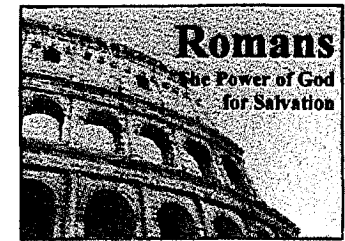


UNIT 17—Future Glory/Romans 8:18-27



TEXT

Future Glory

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not 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. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

^{a26}Or *how*

STUDY

READ

First Reading/First Impressions

What is this passage like to you?

☐ A Christian pep talk. ☐ A sales pitch for faith in hard times. ☐ A foundation to build on.

Second Reading/Big Idea

The word for this passage is _____

SEARCH

1. What type of suffering do you think Paul has in view here? (see 8:17)

2. How is "the frustration of creation" a good picture of what it feels like to be a Christian?

3. List all the reasons for, pictures of, and principles about hope that you can find here.

4. In this passage, what is the problem with each source of "groaning"? What images are associated with it? What is its hope?

	Problem	Image	Hope
(v. 22)			
(v. 23)			
(v. 26)			

APPLY

What did you see about hope in question 3 that means the most to you? Why?

With whom might you share that hope this week? How?

What ideas about "glory" do you get from considering what a world without decay would be like?

GROUP AGENDA

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What are some things that cause your spirit to soar? ☐ How does the weather affect your spirits? ☐ What person in your family is best able to cope with trouble? ☐ What did you jot down for READ? ☐ What older person do you admire for their outlook on life/death?

TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next answering 2, etc. ☐ How does Paul view the world and creation right now? How would this compare with the view of modern science? ☐ How would you explain the word "groaning" to a friend? ☐ What is the difference between hope and wishful thinking? ☐ How does the Holy Spirit enter into prayer? ☐ Case History: Your friend is slowly dying of leukemia. Your friend is a Christian and is struggling with why life has been so hard on him. How might you encourage him?

TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ When do you find your spirit and the Holy Spirit most in sync? ☐ What did you discover about yourself in APPLY? ☐ Do you tend to cave in or thrive under pressure and stress? What do you draw on for hope? ☐ When was the last time you did not know "how to pray"? Did you have any sense of the Spirit helping you to pray then? How?

NOTES ON ROMANS 8:18-27

Summary/Romans 8:18-27. The transition in Paul's thought from the former section (8:1-17) to this new section (8:18-27) really occurs at verse 17. There his focus shifts from the fact that Christians are the *children* of God to the fact that Christians are the *heirs* of God. It is this idea of inheritance that leads to the theme of verses 18-27: The *hope* which people have who are indwelt by the Spirit of God.

In 8:18-27 Paul first discusses what it is that is hoped for (vv. 18, 19, 21, 23b). He then sets this hope of glory over against the pain of the present (vv. 20, 22, 23-25). He ends by pointing out that the Holy Spirit "groans" alongside those who groan due to suffering.

It also needs to be noted that "This subsection will hardly be properly understood, unless the poetic quality displayed in it, particularly in vv. 19-22, is duly recognized. What is involved in these verses is not what belongs to the outward form of poetry, such things as artistic arrangement and rhythm, but rather those things which belong to its inner essence, imaginative power (to be seen for instance, in the use of images), feeling for the richly evocative and, a deep sensitivity, catholicity of sympathy, and a true generosity of vision and conception." (Cranfield)

v. 18 **I consider** . . . This could be translated: "I reckon." Paul has used this same Greek word in 3:28 ("we maintain") and in 6:11 ("count"). In each case he means by it a firm conviction which can be worked out logically from the Gospel message.

sufferings/glory . . . Paul defines the basic contrast that will be the subject of verses 18-27. His point: one's future glory (inheritance) vastly outweighs one's present distress (sufferings).

present sufferings . . . i.e., the persecution (see note 5:3) that Christians experience in the time between Jesus' first coming and his future return. These are real, not pleasant, but slight in comparison with the glory ahead.

vv. 19-21 The fate of humanity and the fate of the universe are intertwined. Just as through Adam's sin, creation also fell (Genesis 3:17); so too through the redemption of the sons of Adam creation will itself be restored (Revelation 22:3). In this section Paul has in view the second coming of Christ at which time all that Christians now experience *partially* will be theirs *completely*. See Philipians 3:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

v. 19 **eager expectation** . . . the image is of a person with excited anticipation scanning the horizon for the first sign of the coming dawn of glory. The only other occurrence of this word is in Philipians 1:20.

for the sons of God to be revealed . . . Christians are indeed sons and daughters of God here and now in this life. What Paul refers to here is the fact that they are, as it were, incognito. It will only be at the Second Coming that it is revealed for all to see who are, in fact, the children of God.

v. 20 **For** . . . verses 20-21 will explain why the creation waits with such eagerness for this revealing.

The creation . . . the whole of the non-human world, both living and inanimate.

was subjected . . . the verb tense indicates a single past action. See Genesis 3:17-19.

frustration . . . the inability of creation to achieve the goal for which it was created, that of glorifying God, because the key actor in this drama of praise—mankind—has fallen. This word is also translated "vanity" which is discussed extensively in the book of Ecclesiastes.

in hope . . . there was divine judgment at the Fall, but this was not without hope. One day, it was said, the woman's offspring would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

v. 21 **will be liberated** . . . creation will be freed from its frustrating bondage at the time of the Second Coming when the children of God are also freed from the last vestiges of sin.

bondage to decay . . . all of creation seems to be running down; deterioration and decomposition now characterize the created order.

v. 22 **pains of childbirth** . . . such pain is very real, very intense but also temporary and the necessary prelude to new life. The image is not of the annihilation of the present universe but of the emergence of a transformed order (Revelation 21:1). Childbirth was a common Jewish metaphor for the suffering that would precede the coming of the new age (Isaiah 26:17).

v. 23 **first fruits** . . . generally this term refers to those early developing pieces of fruit that were harvested and given to God, but

COMMENTS

here the idea is of a gift from God to people. The experience by the believer of the work of the Holy Spirit is a pledge that one day God will grant all that He has promised.

we ... groan inwardly ... one groans not just because of persecution but because one is not yet fully redeemed. Believers' bodies are still subject to weakness, pain, and death. The believer therefore longs for the suffering to end and for the redemption of the body to be complete (2 Corinthians 4:7-18, see box).

we wait eagerly ... in one sense a Christian is already an adopted child of God, but in another sense he/she has yet to experience fully his/her inheritance.

v. 24-25 Hope is connected with patient endurance as in 5:2-5.

v. 26 **what ... to pray** ... it is not clear whether this phrase refers to one's inability to know what one *ought* to pray, or to the problem in knowing *how* to pray (see footnote "e" below).

v. 26-27 Human frailty affects even prayer. Sometimes feelings are so deep and so inexpressible that it is the Holy Spirit himself who must pray for an individual. "Prayer is the Divine in us appealing to the Divine above us." (C. H. Dodd)

The Bondage to Decay (v. 21)

It all seems to be running down, slowing up, or stopping. Hot water always gets cold—it never spontaneously goes from 65°F to 212°F. A rolling ball always comes to a halt—it never starts up without being kicked, thrown, or hit. The logs in the fire get burned up and it grows cold—fire never burns without new fuel. Life is just like that.

Scientists think a lot about things of this sort. In fact this phenomenon (the one way flow of energy) is the subject of a major law of physics: the second law of thermodynamics. Scientists wonder why energy suffers "this curious one-way decay, this loss of value" (Jeromy Campbell).

We see this same thing as we look at the world around us. It is beautiful, it is enormously varied, and it teems with life forms. And yet as we walk through the magnificent forest, there beneath our feet are layers of rotted leaves, dead insects, and decay of all sorts.

One wonders what our world would be like had it not experienced the Fall and so been "subjected to frustration." Would there be no such thing as decay? Would the second law of thermodynamics be inoperative? What would it be like to live in a world in which the principle of death was absent?

One thing is certain. It is all going to change when Christ returns. When the groaning stops and the children of God meet their adoptive Father face-to-face, the very world itself will rejoice, for it too will be liberated. There is a mysterious, symbiotic link between the world God created and the human creatures He made to rule over it. Their fall resulted in the fall of the world. Their restoration will bring about its restoration.

But for now we have the groaning. Yet it is groaning in hope. The glorious vision of a

liberated world and a redeemed people is strong enough to lure us through the pain confidently into the future.

Treasures in Jars of Clay

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 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. —2 Corinthians 4:7-18