

## Futility and Hope

Romans 8:18–25<sup>1</sup>

### Gloriously Saved.

One of the characteristics that I hope you have noticed as we have studied the book of Romans since back in February a couple of years ago, is the way that Paul will take a particular thought, and work through it from every possible angle until, and in the process, he introduces the next idea and gives it the same treatment. We have seen this particularly in Romans chapter 8, which began with that glorious statement (and, of course, you should all have this memorized by now, so feel free to say it with me if you want). Romans 8, verses 1 and 2:

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1–2  
ESV

This is what it means, to borrow a phrase from a friend of mine, to be gloriously saved. That first statement, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” is the summation of the first seven chapters. Everything that has been said so far was leading to this point. All of the teachings, and even the handful of exhortations that have shown up so far, were there to bring us to this profound conclusion.

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:1 ESV

So, are you in Christ Jesus? If so—if you have been brought to God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone—then there is how much condemnation? ... (Please feel free to answer). There is **no** condemnation; not a little condemnation; not occasional condemnation; not even self-condemnation; **no** condemnation.

But how can we be sure? How can we be absolutely certain that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus? Perhaps more importantly, how can we be sure that this applies to ourselves here in the midst of a messed up world? Well, verse 2:

<sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has *set you free in Christ Jesus* from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2 ESV

We have been set free then, but not by works of righteousness that we have done. Rather, by “the law of the Spirit of life”. By the work of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives.

<sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> 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. Romans 8:3–4 ESV

So, it’s not that the law has been set aside. It’s not that God no longer requires righteousness. Rather, sin has been condemned in the flesh, and the righteous requirement

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations, unless noted, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

of the law has been fulfilled in us through Christ. The righteous requirement of the law **has been fulfilled** in all those “who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Of course, this was not the first time that Paul mentioned the Holy Spirit in this letter—the Spirit was mentioned all of four times in the first seven chapters—but the Spirit and His work will be addressed fully 17 times between verse 2 and verse 17. And this is what I was talking about at the beginning. Having thoroughly worked over the idea of what we were saved from and how that was accomplished by Christ Jesus, Paul then went on to tell us that this redemption has been applied to us by the work of the Holy Spirit.

See, we brought nothing to our salvation but the sin the made it necessary. Having been set free from the law of sin and death by the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit now dwells within us, the Spirit leads us, and

<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies...

—He will raise you from the dead—

...through his Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11 ESV

We will see this fully a little later in the chapter, but let’s look ahead for just a minute. Verses 29 and 30:

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he **foreknew**...

Those on whom He fastened His love from the foundation of the world (we’ll talk about what that means and doesn’t mean when we get to it),

<sup>29</sup> 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. Romans 8:29 ESV

And this is a clear reference to the text we considered a couple of weeks ago. Romans 8, verses 16 and 17:

<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ... Romans 8:16–17 ESV

We were predestined for this very thing by the power of God.

<sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also **called**, and those whom he called he also **justified**, and those whom he justified he also **glorified**. Romans 8:30 ESV

### **Subjected to Futility.**

Our salvation, in other words, is the work of God from beginning to end, and it is a done deal to the extent that God, having known us from before the foundation of the world, has given us the Holy Spirit as an absolute guarantee of a future inheritance that remains unseen at this point, but, as we noted last week,

<sup>18</sup> ...the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18 ESV

<sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction...

as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4,

...is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison... 2 Corinthians 4:17 ESV

So, the sufferings of this present time—the sufferings that all people endure, all the time, and also the sufferings that come in a peculiar way to the people of God (the sufferings that you may be enduring right now)—all of these are not worth comparing—they don't just pale by comparison; they are not even worth comparing—with the glory that is going to be revealed to us and in us.

The thing is, at the present time, we see—we experience—the sufferings. At the present time, light and momentary or not, the affliction is real. At the present time, we look at the world around us and what we see, in our lives and families, and even in the natural and political world—the very created order—is futility. You might recall the series that we had on the book of Ecclesiastes a while back. This was Solomon's problem, and has been the problem of mankind since the fall.

<sup>2</sup> Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. Ecclesiastes 1:2 ESV

<sup>14</sup> I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless...

(all of them are mere futility)

...a chasing after the wind. Ecclesiastes 1:14 NIV84

And we may not like this, but it's the way of the world. Verse 19 in our text.

<sup>19</sup> For the creation...

The creation itself—the universe; the natural order of things—waits, and

...waits *with eager longing* for the revealing of the sons of God. Romans 8:19 ESV

<sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly...

(not of its own choice)

...but because of him...

(because of God)

...who subjected it... Romans 8:20 ESV

You can go home and read about that in Genesis, chapter 3, if you want to know more. But notice this; it was God who subjected the creation to futility, but He did so "in hope" (in the certainty when it comes to God),

<sup>20</sup> ...in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:20–21 ESV

And I'm sure that there's a whole sermon in there somewhere, but at the least, we need to understand (especially in our day) that the creation is not waiting for us to fix it. The creation is waiting for the sons of God to come into our inheritance, because our inheritance is the new heaven and the new earth—the renovation and restoration of the creation—that will come only when Christ returns.

How do we know this? Verses 22 and 23.

<sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. Romans 8:22 ESV

And the earth—the creation—will endure until the promise of God is fulfilled, and the promise of God will be fulfilled, but in the meantime it groans in the pains of childbirth.

<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit...

(the Spirit of God dwells in us; that's what he means by the firstfruits of the Spirit),

...we ourselves...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies... Romans 8:22–23 ESV

and the redemption of our bodies happens at the resurrection of the dead, when Christ returns in glory, and

<sup>11</sup> ...he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11 ESV

In the meantime,

<sup>22</sup> ...the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now...

because the fullness of the promise remains to be fulfilled.

<sup>23</sup> And...we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:22–23 ESV

### **Saved In Hope.**

So, for the time being, we live with suffering and affliction; we live in a world that has been subjected by God Himself to futility, and you only have to turn on the news or go online to see that this is so—a world that seems meaningless, especially to those who have no hope beyond this world. But for those who trust in Christ—for those who have heard the proclamation that Jesus is Lord, and have bowed the knee, reiterating that profession and making it their own—for them, *there is* hope. In fact,

<sup>24</sup> ...in this hope we were saved. Romans 8:24 ESV

In what hope? In the hope of a renewed and reconciled creation—a world that has been set free from its bondage to corruption and obtained, once and for all, the glorious freedom of the children of God. In that hope. More still, we are saved in the hope that because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death, and because the Holy Spirit of God indwells us, and because He leads us, and because He bears witness with our spirit that right here, right now we are already the children of God, then

<sup>11</sup> ...he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:11 ESV

In other words, the redemption—the resurrection—of our mortal bodies at the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. We were saved in this hope. We were saved in the hope of a better life and a better world. But here's the thing, Paul went on to write in verse 24:

<sup>24</sup> ...hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? Romans 8:24–25 ESV

If we can see it—if we have it in our possession—then there's nothing to hope for. If we can have our best life now, then we haven't been saved in the hope of something far better than this sinful world (to say nothing of the fact that, as John MacArthur once said, if you can live your best life now, then the next life is going to be really unpleasant).

And what does this hope look like? Well, we don't know. "Hope that is seen is not hope." We cannot comprehend it by natural means, we have to come by faith, because, as the writer to the Hebrews said,

<sup>1</sup> ...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1 ESV

Even so, we have been gloriously saved, and that, here and now.

<sup>1</sup> There is therefore **now** no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life **has set you free** in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1–2 ESV

But we're on a journey. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit inwardly right now, but God is not finished with us yet. For now, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, even the redemption of our bodies. For, and let me read here from 1 Corinthians 15, verses 50 – 54:

<sup>50</sup> I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

<sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

<sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on

immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” <sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:50–54 ESV

This is the promise of God. This is the hope in which we were saved.

<sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. <sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV84

<sup>25</sup> ...if we hope for what we do not see, **we wait for it with patience.** <sup>Romans 8:24–25</sup> ESV