

# The Epistle of Paul to the *Romans*

## **Sanctification: The Demonstration of God's Righteousness** (6:1 - 8:39)

**8:18** I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Paul expanded on the concept of Christian suffering being worth future blessings when he wrote in an earlier writing that the earthly sufferings are relatively short and the blessings of "glory" are "eternal" <sup>2 Corinthians 4:16-17</sup>. The "glory" to be "revealed" refers to the anticipation of the "redemption of [the] body" <sup>v.23, 1 Corinthians 15:35-57</sup> and the Christlikeness that all believers will enjoy in eternity <sup>Philippians 3:20-21, Colossians 3:4, 1 John 3:2</sup>.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul actually advised the way to obtain the "eternal glory" by telling believers to "fix [their] eyes ... on what is unseen" <sup>2 Corinthians 4:18</sup>.

**8:19-21** The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. The "creation" is a reference to everything in the physical universe except mankind (implied by the contrast between the "whole creation" <sup>v.22</sup> and "we ourselves" <sup>v.23</sup>). The creation was personified by Paul as waiting for a release from the "curse" and the effects of the curse at the fall of man <sup>Genesis 3:14-19</sup>. God promises the "liberation" of the creation at the end of time <sup>2 Peter 3:10-13, Revelation 21:1-5</sup>.

The word translated "revealed" <sup>v.18,19</sup> (*apokalypsis*: to unveil) is also translated "Revelation".

The phrase "bondage to decay" is Paul's description of the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

**8:22-25** We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he

already has? **But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.** Paul made a comparison between the “groaning” of “creation” for change and the inward “groan” of saints, who grieve at their continuing sinfulness <sup>Psalm 38:4, Romans 7:17-20</sup> and yearn for the completion of their spiritual position (i.e., to be Christ like <sup>1 John 3:2-3</sup>). The “firstfruits of the Spirit” are the improvements (fruit <sup>Galatians 5:22-23</sup>) the Spirit produces in a person following salvation. While the “adoption” <sup>Galatians 4:4-7, Ephesians 1:3-10</sup> process started at salvation, it will not finish until glorification <sup>v.30</sup>, when the Christian’s inheritance will be fully realized <sup>1 Peter 1:3-5</sup>, including the “redemption of [the saint’s body]” <sup>1 Corinthians 15:35-44, Philippians 3:20-21, 2 Peter 1:3-4</sup>. All these blessings are part of the “hope of salvation” <sup>1 Thessalonians 5:8</sup>. The only aspect of this hope that leaves any room for doubt is that it is not “seen” by earthly man, who are called to trust in and focus on this “unseen” hope <sup>2 Corinthians 4:18, 5:7, Hebrews 11:1</sup> promised by God.

**8:26-27 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.** The Christian is called to pray with passion <sup>Hebrews 5:7</sup>, regularity <sup>1 Thessalonians 5:16-18</sup>, confidence <sup>Philippians 4:6</sup>, joy <sup>Philippians 1:4</sup> and persistence <sup>Luke 18:1</sup>, and always in the Spirit <sup>Ephesians 6:18, Jude 1:20-21</sup>. However, when the appropriate objective of the prayers (“God’s will”) is unclear to the believer (in their “weakness”), the details can and should be left up to the Holy Spirit who knows best what the outcome should be. This is one of the most underused, yet powerful, gracious and precious gifts from God to the believer. The Spirit does not need to speak, but simply “groan” or think (“the mind of the Spirit”) in order to communicate with the Father, because they are one in essence <sup>1 Corinthians 2:11</sup>.

Paul used the phrase “in the same way” to indicate that the Holy Spirit joins the creation <sup>v.22</sup> and the followers of God <sup>v.23</sup> in the business of “groaning” for the restoration of all things.

Whether it is through the Holy Spirit, as Paul emphasized here <sup>v.26</sup>, or through Jesus Christ, as the author of Hebrews mentioned <sup>Hebrews 4:14-16, 7:24-26</sup>, the prayers of the genuine believers end up in the presence of God the Father ... another example of the Trinity working together.

**8:28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. This verse states that the revealed principles presented are directed toward genuine believers (“those who love [God]” Psalm 103:17-18, John 14:15, 21, 23). And while it is true that God has plans for all of His created people to “prosper” Jeremiah 29:11, He “works” in every event in the life of believers (including trials of temptation 1 Corinthians 10:13, suffering Psalm 119:71, Isaiah 38:17, hardship/discipline Hebrews 12:7-11 and sin Job 42:7-9) to accomplish “good” in their life Genesis 50:20, including spiritual maturity Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4, 2 Peter 1:5-8.

An example of this lesson is found in the OT when the Israelites were “east of the Jordan in the territory of Moab” and Moses was “[expounding on the] law” Deuteronomy 1:5 prior to his death on Mount Nebo Deuteronomy 34:1-7 and the nation of Israel’s entrance into the Promised Land Joshua 3-4. In his decrees, Moses told the Israelites to remember (“not forget”) the many things God had done in order “to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you” Deuteronomy 8:10-16, but he also warned them if they rebelled/disobeyed they “[would] surely be destroyed” Deuteronomy 8:19-20 (just as had happened to the previous generation Deuteronomy 1:19-40). Therefore, while God certainly worked “for the good” of the nation of Israel, some of the Israelites did not always work (cooperate) with God in order to embrace and take advantage of all the good He wanted for their lives, and as a result, the ones who rebelled/disobeyed were “destroyed” Joshua 7. Certainly God works for good in all of His OT and NT followers, but only through obedience will anyone gain all of the incredible blessings He has planned for mankind Proverbs 13:13, Luke 11:28, James 1:25.

While the subsequent verses v.29-33 present very strong statements that apparently support God’s complete sovereignty over salvation, the statement “those...who have been called according to his purpose” does not preclude the call of all people Matthew 11:28, Romans 1:5, 16-25-27.