or given to everyone. The Christian life is all pointing towards glory. This is the final result of our salvation.

For 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. And those whom he predestined he

³⁶ W. A., Elwell, & B. J. Beitzel, In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988) Electronic Ed. Logos.

³⁷ Doug Welch, Romans 8, Class notes, (Ozark Christian College: Joplin, MO, October 30, 2013,) Lecture.

also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
(8:29-30)

This passage has been one of the most wrestled with passages of scripture throughout Christian history. Every theological camp it seems has taken their own spin on how they interpret the meaning of these verses. I see it as both a conclusion to Paul's prior two points (creation groaning and presence of the Spirit) and as an outline of the argument he has presented thus far in the letter. It is the will of God to be conformed to the image of Christ. The trinity is at work in the life of a believer. It is the Father who orders all things, the Son who makes restitution and ministers a new covenant of grace with the church, and the Spirit who sanctifies the believers into glory. For Paul, the connection between the work of God in a believer's life and their suffering is too great to not make a point of. Many times it is through suffering that faith is challenged, shaped, and refined.

“Faith is not a storm cellar to which men and women can flee for refuge from the storms of life. It is, instead, an inner force that gives them the strength to face those storms and their consequences with serenity of spirit.”³⁸ The Apostle Paul was no stranger to storms, just by cracking open the book of Acts, we know he had a very rough life all stemming from the prophecy Jesus said about his life in Acts 9:16, “For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Paul himself even highlights the many sorrows and struggles he has faced as he autobiographically lists his sufferings in ministry near the end of 2 Corinthians.³⁹ We must remember that Christ was subjected to human form, he lived wrapped in flesh, the last time he experiences this tension is when he was crucified, a brutal suffering physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He endured sufferings so as to be brought into glory. The promise of redemption that creation cries out for, and that the Spirit intercedes for, is complete in the church's conformation to Christ.

³⁸ Sam J. Ervin, Jr.

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Not only does this passage highlight those points but it summarizes where we have been through the letter thus far. Paul began his letter with strong language of calling. He cites himself as “one who is called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God” (8:1). He also identifies the Roman Christians as “loved by God and called to be saints”. From this calling language he immediately moves into the theme of God’s righteousness (or justice) in covenant faithfulness to those whom he has called, for “those whom he called he also justified.” From this discussion on justification the Apostle moves to the realization of faith and where it leads. Luther in his introduction to the Book of Romans said it best,

Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God. It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. What a living, creative, active powerful thing is faith!

Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God's grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith. Through faith, a person will do good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of God, who has shown him such grace.

Now *justice* is just such a faith. It is called God's justice or that justice which is valid in God's sight, because it is God who gives it and reckons it as justice for the sake of Christ our Mediator. It influences a person to give to everyone what he owes him. Through faith a person becomes sinless and eager for God's commands. Thus he gives God the honor due him and pays him what he owes him. He serves people willingly with the means available to him. In this way he pays everyone his due. Neither nature nor free will nor our own powers can bring about such a justice, for even as no one can give himself faith, so too he cannot remove unbelief. How can he then take away even the smallest sin? Therefore everything which takes place outside faith or in unbelief is lie, hypocrisy and sin (Romans 14), no matter how smoothly it may seem to go.⁴⁰

It is faith that will enable the believer to stand through sufferings of any extreme, of which eventually culminates in glory.

⁴⁰ Martin Luther, *Introduction to the Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1954).

As stated before, Romans 8:18–30 sets the tone for Romans 9–11 with its argument on God’s faithfulness explained according to traditional Jewish motifs. These motifs are understood as notions of freedom from slavery (8:2, 21), resurrection (8:11, 23), sonship and adoption (8:14–17, 19, 21, 23), the role of the Spirit (8:6, 11, 15–16, 23, 26–27) and suffering (8:17, 18–23, 26) and glory (8:18, 30). The blessings typically seen as belonging to ethnic Israel have now become the inheritance of new Israel, the church.⁴¹ The promises that were given to Abraham and the glory promised to Israel are now every believer’s in Christ Jesus. The glory that is to be revealed in and to mankind is the flesh learning to be in subjection to the Spirit, and changing believers, conforming believers to the characteristics and righteousness of Christ Jesus: the image of the Son. Every category of God’s plan is fulfilled in Christ- the believer inherits these characteristics with our participation in Him. He is the foreknown one, predestined one, called one, justified one, and the glorified one. And through him so are we.

Conclusion

The chief feature of the life of Jesus is this: He surrendered Himself wholly to the Father on behalf of men. This is the chief feature of conformity to Him; the offering up of ourselves to God for the redemption and blessing of the lost. The letter to the Romans is unquestionably an argument from the Apostle Paul on what the Christian life is truly about. Throughout the narrative, the Apostle digresses into reasons and ways God has grafted all people into the promise. Nothing hits the nail on the head better than his point throughout Romans 9–11. However, it would not hold as much weight if he did not first give the Roman believers the promise of an eschatological hope and

⁴¹ Dunn, 297

assurance of God's blessing and presence with them. At the end of days, the believer will be taken into glory and will sit as a co-heir with Christ. This promise of complete redemption is only fully accomplished in the church's conformity to Christ, (the image of the Son) according to the will of the Father, by the empowerment of the Spirit. This is the full Gospel, the full counsel of God, it is a beautiful and wonderful message.

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