

FPFWC Christian Development



Liberating Letters

May 2022

Spring Quarter

May 7, 2022

Lesson #1 –Freedom for the Future

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Romans 8:18-30

ICE BREAKER –

1. What gives Christians confidence as they go through hard times?
2. How can our patience be strengthened?
3. How can you commit your difficult circumstances to God this week?

Key Verse - I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.—Romans 8:18

LESSON BACKGROUND

The apostle Paul was involved in several important mission trips, the last of which was his trip to Rome for a hearing before the emperor. The book of Acts ends with Paul awaiting this trial (Acts 28:30–31). Rome was a destination he had desired for many years (Romans 1:13), but not necessarily in the status of prisoner!

The letter to the Romans includes Paul's understanding of the Old Testament background for the Christian message, the nature of Christian salvation based on the atoning death of Christ, the centrality of faith as the only path for human salvation, the relationship between Christians of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds in the plan of God, and several other matters.

All this makes Romans both the most challenging of Paul's letters to understand and the richest depository of what he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25). The basis and reality of being justified by faith is the subject of Romans 1–4 in general and 3:24, 28 in particular. Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 to set the tone for the entire book: "the just shall live by faith."

This means that faith—complete trust in Jesus—is the only way that eternal life may be found. It cannot be earned by obedience, although obedience is important. It is not inherited by ancestry, although this is not unimportant (see Romans 3:1–2; 9:4–5). True life, eternal life, the life of salvation, is only found in trusting God to save us through His Son.

Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jews, was justified by faith (Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6). Thus the idea of faith in God as the core element of one's life is not a Christian innovation. Such faith is to be the foundation of our relationship with God. This was intended as central in the pre-Israel period (Abraham), in the nation of Israel itself (Habakkuk), and now is so in the church.

In Romans 5–8, Paul lays out the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection. Through Christ, the reign of sin and death has been overthrown by righteousness and grace (Romans 5:21). With the reign of sin and death defeated, believers are free. New life in Christ also means freedom from bondage to the law (7:1–6).

Romans 8 brings these various elements to a climactic resolution. There is “now no condemnation” for those “in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). What the law failed to do, God himself has done through Jesus (8:3). Righteous living is enabled by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in those who have faith in Christ (8:9–10).

All these wonderful truths, however, raise a painful question: Why do suffering and death still wreak havoc? Paul indicated the likelihood that Christians would suffer for Christ's sake. Paul encouraged the Roman believers to keep the big picture in mind: we are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17, not in our printed text).

LESSON COMMENTARY

8:18–25. Paul continues both the theme of the futurity and the suffering associated with being God's heir. At the second coming, believers will see God's glory (v. 18) as they return with Jesus to earth, but also will have their own glory (v. 21), a glory that surely reflects the glory of Jesus, just as the moon's glory is found in its reflection of the light of the sun. Verses 19–21 are Paul's commentary on Gn 3. When Jesus returns to earth with His people, the curse will be lifted from the world. Inanimate creation is personified in this passage as looking forward to the restoration of creation. **Creation groans** (v. 22) probably refers to natural disasters in which human life and property are lost. **Suffers the pains of childbirth** (v. 22) indicates that the natural disasters are not permanent, and will not continue past the second coming. When calamities happen in the world, they remind the believer that these conditions are temporary, just as a woman's labor is temporary. Eventually the baby comes, and happiness ensues, and so it will be when the Lord returns.

Not only does creation groan (v. 22), but believers **groan within** themselves (v. 23) **having** (or “because they have”) **the first fruits of the Spirit**. **First fruits** may have OT offering connotations (cf. Lv 23). The first fruits offering was to show one's trust in the Lord, that if He has provided early aspects of the harvest, He could be trusted for good provision later. God has given the Spirit to believers at the present time, establishing an unbreakable connection between the initial experience of salvation and its end in eternity. The Spirit is both the first installment of our salvation and the down payment of the pledge that guarantees the remaining stages of the work of God in our salvation. Because believers have the Spirit, they have a slender experience of what awaits them, and as a result, they groan. There is no good reason to think that believers' groanings are not audible. Many of God's children, when they encounter hardship, have uttered a groan and said, “How I wish Jesus would come back *right now!*” Unbelievers do not express such sentiments, and the fact that believers do should serve to remind them that their utopia is not found in this life. They groan while **waiting eagerly for their adoption as sons**. In v. 15 the adoption is seen as already accomplished, and it surely is,

but the full consummation of it awaits the future (a classic text for the concept of “now and not yet”). **Redemption of our body** refers to the resurrection, when all sin, evil, and suffering are set aside. If the Christian adoption as sons and daughters of God is accomplished (v. 15) but is not now fully accomplished (v. 23), then **perseverance in hope** (confident expectation) is needed (vv. 24–25).

8:26– . **In the same way** that hope sustains believers when they suffer, so also **the Spirit helps** their **weakness** when they pray (v. 26), the **weakness** being found in ignorance concerning how one ought to pray. **Groanings too deep for words** is an oxymoron, but describes the Spirit’s “wordless prayer groaning” on behalf of God’s children. **Too deep for words** means “unspoken,” “unspeakable,” “unuttered,” “unutterable,” but in any case these groans are inaudible and therefore do not refer to speaking in tongues. In addition, **the Spirit Himself** performs this intercessory ministry, but speaking in tongues involves the participation of the believer (cf. 1Co 14:14), and while not every believer speaks in tongues (1Co 12:30), *every believer* can be confident of this prayer ministry of the Spirit. If God knows every thought of every person, then He is quite capable of understanding the Spirit’s prayers for His children (v.). **He [the Spirit] intercedes ... according to the will of God** provides the basis for what Paul will say in v. 28. If the Spirit prays for believers, then God’s loving purposes will come to them. Not only does the Spirit intercede, but the Son does as well (v. 34), and the intercessory work of two members of the Godhead are what guarantees that “nothing will separate us from the love of God,” and that believers will never lose their salvation.

8:28–30. Believers do not always know how to pray (v. 26), but **we do know that God causes all things to work together for good** (v. 28). It is not clear what the subject of v. 28 is, for the subject is embedded in the third singular verb (either “He/it works together”) and “all things” could remotely be the subject (see KJV; NET). But God should be understood as the subject in light of His active role in calling and saving His people (vv. 29–30). Because God is both sovereign and loving, **all things** should be understood comprehensively. Even the tragic circumstances that believers undergo are part of His loving design for their lives, for from them He brings **good** (“that which is morally, tangibly beneficial”). **To those who love God** is defined further by **to those who are called**, so that **those who love God** are not some group of super-believers, but is a category in which *all* believers are found. **His purpose** is explained in vv. 29–30. **Foreknew** (v. 29) means “to determine ahead of time to enter into a loving relationship with someone” (cf. Ac 2:23; Rm 11:2; 1Pt 1:2, 20). The functional opposite is found in Rm 11:2, where the verb “foreknow” is the opposite of “reject.” If “reject” has an active sense in Rm 11:2, then its opposite (God’s foreknowledge) is an active, determinative foreknowledge. In other words, His foreknowledge is not simply a prognostication (a bare, passive knowledge of what will happen next—for which see the human forecasting in Ac 26:5; 2Pt 3:17), but a *causative, determinative* foreknowing, where His foreknowledge *brings about* what is foreknown. **Predestined** means “to decide upon beforehand,” “to predetermine.” **Foreknew** emphasizes God’s initial decision to embrace a specific believer, but **predestined** refers to the final eternal goal of His active foreknowledge, namely, believers being **conformed to the image of His Son** on their way to their eternal “destination” (as

in “pre-destination”). Sanctification is missing from Paul’s five-item list, but that is covered by the last half of v. 29. Being **conformed to the image of His Son** probably pertains not only to what will happen on the day of Christ’s return but also what happens in the lengthy period before that return. **Firstborn** does not mean “first created” but rather “preeminent.” The same term is used in the LXX for Israel being a preeminent nation, not the first nation God made (Ex 4:22), and for David, the preeminent king compared to all others, not the first king who ever lived (Ps 89). **Among many brethren** indicates that God’s purpose (v. 28) includes a vast number finding redemption, the restoration of the human race through Jesus’ work. There is, in this phrase, a brief reminder from Paul about the obligation the Romans have to promulgate the gospel, especially by helping him go to Spain (cf. “Purpose” in the introduction to Romans). **Called** (v. 30) refers to the effectual call of God. This call is the believer’s experience of God’s foreknown and predestined plan (cf. 1:1, 6, 7). For **justified**, cf. the note on 3:24. **Glorified** (to experience God’s glory with Him forever) is in the aorist tense, as are the other four verbs, and the tense presents each action comprehensively, as a complete (not “completed”), undifferentiated whole, without regard to its internal workings or how it unfolds. In God’s plan, He foreknew, predestined, called, justified, *and* glorified each believer. If God foreknows, predestines, calls, and justifies a believer, then it seems extremely unlikely that the believer might fail to be glorified as well.

LESSON NUGGET – We are not frustrated by the suffering we experience or see in our world because we have hope. When Jesus returns, we will enter into glorious liberty! The Spirit is the beginning of the harvest and assures us that the best is yet to come.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary