

Romans

PART 14

SUFFERINGS & GLORY

Zooming Out

In these verses, Paul begins resolving themes and closing loops that have been building throughout the book. Zooming out, we continue looking at reality through God's worldview, considering the suffering of this present time in light of the scope of God's big cosmic plan to make all things new. Christians often ask, "If God is good, why do Christians suffer?" or "Why is there so much evil in the world?" Without answers from God's word, questions like these can cause people to walk away from the faith. Though we can't always see God's purposes, He sees, cares, and is at work to transform everything broken into something good. We can have hope to come out of suffering and into glory.

Chapter Highlights

VS 17

Being a joint-heir with Christ is a twofold package: sufferings now, glories to come. Biblical truth does not teach the idea that "if you *really* have faith, you will not suffer." In fact, having faith, we *will* suffer for it. Spiritual wickedness is aligned against God, of whom we are spiritual children and eternal heirs. Therefore, there will be persecution in this life.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

I PETER 2:21

PROSPERITY GOSPEL VS. POVERTY GOSPEL

We need the healthy doctrine of what the Bible actually teaches: "*sufferings now - glory later,*" as opposed to "*suffering never.*" The "prosperity gospel," as it is sometimes called, teaches that if you input enough prayer and faith, God is obligated by a faith principle to output prosperity for you; most often in matters of perfect health and wealth. This teaching is dismissive of Christian suffering and presents no real need for future glory because it expects all the abundance and blessings of Christ here and now.

PROSPERITY GOSPEL VS. POVERTY GOSPEL CONT.

In this unbiblical way of thinking, the only way suffering can make sense is if it was allowed to happen because of *you* - because you didn't believe. The sufferings of this age are not because of secret sins or because of a failure on our part to claim our rights as sons of God. These subtle falsehoods destroy lives, causing people to give up on the faith entirely when bad things happen.

On the other hand, we dare not run to the other end of the spectrum and think that God doesn't answer prayer. A "poverty gospel" is also ungodly. Otherwise, why ask God for help now if this life is only suffering? Ultimately, we all need new redeemed bodies, but God *does* do miracles and He *does* heal sicknesses. These are gifts of grace, however, and they are not earned by us or owed to us. Regardless, we should be zealous about God's deliverances during this life too, and we should boast in His gracious mercy to us with faith in His care.

VS 18

The total balance of this present time, even including all the miracles God does, adds up to a time of suffering. However, the total balance of eternity is glory, and ultimately the outcome is so good that the bad is not even worthy to be compared to it. Suffering is the only path to glory, (look at Jesus' example!) but they are not proportionate. They need to be contrasted, but they cannot be compared. The suffering will be worth it, as Paul could personally testify with all he endured for the gospel's sake. So suffer well; hold on - because God has lovingly told us that regardless of how much it hurts now, it's nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. (See 2 Corinthians 4:17.) The bad will end, but the good God has awaiting us will never end.

VS 19-22

You're not alone in suffering. All of creation is moaning together in pain, but God is redeeming all of it. He's bringing everything along this path in Christ from present groaning to eternal glory. The earth, too, is waiting for the ultimate revealing of who we are as resurrected sons of God, because like us it's also in bondage to corruption. It waits to be turned from vanity into the glorious liberty of the children of God. None of this grief is as it should be. We live in a fallen world. Originally, it was made by God, for God, and existed to glorify God. When man fell, so did creation under his reign. It, like us, was corrupted from its intended glory and purpose, and now it figuratively groans. **Its release from this unjust subjection under the fallen reign of the first son of God, Adam, will be at the revelation of the freed sons of God, under the reign of the true and better Adam, Jesus Christ. Therefore, creation anticipates our return with Christ in glory.** When Jesus comes back, heaven itself will be united with earth, and all will be renewed and redeemed - just like us.

VS 19-22 CONT.

In verse 20, the word futility is used to mean emptiness or vanity. There is an element of frustration here, like the phrase “vanity of vanities” in Ecclesiastes. The plagues, disasters, famines, and violence we see in nature is not as it should be. Without knowing God’s plan, the hearts of men often feel like life is meaningless, and resign themselves to futile pursuits with futile goals, chasing a little bit of happiness in the midst of a futile world where everything feels wrong. They ask, “How would a good God allow this?” or “Where is God in all this?” But His plan is leading to a good outcome. He subjected the world to this track so that it would have hope of restoration in Christ. God sees and cares about the suffering of the world. He is the one who will make good triumph over evil, but the only way is through resurrection. This temporary state of brokenness is with a view to an eternal solution: the gospel promise. God in his mercy let Adam and Eve die because the redemption of creation hinges on resurrection. God is grieved when evil happens and when people die, but his greater plan is to make all things new rather than let them live on in the frustration of futility. In the end, there will be no more death, suffering, or pain. There will be no separation from God when He dwells among us on the new earth. This is God’s grand perspective. He did it this way because He is good, and by calvary, Christ has already won.

VS 23-25

God understands we don’t yet see our hope realized, but we can know about it now. Hope is used 5 times in vs 23-25. We can focus on the promise of future glory, not allowing Satan to make us gaze on our present suffering. We who have the first fruits of the spirit can eagerly await our inheritance of sonship, the redemption of our bodies. We can do it with perserverance because of this hope in Christ.

THREE GROANINGS



VS 26-27

In the same way hope helps us to endure in this present time, we are also helped to endure by the spirit. It helps our constant state of weakness, in that on our own we don’t know what to pray. The natural man can’t understand the things of the spirit, so in our groaning, we need it to pray as we ought.

VS 26-27

The key to effective prayer is praying according to the will of God, and as the spirit groans along with us, we can pray words beyond our natural human ability, communicating with the most holy God as He would have us to. In light of my present suffering, I can't always see what God is doing, so I may not know how I should pray in a given situation. But God knows, and by His holy spirit, there's constant help for his children in the midst of the brokenness we face. Like the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane who couldn't endure with Jesus in prayer, on our own we are weak. But the spirit comes alongside us to assist us. It intervenes for us. What a great promise it is, that when we are overwhelmed and frustrated, tempted not to pray, the work of the spirit helps us, whether by prayer in tongues or prayer in the understanding. God will always respond to His will, and the spirit helps us to pray His will.

VS 28

"We know" - even if we don't always see God working, we know He is. His purposes are always good, expressing his character. Not everything in life is good, but because He is, even the bad things amount to good in the end. All the evil deeds will only result in the opposite of what they intend. Jesus's victory on the cross is itself a perfect picture of this concept. All the evil intended against him and all the suffering he endured was turned into superior good by his resurrection. So even now in all our dangers, we are more than conquerors, because by that resurrection, all the evil we see now will also be turned into glory. We can boast in this and suffer well, knowing the good work He began in us will be brought to completion at the day of Christ. They can't harm us, because the tomb is empty, the throne is occupied, and the king is returning.

Conclusion

VS 29-30

Let us see the scope of time the way God sees it. God inhabits eternity and sees all creation from the perspective of forever. The path we are on is an unbreakable progression to glory. God already sees us glorified. In our groaning, we can know God has foreknown us, predestinated these things for us, called us, justified us, and glorified us. It's as good as done. We have the downpayment of this and we are already seated with Christ. We are those who love God and are called according to his purpose, so we know how the story ends for us. As surely as we stand presently in justification, we stand in eternal glory as if it's already accomplished. Everything is going according to God's plan.

Romans

VIEW OUR ROMANS SERIES ON YOUTUBE

