

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part twenty

Sunday, March 17th, 2019 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2115

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JOY, PAIN, AND HOPE - HOW BIBLICAL REALISM PRODUCES PATIENCE AND STRENGTH

Romans 8:15-25 - "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. [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 decay 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."

The Christian life - the life of the Spirit - is a mixture of *joy*, *pain*, and *hope*. What's more, we're called to *remember* that our walk with Jesus will never be anything *but* this mixture if we want to avoid hypocrisy and despair. This text explains *why* this is so, and why it *must* be so:

1) **THERE ARE TWO WAYS BY WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT ESTABLISHES HIS "WITNESS" WITH OUR SPIRIT**

Romans 8:13-16 - "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...."

The verse that pops out in this text is beautiful indeed. Verse sixteen is comfort food for the soul. Most Christians can *quote* it better than they can *explain* it - "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16). We can't *create* our own Christianity. Any person can *know* the doctrines of the Christian faith. But no one can *create* the inward change of heart that makes it *happen*. Only the Holy Spirit brings truth to life. And the experience He brings is *recognizable*. That's the point whole point of this famous verse.

How the Spirit "*bears witness*" with ours is defined by the context of the verse 16 promise. The Holy Spirit works along *two lines*, marking His presence and our adoption as children of God:

- a) ***First, He brings out an official renouncing of sin in our lives - Romans 8:13-14*** - "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. [14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Paul tells us how to recognize the "*leading of the Holy Spirit*" when it comes. The Holy Spirit always kills sin. He's merciless with it. He never partners with it. When you feel Him pulling you away from sins of the flesh and mind and you *respond* (not always *perfectly*, but at least *longingly*) to His leading, you can be sure you are a child of God. On the other hand, if you make absolutely *no* break with the sin the Holy Spirit draws you from, even if you like the idea of going to heaven, you have no reason to suppose you're saved.

- b) ***Second, the Holy Spirit causes us to cry out to God as our "Father" - Romans 8:15*** - "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

This is so important. The Holy Spirit makes my knowledge of God *relational* rather than merely *academic*. He creates *intimacy*. This isn't someone who *believes God exists*. You don't need the Holy Spirit to prove the existence of God. You don't need the Holy Spirit to go to church. But you *do* need the Holy Spirit to call out from your innermost being to God as "*Father*."

This is key to everything Paul had been teaching in the previous chapter. This is what frees the Christian from the law. The law is good and holy, that's true. But the law is never *personal*. It's a *code*. It's a bare

standard. It can be part of your religious **creed**, but it can't touch the inside of the life the way a relationship of love can.

This is precisely how the Holy Spirit frees us from the unforgiving, condemning bondage of the law - **Romans 8:3-4** - "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, [4] in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

The New Testament would almost summarize the agenda of the Holy Spirit around the **two** cries that only He can produce with genuine sincerity in our hearts. Paul tells us of them both:

1 Corinthians 12:3 - "....no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit."

Romans 8:15 - ".... you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

The Holy Spirit causes us to bow before **Jesus as Lord** and **God as Father**. This is His beautiful Trinitarian work and delight.

2) THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS FILLED WITH BOTH GLORY AND SUFFERING - AND BOTH FULFILL A VITAL PART IN THE PLAN OF GOD

Romans 8:16-17 - "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, [17] and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

These are truly amazing verses. Like Chinese food, they contain a mixture of both sweet and sour. And, like the food, **both** ingredients are essential to achieve the proper flavor. The remaining verses in our text - **8:18-25** - mix and tumble these elements together like seasonings in a recipe. The thoughts are all mixed together, back and forth, in a way that makes them hard to study in a neat sequence. Here are some of the key ideas:

- a) **Any theology that denies the value of hope and suffering together or treats suffering as something to be removed or overcome in this age is rebelling against the plan of God Almighty - Romans 8:17** - "....and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

I won't take time to prove the obvious. In Paul's mind **present suffering** is a much a sign of being an heir with Christ as **future glory**. And this wasn't just some pet theme of Paul. The Apostle Peter writes, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. [13] But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed"(1 Peter 4:12-13). And Paul repeats this same thought in **2 Timothy 3:12** - "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...."

The important point from today's text, however, is this suffering included much **more** than merely persecution for our faith. It encases the whole style of existence in a broken creation. It includes all pain, sickness, death, suffering, and persecution that we experience in these fallen bodies. It's a description of normal life until Jesus comes back.

- b) **While both suffering and hope of glory are essential in our present walk in the Spirit, it is the hope that keeps the suffering from overwhelming us.** Paul makes this clear especially in **verse 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."

In fact, the Hebrew word for "glory" is "**kabod**," which means "**heaviness**" or "**weight**." The future hope of glory (which Paul will describe in a moment) is so much more **massive** in nature that the present suffering doesn't budge or even shake it.

So clearly Paul means you and I are to **think** of God's promised future for us. It is **debilitating** to not ponder the glory Christ will bring when He comes again. We are to place present trials in the balance **compared**

with, or *opposite to* what we know to be God's promise to those who love Him.

And I want to ask you bluntly if you regularly do that. Do you have such a profound sense of eternal hope that all the things of this age seem fleeting and almost unreal in comparison? Do you feel the incoming reality of the future glory so intensely that even this world's pleasures look small and ridiculous? This won't happen by accident. You intensify the weight of the eternal by *meditating* on it. You *study* this. You *give time* to it.

- c) ***This suffering, caused by mankind's sin in the Fall, is the product, not of Satan, but of God. And, in His love and wisdom, He still has a redemptive purpose in it - Romans 8:19-23 - "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 decay 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."***

The fact that Paul says creation didn't put *itself* in this condition (8:20), and the fact that the One who *did* subject creation subjected it "*in hope*" (8:20), shows it wasn't the Devil who did this (he never does *anything* to give genuine hope), but the Creator God. And the *purpose* in the present state of "*futility*" is to inspire hope in God.

It's God's mercy that he refuses to make it as easy as it might be to anchor our destinies here in this present world. We have a hard enough time with our idolatrous hearts even with all the imperfections of present life. God strives to use everything to look elsewhere for the satisfying of our deepest hungers.

- d) ***God's plan to make redemptive use of all suffering extends especially to those who are His children - those who have "the firstfruits of the Spirit" - Romans 8:23-25 - "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."***

It's as though Paul knows we might all be thinking God may well have a purpose in suffering for fallen creation and those who have *not* been adopted in His family through Christ Jesus, but surely it can't be His will for those who have *received the Spirit* to suffer, that he specifically mentions all Christians in verse 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."***

"Yes - I mean those of us who have the Holy Spirit at work deeply in our hearts. *We too* live the life of the *groan*." In fact, the Holy Spirit, far from *removing* the groan, is the *cause* of the inward groan because He gives us all a taste of what is *still to come*, but what isn't fully revealed *yet*.

So we still have to come down to it. We must wrap up answering the "*why*" question. Why does God need suffering to make us what He wants us to be? Why can't we all have heaven now? Why must we groan along with the rest of creation?

There's only *one* answer to that question. Paul's already hinted at the answer less directly in Romans 5:3 - "***More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance....***" But now we're getting a much fuller explanation. God uses suffering to cause us to long for Himself. He takes the edge off our fallen appetites for empty pleasure. If there were no trials or pains or removals we would fall more and more deeply in love with this sinful world. We would think ourselves invincible and satisfied here and now. We would turn from God.

Paul explains this in his own life and ministry - 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 - "***For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. [9] Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.***"

God refuses to allow us to make the mistake of thinking this is heaven. He removes the things that draw our reliance from Him alone. Like we all sing on Sundays, "He *gives* and *takes away*." And *both* are proof of

His wise, eternal love.