

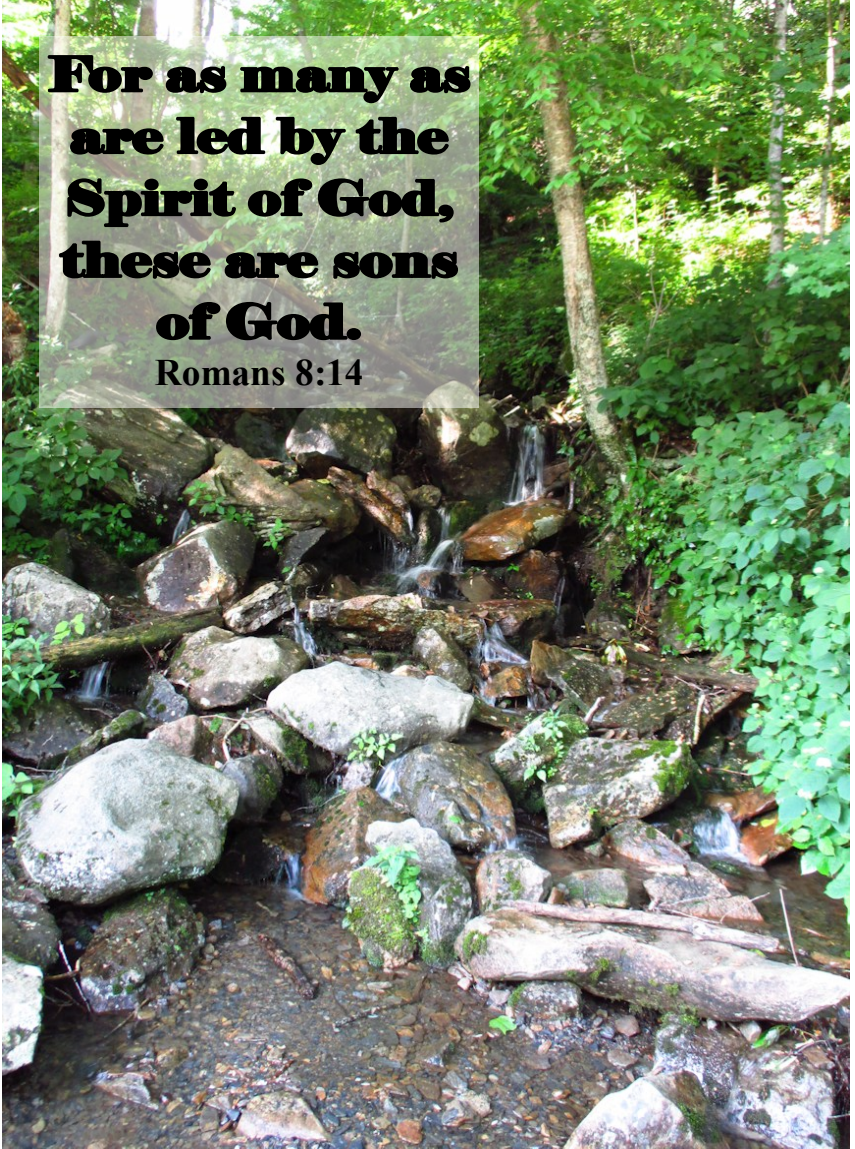
# Lessons from Romans Book 6

## Truth in Sequence

### Sonship and Adoption

**For as many as  
are led by the  
Spirit of God,  
these are sons  
of God.**

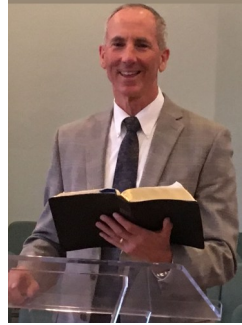
Romans 8:14



**Alaska Christian Ministry to Seafarers**

# Foreword

It is not so much that I like to write. Rather, after studying to preach, I often feel compelled to write. I always feel as if I have made a more lasting contribution after doing my best to put the Word preached into written form.



Best of all, I am most certainly encouraged to continue writing whenever anyone expresses their appreciation for any of our written materials. I must tell you that having two weeks of uninterrupted time to write in May 2023 with the content of Romans as my material was glorious indeed.

Let me share the view I had as I looked out the window and pondered how best to proceed.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig'.

Kevin Redig



All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NIV (1984 edition) or the NKJV (1982 edition).

**Vistoso Community Church**  
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# I. Oh, to Be a Mature Son!

Today, as the next step in our journey through the Book of Romans, we begin a study of two concepts: *sonship* and *adoption*. You will find one of these to be as challenging as anything you will find in the Scriptures and the other to be a great blessing! In sonship, we shall come face-to-face with the height of our Heavenly Father's call on the life of the believer. Then, in adoption, we will be blessed by the Father's unimaginable grace. Let's begin by turning to our text:

**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** Romans 8:14

This declarative statement is really a picture of the *destination* to which the Book of Romans has been leading us. It declares God's expectation for each and every one of His children! All that we have been studying—justification by faith, sanctification by means of the *Cross of Christ*, the *Life of Christ*, and the *Spirit of Christ*—are God's provisions to produce mature children of God!

What we learn, as we unfold this verse and those that follow, will provide the perfect opportunity to take a hard look at our own lives. It is spiritually healthy for us to do so in order to assess whether or not we are in step with the plan of God and making progress in appropriating what He has provided so that we might become mature children worthy of His approval!

In order to grasp the distinctive call contained in Romans 8:14, we must first look at John 1:12.

**Yet to all who receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God ...** John 1:12

The word translated *children* is the word typically used for a small child. As we carefully examine the Scriptures, we will see a powerful illustration drawing from our understanding of the process of physical birth and physical maturation as a means to explain the parallel spiritual process.

**Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."**

John 3:3

**If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation ...**

II Corinthians 5:17

Faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ leads to a spiritual birth. As a result, each of us can be said to be a *new creation* in Christ. At the point of faith, whether seven or 70, we become children of God! This prepares us to take a closer look at our text from Romans 8.

**For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**

Romans 8:14

The word translate *son* is quite different from the word used in the first chapter of John. This one is the word used to refer to a mature son. We see it used in exactly



This way in the phrases *Son of Man*, *Son of God*, and *only Begotten Son*. It is essential that you see this distinction. To believe in Christ leads to a spiritual birth and the receipt of both the life of Christ and His righteousness. All of this grace occurs prior to even the least bit of spiritual growth on our part. On the other hand, once we learn to walk by the Spirit, to the point that He has such a hold on our lives that we can be said to be *led by the Spirit*, then and only then can it be said that we are mature sons!

You see, new birth comes by faith, but maturity comes only after spiritual growth. Specifically, that growth comes by means of the Holy Spirit accomplishing the purposes of God in our lives: separation from the flesh, and manifesting the *Life of Christ* by the *Spirit of Christ*! To reinforce this very concept, the word translated *led* in Romans 8:14 means to lead by laying hold of, to influence, and to guide and direct. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit!

I was saved because the Holy Spirit laid hold of me, convicted me of sin, and pointed me to the Cross of Christ! But, having believed, God does not mean it to stop there. I can mature into sonship only as the Holy Spirit lays hold of me: guiding me into the truths of God's Word and manifesting the new life that is mine in Christ. Given that the Holy Spirit has been poured out during this, the time of the Church, it is no wonder that we are to have confidence regarding the potential to grow into mature sons:

**... being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

Philippians 1:6

*It should be of the utmost comfort to our souls to realize that He who has put His hand upon us will never relax His hold.*

Barnhouse

It should be equally clear to us that the goal of God's great redemptive work isn't infants in Christ. He wants mature sons in the image and likeness of His Son!

## A Lightbulb Should Go On!

Let me suggest that, as we understand these truths, several points should become clear:

- A lost person getting saved is reason for great rejoicing—not unlike bringing a newborn baby home for the first time. But, as joyful as this event might be, we can agree that there is an expectation that change will occur over time. Every parent looks for growth and development in their newborn, and now we know that God looks for it in His children as well! (Romans 8:14)
- So then, let's state it formally: A saved person who fails to grow spiritually is every bit as much a problem as an infant who fails to grow physically. This isn't my opinion, but the clear statement of Scripture!

**And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal.**

I Corinthians 3:1-3

**... though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant ...**

Hebrews 5:12-14

In the physical realm, when a newborn fails to grow as it should, it is diagnosed as a *failure to thrive*. This is heartbreaking for the parents. Let me suggest there is far too much of this malady in the spiritual realm, and it is equally heartbreaking for our heavenly Father.

- We must clearly understand the distinction between being *born again* in the family as a child of God, and becoming a *mature Son*! One is the result of the placement of faith in the person and work of Christ. The other is the result of perpetuating that faith into an abiding relationship with Him.



- Let's not forget that our text states it is those who are led by the Holy Spirit who reach maturity. This raises the question: What is the Holy Spirit's role? As we search the Scriptures, we find the Spirit indwelling (I Corinthians 6:19), teaching (John 14:26), filling (Ephesians 5:18), and enabling (Ephesians 1:19-20). In the process, the Holy Spirit is putting to death the misdeeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13) and producing fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). Not surprisingly, these are all a part of spiritual maturation. (Recall that these have all been described in previous publications and are the kinds of things we may need to turn back to on a regular basis as we seek to mature.)
- Given an understanding of the tasks of the Holy Spirit, we are ready to address the question I put before us earlier: *Does the Spirit have a hold of your life?* Is He teaching, enabling, and producing fruit? If not, what is it that is hindering His work of maturation? There are many possibilities: the world, the flesh, and seeking to make progress from a reservoir of your own strength rather than by means of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. It is always productive to ask, *How could I cooperate more closely with the Spirit in order to grow?* Perhaps it is more time in the Word, prayer, or other disciplines of the Christian Life!!

## Points of Application

At this point, let me suggest a few Points of Application.

First, I do not think I can overstate this principle: God's expectation for every one of His children is growth into Sonship, where Sonship is a reference to spiritual maturity. By spiritual maturity, I mean developing to the point we are caught up in our Father's plans, affections, and purposes in such a way that we can be entrusted with His business. The result should be that when people see us, they see Him!

**For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the first-born of many brothers.** Romans 8:29

Let me suggest to you that this is the outcome God wants and where all of the content of the past five chapters has been heading. We are to be clothed with His righteousness, identified with His death, raised to newness of life in Christ, enabled by His Spirit so that we might become mature sons in the mold of the *Firstborn*, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Second, if we are not progressing toward spiritual maturity—the kind of son or daughter a loving Father would desire—then we are not living the Christian life! How can I make such a claim? Look once more at Romans 8:29. We are to be like Jesus. Now, how does the Father feel about Him?

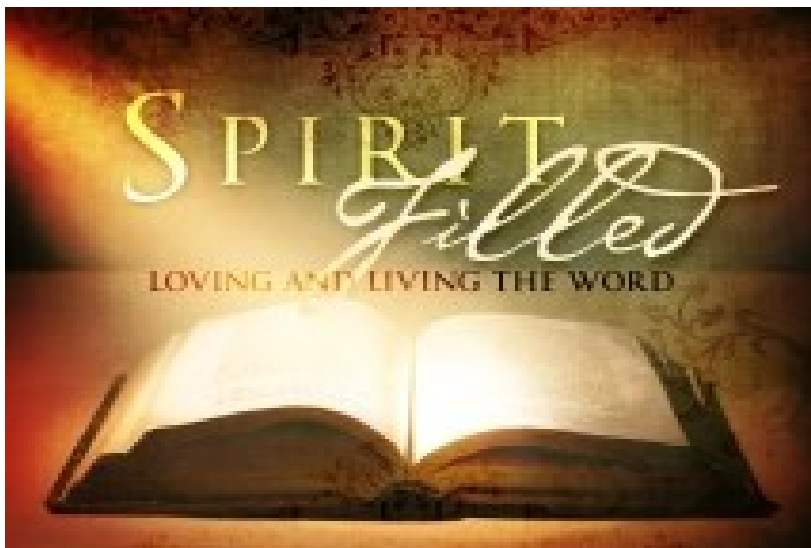
**"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."**  
Matthew 3:17

What we are learning right here has caused me to change my thinking. I no longer want to hear, "*Well done my good and faithful servant...*", but rather the voice of my heavenly Father saying, "*Well done My son—you have made me proud!*"

Think through carefully God's desire for us to become mature sons! It is very, very Biblical (Romans 8:14), and yet rarely a point of personal exhortation.

Finally, the witness and function of the local church is inexorably tied to the spiritual lives of the individuals who make up the local body. A local church cannot be any more *spiritual* than the spirituality of its membership. On the one hand, Lone Ranger Christians cannot accomplish the mission of the Church, no matter how biblically literate and grounded they might be! On the other hand, we cannot be a comely bride, unless we are individually comely.

There must always be a certain tension between individual growth and corporate function. You, individually, are not the bride of Christ in this locale. Rather, we collectively are the bride of Christ! This is why we must encourage each other in the faith! At the same time that we seek to mature individually, there should be a commitment to help the body mature corporately.



## Romans 8:15

This brings us to Verse 15:

**For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we call out, "Abba, Father."** Romans 8:15

When we placed our faith in the person and work of Christ many things happened—we are perhaps most familiar with the receipt of eternal life, but there is much, much more. For example, we changed dominions:

**For He (the Father) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

Colossians 1:13-14

When we were brought out of Satan's kingdom and into that of the Son, we did not exchange slavery and fear in one

for the same thing in another. On the contrary, what is ours in the Father's so-great plan of salvation is nothing like being in Satan's dominion. We have been redeemed out of slavery and set free—sins forgiven—no longer needing to fear death! Jesus did all of this for us!

**... by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.**

Hebrews 2:14-15



Satan has indeed truly blinded the lost when they would prefer slavery and the fear of an eternal separation from God rather than the salvation that is available in Christ Jesus our Lord. But the *Good News* of what God has in store for His sons and daughters is what He has left us here to share—to spread the news of a family relationship whereby we call Him Abba, Father!

Further, we must understand that the Father's salvation is not like being under some system of law.

**When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."**

Exodus 20:18-19

We are not saved to stand at a distance from our loving heavenly Father. We are saved that we might come *boldly before His throne of grace!* How can that be? Because ours is the glory of adoption:

**... but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."**

Romans 8:15

In the family of God, are we a slave or a son? Look at the text! We didn't trade one bondage for another. When we are saved, each of us is a son or daughter of our heavenly Father! What kind of son or daughter? One by Adoption. Jesus is *the only begotten Son*. Our sonship is by adoption.

In order to understand the significance of this verse, you must understand adoption in the ancient world. It was not like our modern day practice of adoption which typically involves an infant. Instead, adoption at the time Romans was written involved the adoption of one who could take on the role of an heir—an adult son.

As we become an heir of God, it is this that allows us to address the Father as *Abba*, a term of familiarity and intimacy. This is the very term that Jesus used to address the Father while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Perhaps you are thinking: *What do you mean I have been adopted as an heir? Why, that would imply an inheritance from God—for every believer? How could that be possible, and what could we possibly have done to deserve such a thing?* Asking these questions indicates you have not yet caught on to the grace of God! Far too many Christians have some vague understanding that they have become a child of God through faith in Christ, but then act as if, when the will is read, they are going to get \$50 and the old car that doesn't run anymore.

Is that what is preserved in the Scriptures for us to know and rest upon? Absolutely not! Paul knows just how important it is for us to have a correct understanding as he prays for those who believe:

**... remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints ...** Ephesians 1:16-18

The inheritance that is on reserve for us is a *glorious inheritance*! This idea of an inheritance brings us back to our study in Romans.



## II. If a Son, Then an Heir!

**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ ...**

Romans 8:16-17

Look back in your Bible to Romans Verse 14 all the way down through Verse 17. Didn't I tell you that we were going to receive an impossibly high calling? Our calling is to be mature, Spirit-led sons, like Jesus. At the same time, we are on the receiving end of unimaginable grace: What belongs to Jesus belongs to us, for we are joint heirs with Him! And, if we are joint heirs with Christ, then, of course, the Scriptures will speak of a future inheritance. They must!

**In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you ...**

I Peter 1:3-4

I know this is hard for us to grasp. We tend to view this as an extreme that can't really be true. On the one hand, we think the goal of becoming mature sons of God like Jesus isn't really possible. So, we leave it untried, not realizing that if God has called us to a supernaturally high quality of life, He will provide the supernatural means, which includes being led by the Spirit of God! On the other hand, when we hear about the inheritance that is ours by virtue of being sons, we don't really think that is possible either. The result is that we don't hold firmly to it as our future hope, which it is most definitely meant to be!

After finally understanding that God has saved us by grace, it is so hard for us to realize that every aspect of the Christian Life is dependent upon His grace to us: the

Cross of Christ, the Life of Christ, the Spirit of Christ ...  
and our inheritance as sons and daughters!

## Settling Some Issues

We have more to learn about the inheritance that is ours in Christ, but before we do, let's settle several related items in our thinking. First, we learned about the foundational truth of our *justification* back in Romans Chapter 3, where justification is a righteousness that will withstand the scrutiny of God's holiness. Not surprisingly, it is a provision of God for those who will turn to Him in faith:

**... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Christ, to all and on all who believe.**      Romans 3:22

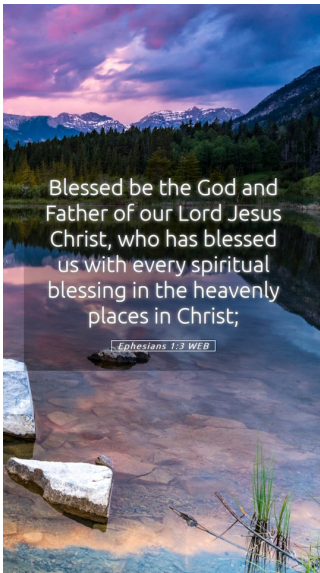
Now here is my question:

*Did our Savior come and go to the cross in order to do everything necessary for our justification so that we might merely be legally safe, or so that we would have a foundation from which to progress to spiritual and moral soundness?*

Of course, when I ask the question that way, there is only one possible answer! What we are learning in Romans is simply the fullness of this concept: God's plan is one whereby those who are saved progress to spiritual maturity such that they are adult children, well pleasing to the Father and conformed to the Firstborn, our Lord and Savior. Anything else is not the Christian Life!

Now, I have two options for you to consider. Once a person is saved for eternity, upon what basis does God unfold the Christian Life: *Is it devotion first that we might receive conditional blessing or is it unconditional blessing in anticipation of devotion to follow?*

I have asked this many times, and the average Christian almost always responds that God's plan requires devotion first. When they give that answer, they are thinking law and not grace. That is not God's way as revealed in the pages of Scripture!



Blessed be the God and  
Father of our Lord Jesus  
Christ, who has blessed  
us with every spiritual  
blessing in the heavenly  
places in Christ;

Ephesians 1:3 WEB

**Praise be to the God and  
Father of our Lord Jesus  
Christ, who has blessed us in  
the heavenly realms with every  
spiritual blessing in Christ.**

Ephesians 1:3

The Book of Ephesians isn't about how to get saved, it is to the Church and all about our position in Christ and the life that results from who we are in Christ. So, after a short greeting, in just the third verse of the book and before a single requirement

is placed upon the believer, we are told we already have every spiritual blessing. That blessing, in Christ, is on reserve for us in heaven. That's grace!

So, what comes first? Is it becoming a child of God with an eternal inheritance or first proving ourselves through commitment and surrender?

**Yet to all who received him, to those who believed  
in His name, He gave the right to become children  
of God ...**

John 1:12

**In His great mercy He has given us a new birth into  
a living hope ... and into an inheritance that can  
never perish, spoil or fade ...**

I Peter 1:3-4

Look at the verses. We enter the family of God through faith apart from anything else, and our inheritance is

given and secure right from the outset—that's grace! It is not until our family status in eternity is settled that we are called to take up the mantle of spiritual growth so that we might become like our Savior—denying self and taking up God's calling on our lives as we learn to appropriate all that His grace provides.

## Joint Heirs With Christ

Let's continue our investigation of what it means to be joint heirs with Christ. First, if we are heirs, then we should anticipate an inheritance! God has gone out of his way to apply the language of family to those who come to Him in faith: new birth, child, son, heir. Isn't an inheritance a natural expectation with such language?

**God is able.** Then why do we respond with such surprise? Do we consider God Almighty to be short of resources? Hardly! Nor are we relying on just one passage, for this is a consistent theme within the Scriptures:

**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.** I Peter 1:3-5

**Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession ...**

Ephesians 1:13-14

**I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints ...**

Ephesians 1:18

**That is not all!** We do not have just an inheritance. We are joint heirs with Christ! That means we have a share in what is His. It almost seems too wonderful, but what is His—is ours!

Allow me to show you and bless you at the same time:

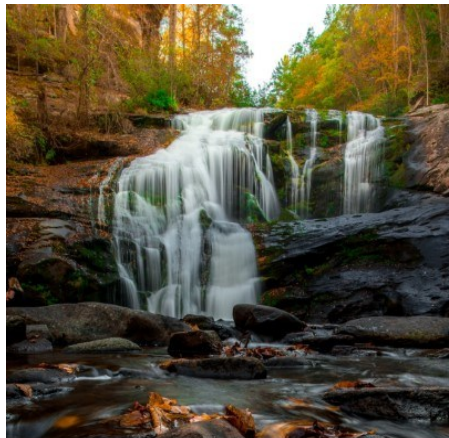
- We have a share in His home! How can this be? Because we are joint heirs!

**"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am."** John 14:1-3

- We are going to have a glorified body like His. It must be so if we are joint heirs with Christ!

**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.**

Philippians 3:20-21



*But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name:*

John 1:12 WEB



- We have direct access to the Father, because Jesus has access to the Father!

**... He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.**

Hebrews 9:12

**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ...**

Hebrews 10:19

**Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

Hebrews 4:16

- We share the destiny of Christ. Where He goes, we will be going!

**We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him ... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.**

I Thessalonians 4:14-17



**When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.** Colossians 3:4

**We are undeserving.** Once again, I understand that our inheritance seems to be so much more than we deserve! It is! That's what makes grace, grace. Once we settle in our thinking the astounding nature of what God has provided for those who will turn to Him in faith, perhaps we can, with greater earnestness, be about growing into all that He has provided. The Christian Life is not about what we do. It is about what God has provided and is able to do through us as we choose to believe and take Him at His Word!

**God has expectations.** Are there qualifications on our inheritance—exceptions, fine print? Consider the following and I'll let you decide!

**The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons ... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.** Hebrews 12:6-10

Our God is not *hands-off*! He has things in mind for those who come to Him in faith and He has ways of getting our attention. Sometimes the only way to develop us further is through trial. Is that unreasonable on His part? As we look back to Romans Chapters 6-8 and consider the *Cross of Christ*, the *Life of Christ*, and the *Spirit of Christ*—has our gracious God, in even the slightest way, failed to provide the means to meet His expectations?

Let me take you back to the way we began this section. If you recall, I told you that we were going to simultaneously receive an unimaginable blessing and an impossibly high calling. And so we have. God the Father has

brought those who trust in the work of His Son into a family relationship with Himself, such that they are His heirs and joint heirs with Christ Himself. That most certainly is the *blessing are first!* However, the expectation of the devotion to follow should sober us.

As we mature in the second phase of our salvation, we are to follow in the footsteps of our Savior by reckoning ourselves to have died with Him in order to deny self, and then walk in the new life He provides. In this new life we are enabled by His Spirit that we might, daily, take up His calling on our lives. This is not something that came from the mind of man, but a so-great salvation that is found in our God and nowhere else! I Peter 3:15 tells us to:

**Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.**

So, when someone asks, *"Why are you a Christian?"*

## "Phases" of our Salvation



"heirs of God...joint heirs with Christ"

As a mature son:  
"deny self...take up your cross"

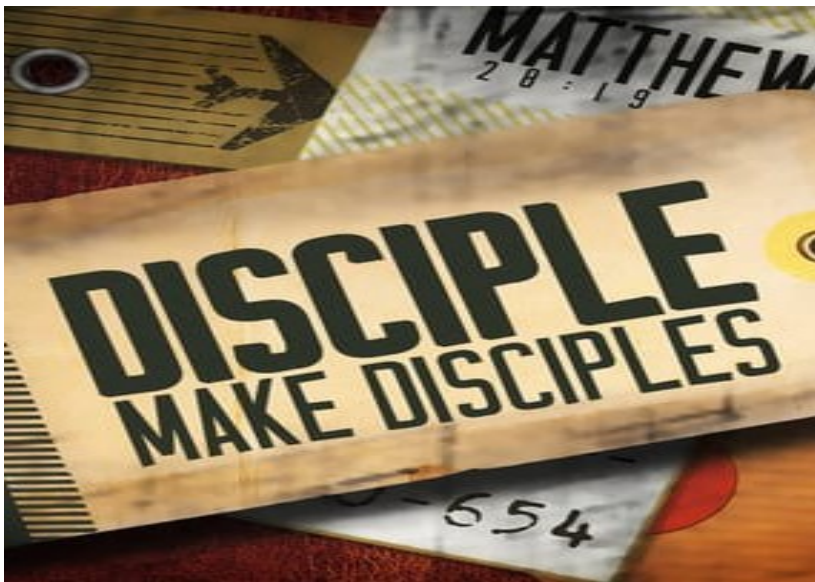
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*Why do you believe that stuff?" You could say, "Because I have eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ."* That would be a very good answer! But, should we understand the truths we have just studied, let me suggest an even better answer:

*God has cleansed me of my sin and made me His child, so that I would share in the life of Jesus, the heavenly home of Jesus and, one day soon, receive a resurrection body just like His. That's why I am a Christian and why I have put my faith in the truths contained in His Word!*

Should the person respond with something like, *"I wish I had your faith and your future ..."*, you have an opening to go further.

You can reply with something like, *"Jesus came to bring many sons to glory. (Hebrews 2:10) He'll accept you too! Sit down with me and I'll explain how you, too, can have my future and my faith!"*



### III. How Does Suffering Go With Being a Joint Heir?

To begin to answer this question, let's finish by looking at Verse 17 in its entirety.

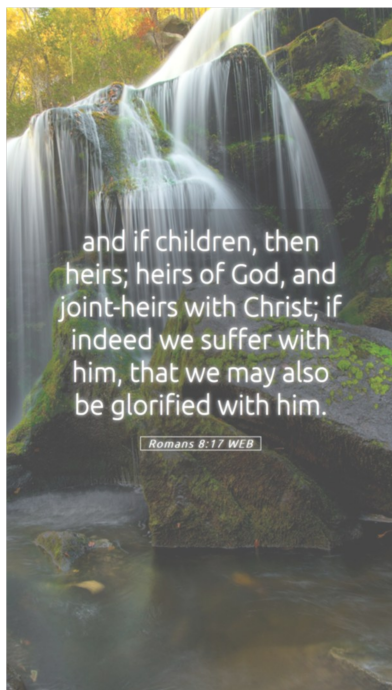
**... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, *if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*** Romans 8:17

We have considered the amazing blessing of the first half of the verse. What about the second half highlighted above in blue? Does this last statement raise some questions in your mind? Does it qualify everything we have just learned?

#### Two Errors to Avoid

Let me start by giving you two errors to avoid when studying Romans 8:17:

1. There are some who interpret this verse to mean that we are a joint heir with Christ, only if we suffer with Christ! In other words, they think that we have to earn our inheritance. The plain text of Scripture so often refutes false teaching if we will just spend the time to look. Go back to Page 14 in this book and look at the



Scriptures from I Peter and Ephesians. Our inheritance was put on reserve in heaven as part of our new birth. Having believed, the Holy Spirit was given as a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance! Was there even the slightest hint of earning our inheritance? Absolutely not!

2. There are also those who claim that suffering is proof that we *really* are joint heirs with Christ. Thus, if we avoid suffering, for example by failing to bear witness to Christ in order to avoid a neighbor's ridicule, it is proof that we are not *really* joint heirs. Some even go so far as to claim it proves that we are not even an heir—or even a child of God. Again, what Scripture readily comes to mind? How about Peter denying Christ to avoid conflict with a servant girl? Is there any possible way you could make the case Peter was not saved at that point? Again, absolutely not!

Okay, we have avoided two errors, but in the back of our minds this verse still raises questions. The correct interpretation is actually pretty straight-forward, but will require a bit of work. Consider the phrase, “... *if indeed we suffer* ...”. The little word *if*, in this case introduces what is called a first-class condition in Greek grammar. That means Paul is stating something he assumes is true, rather than attaching any kind of condition on the previous phrase. This would mean the second half of Verse 17 is communicating something like the following:

*... heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, assuming we are going to suffer with Him as well as be glorified with Him.*

As you can see, just a little bit of Greek work proves that Error #1 is complete rubbish!

## Points of Application

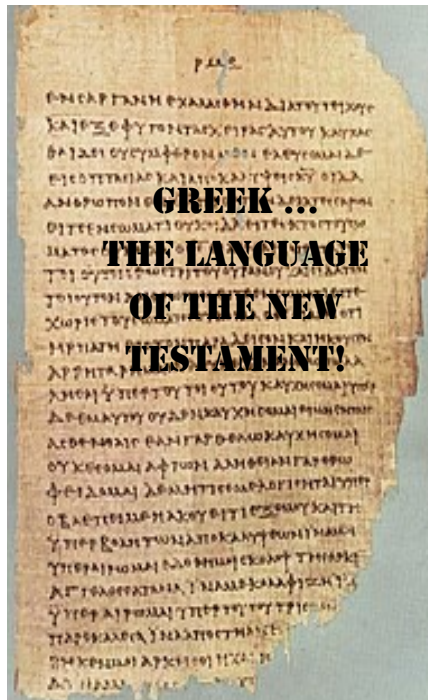
Now, since I brought up the use of Greek (the language of the New Testament) as a means of properly interpreting this passage, I do want to give you a few points of application as a caution to always be suspicious of an interpretation that depends on someone else's understanding of Greek!

1. Does the above interpretation of the last phrase in Verse 17 depend solely upon an understanding of the Greek language? What about the context? Look at the very next verse:

**For I consider the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**

Romans 8:18

Notice Paul continues talking about the subject of suffering! Why is that? Because in Verse 17 Paul has made use of the Greek language to assume that every Christian will suffer to one degree or another, and he smoothly continues to write about the subject he has raised—suffering. Notice, there is not a hint of a conditional nature to our inheritance, or need for proof of our family status.



2. Is the axiom of Christian suffering supported by other Scripture? I'd say so!

**Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.** Psalm 34:19

**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.** II Timothy 3:12

**For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.** Philippians 1:29

**Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.** I Peter 4:12-13

So as you can see, the assumption that suffering will come into the life of every believer is supported in the immediate context by the text of Romans 8:17, as well as many other portions of God's Word. A bit of Greek grammar can help us to understand the last part of Verse 17, but it is by no means the only piece of evidence pointing to the correct interpretation at which we have arrived. That leads right into Verse 18.

**For I consider 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

At this point, I want to pause and address something I think is very important for our fellowship to understand. In Verse 17, we have seen an expectation for suffering to come into the life of every Christian. Then, in Verse 18 we are going to receive a reminder that puts any suffering that comes our way into the context of eternity. So, what about suffering in the life of a Christian?

Naturally, most of us see suffering as something to be avoided. We exercise, even though we don't like it, take supplements, and do a host of other things in order to avoid physical suffering. We are not quite so organized when it comes to our spiritual life—but still—we know that suffering is to be avoided. Some seek to do so at all costs. However, it is not really possible to avoid suffering while living in a fallen world and in a corruptible body with a nature to sin! For a time we may be able to avoid the majority of suffering, but sooner or later, it is going to catch up with us in one form or another.

In fact, one of the most nonsensical positions of fallen mankind is to say something like the following when suffering finds them or a loved one: *How could a loving God let this happen?* This type of query is nonsensical because we are living: in rebellion against a Creator who is perfectly holy, ignoring His revelation, listening to the whispers of Satan—and then having the spiritual blindness to whine about the outcome!

Unfortunately, sometimes even Christians get caught up in this disappointment with God because they think that God should always protect them from any *fallout* in this



World. They hold this thought even though the Scriptures make it clear that heaven is their home, they are on a mission in enemy territory, and they still live in a fallen body!

## Suffering from a Biblical Perspective!

You can see that there are many reasons why we need to turn to God's Word and see what it has to say about suffering.

**First, misconceptions.** The world either thinks things are continuing on as they always have while some even hold out hope for some kind of glorious man-made utopia! The Bible says both of these ideas are wrong!

**First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' He promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ... the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ... The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ...** II Peter 3:3-11

God is patient, not wanting any to perish, but the Day of the Lord will come, judgment will follow, and God will continue to unfold His plan until He has made all things new.

**A guaranteed outcome.** Every child of God needs to keep in mind that we are in the midst of an unfolding drama, with many story lines, and, thankfully, a guaranteed outcome! I can summarize the details of this great drama in this way:

- In Adam all die ... (Romans 5)
- Unless you believe ... you will die in your sins ... (John 8)
- Satan is the ruler of this world (I John 5)
- We fight not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil ... (Ephesians 6)
- God called us out of darkness into His wonderful light (Ephesians 5)
- So, we are to redeem the time (Ephesians 5)
- God is making His appeal through us ... be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5)
- We are aliens and strangers in this world (Hebrews 11)
- Who are waiting for our Blessed Hope (Titus 2)
- In the meantime, finish the race of faith, testify to the Gospel of grace (II Timothy 4, Acts 20)
- Be caught up in the grandest rescue operation of all time (Matthew 28)
- For our light and momentary troubles are achieving an eternal weight of glory and the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory to come (II Corinthians 5, Romans 8)
- We have a hope that does not disappoint ... ever! (Romans 5)

**The key question.** You and I live right in the midst of the unfolding drama I just described. That prompts me to ask:

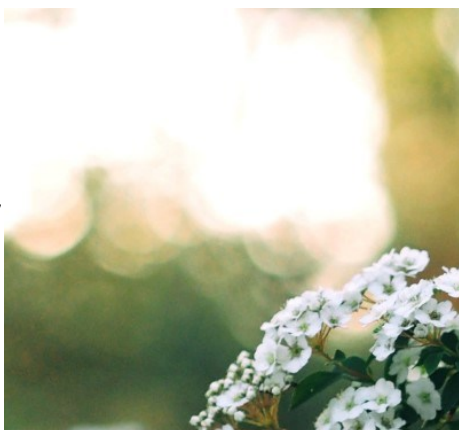
*Is there any way we could possibly think we could somehow live a life free of any sufferings, trials, and tribulation?*

The answer to this question is no if you have children, an extended family, or are growing older! It is certainly no if you are going to engage in the mission of the Church to bear witness to the person and work of Christ! Suffering, trials, and tribulation are waiting at our doors. Because we are Christians, we should know something that will allow us to give thanks even in the midst of trial:

*All trial and tribulation has the potential to be used by God for good, His ultimate glory, and is often for our direct benefit.*

Perhaps you are thinking, *You are going to have to prove that to me!* I accept that challenge!

**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.** Romans 8:28



ROMANS 8:28 WEB

*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.*

**And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.** Romans 5:3-5

Although this is just an introduction, already we have trials and tribulation being used by God for our good and being used to produce character and hope. These outcomes must be seen as more desirable than the world's false promise of sheltering you from hardship. Why? Because a lack of character and an absence of hope are their own form of suffering! Furthermore—look around! The world really can't shelter anyone from suffering, regardless of what it promises.

**More on Suffering.** We are digging further into the topic of Christian suffering because Romans 8:17 says plainly that we are going to share in the sufferings of Christ. You may have noted I have expanded the idea of suffering to include trials and tribulation. That is because I want us to consider all the kinds of things which challenge us in this life and can all too often cause



*and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him.*

Romans 8:17 WEB

us to become discouraged or perhaps even turn from God in unbelief. So, whether it is a bit of persecution for your stand on the truths of the Scripture or a bad diagnosis from the doctor, we need to be mentally prepared!

Is this expansion of the idea of suffering warranted? Consider the following:

- Did not Jesus suffer the privations associated with *dwelling among us* during His First Advent? Consider that He faced things like fleeing for His life from Herod, rejection by His family, betrayal by one of His closest companions, and ultimately the crucifixion!
- Further, is there a standard template for Christian suffering? Is it not true that some face issues in their extended families, others face issues of health, while others outside of America find their very lives threatened as the result of their faith? There is no *one size fits all*, thus we simply need to be prepared, no matter what comes our way—whether suffering, trials, or tribulation!

In the same way the Scriptures assume we are going to suffer with Christ, they also make the issue of trial and tribulation a foregone conclusion:

**... though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.** I Peter 1:6

**Understanding the Causes.** What causes trials, tribulation, and suffering to come into our lives?

- Living in a fallen world!  
**... in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay ... we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.**

Romans 8:20-22

Natural disasters, illness and disease—everything from Covid to cancer—are the result of sin entering God’s perfect creation. Furthermore, this is the reason things wear out, bad people commit crimes, and Christians are sometimes victims. We live here and we share in the sufferings of this world.

Certainly, God preserves and provides for His own. More importantly, He has provided us with a home in the new creation to come where there will be no more death or sorrow. In the meantime, ours is to trust and serve Him, even as we suffer through what it means to minister in a fallen world.

- We also suffer because we are in the midst of a spiritual battle.

**“Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you ...”** John 15:20

**For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**

Ephesians 6:12

The *they* of John 15:20 are, of course, people. They are people for whom Christ died, as well as those who are blinded by Satan and doing His will. Our struggle is not ultimately with the lost, but with the one who is simply using them to attack the plans and purposes of God. Naturally, that can bring suffering upon us!

- It must be mentioned that we all too often suffer because of *self-inflicted* wounds! Sometimes the truth is: The boss didn’t fire me because of my Christian testimony, he fired me because I was late for work every day!

We need to make sure that when suffering comes our way that we didn't bring it upon ourselves because of our shortcomings or sin!

**Standing Firm.** How do we stabilize when suffering, trials, or tribulations come our way? How do we get past the "*Oh God, how could you let this happen*" stage? Let me suggest we start with Deuteronomy 29:29:

**The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us ... .**

This passage reminds me that there are some things about the trials that come my way that I am never going to know. But the things that God has revealed to me in His Word are mine to hold firmly until the end.

Things like:

**" ... you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good ... "**

Genesis 50:20

**And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**

Romans 8:28

Eventually, we need to reach the point where we choose to rest upon the goodness of God as One who is "*too wise to make a mistake and too loving to be unkind.*" (Pink)



**For Good.** Lest you think *working all things together for good* is simply pabulum, the following are some ways God uses the trials we go through for good.

First, He uses trials and tribulation to refine our faith!

**In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

I Peter 1:6-7

Just two verses earlier, the text speaks of the inheritance every child of God has on reserve in heaven! So, how did we get to the trials of Verses 6-7? God tell us:

**... these (trials) have come so that your faith ... may be proved genuine!**

We ask, *How does this work?* In this answer we have a wonderful illustration built around the concept of being *refined by fire*. A piece of gold ore, like the one at left,



would be very valuable. But to make it more valuable still, it must first perish! The word translated *perish* in our text literally means to *come apart*. In the refining of gold ore, the first step is to crush the ore and then apply heat in order to separate the pure gold from the dross (the rest of the rock).



The end of the process is an ingot of gold, or perhaps an

item of jewelry, both worth much more than the ore from which the gold was purified.

In the same way that gold is refined by or through the crushing and heating process, our faith is refined by trials. We enter the Christian Life by faith, but it really should be called *faith-plus!* We have trusted in Christ, but we also tend to trust in our bank account, intelligence, talents, and abilities. These, and many other things, are collectively *dross*. The dross must go if our faith is going to be pure! God has a way of using trials and tribulation to get rid of everything but faith in Himself and the promises which He has given to us in His word. In short, every Christian is going to spend some time in the crucible! Why? In order to refine our faith, for God will delight to honor a faith that is in Him alone!

The second reason trials and suffering come into the life of the believer is to build character which, in turn, leads to confidence!

**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**

James 1:2-4

Like a rigorous practice schedule for an athlete, trials allow the child of God to develop the ability to persevere in faith. Without the ability to persevere in faith, we are said to be immature, incomplete, and lacking with respect to the Christian Life. Furthermore:

**... we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.**

Romans 5:3-5

Notice carefully what initiates the process that leads to both perseverance in the faith and confidence regarding the future. It is suffering! Further, to clarify, Biblical hope is a confident expectation of what is to come.

It will take time for this to become part of our thinking, because it is contrary to our nature. We can understand the goal of a pure faith, the ability to persevere in the faith, and a steadfast confidence in the ability of God to do what He says He will do. But, we seem to think it can be obtained by coasting down hill! That is neither the crucible nor perseverance! It is the long steady climb uphill that develops the ability to persevere.



By way of application, we will not develop perseverance in the faith apart from walking by faith in the midst of suffering and then coming out the other side still trusting in God and His promises to us!



Further, let us not fail to make the connection to character. The principle is simple: learning to persevere in the face of difficulty comes first. We do not love another until it is in spite of their unlovely behavior. We can't forgive unless we have first been wronged. We are not patient unless we have cause for anger, not humble unless we have cause for pride, and not merciful until we have been given a reason to condemn! Character is not a possession in our billfolds; it is something that is forged in the midst of trial that it might become a spiritual habit!

This is God's ongoing desire for our Christian walk! Do you want to see what it looks like when someone understands the above? Consider this quote from

Hudson Taylor, who had gone through great trials in both his personal and ministry life, and much suffering:

*He, I know, is able to carry out His will and His will is mine ... So, if God places me in great perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? ... the work and strain are all gone. His resources are mine, for He is mine ... all this springs from ... (oneness with Christ).*

Hudson Taylor

**Sufficiency of grace.** A third reason for suffering and trial is to show us the sufficiency of God's grace in the midst of our own weakness.

**Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

II Corinthians 12:8-10

The principle is in Verse 8: God uses suffering to make it clear that we are weak, so that in turning to Him, we might learn the sufficiency of His grace. I must admit, I have had to learn and re-learn this lesson many times. But look at Paul's response in Verse 9—it is amazing! In essence, he says, "*Lesson learned!*" Then, from that moment forward, he begins to boast in his weaknesses that the power of Christ might be manifest in him. He has even learned to delight in trial and sufferings because his weaknesses is a showcase for the Lord's strength.

That's the mindset of a spiritual giant. We may not be able to learn to listen as quickly as Paul, but learn we can by means of the Word of God, our teacher the Holy Spirit, and the trials and tribulations the Lord skillfully brings our way.

**To change our focus.** Let me close our list of reasons why the Lord brings suffering and trial to us with this thought: God cares more about what we become than He cares about what we do—far more. Trials, suffering, and tribulation help shift the balance from our emphasis on *doing* to His on *being*! Just consider these calls from the Scriptures, and see wherein lies the emphasis—on doing or being:

- Sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to what He has to say. (Luke 10)
- Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Romans 12)
- Abide in Me and I in you. (John 15)
- Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me. (Matthew 11)
- Be conformed to the image and likeness of His Son. (Romans 8)
- Faith is the victory. (I John 5)



## One Closing Point on Suffering

What happens if we come to our senses and realize the suffering or trial in which we find ourselves is of our own making? In other words, our suffering is self-inflicted suffering and not of the Lord unless it is for the purpose of discipline! If we realize this is the situation, it is a very good sign, as it was in the life of the prodigal son of Luke 15. The next step is confession of sin, which causes us to rest in the cleansing that is available through the *Blood of Christ*.

At the point of confession, there is something we can count on: The trial or suffering may not go away, but it will allow God to use even our failures for good. Consider how He did just that in the life of Peter and with every other prodigal who has turned back to Him! How do I know this? I know this because our Savior is interceding for us even now:

**... Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, Who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.**

Romans 8:34



## IV. Balancing Time and Eternity

This short investigation of suffering was begun because Romans 8:17 assumes we are going to suffer with Christ, and then Verse 18 continues the concept with *the sufferings of the present time*. Now that I have raised your awareness, you will begin to see it is the norm in the plan of God. For example, I am sure we would agree with Paul's statement in Philippians: *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of His resurrection ...* But, how about the rest of the verse?

**... and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death ...** Philippians 3:10

There we have it—a share in His sufferings and His death. Perhaps your response is, "*No thank-you!*" But Peter also saw suffering as normative and part of our calling as Christians.

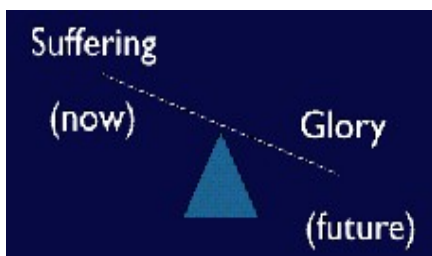
**For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.** I Peter 2:21

The Lord Jesus isn't asking us to do anything for which He hasn't already led the way! We are simply, by faith and in the power of the Spirit, to follow in His footsteps. Perhaps you are thinking: "*Pastor, I wish you had never brought up this subject. There is no way I can ever embrace it.*" I didn't bring it up. The Word of God did, and I think you can embrace it if you will turn your attention to Romans 8:18. You see, the key is to learn to balance suffering in time with what is to come in eternity.

**For I consider 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

## Present Sufferings

Present sufferings always get our attention, and if we are not careful, will carry more *weight* in our thinking than anything else. But Paul is reminding us that should we put our sufferings on a scale, no matter what they are, the glory that is ours as a child of God and a joint-heir with Christ is far weightier. In fact, it isn't even close! If we forget this, our trials can discourage us. But, should we correctly place them within the plans and purposes of God, we can persevere through them with glory on our minds!

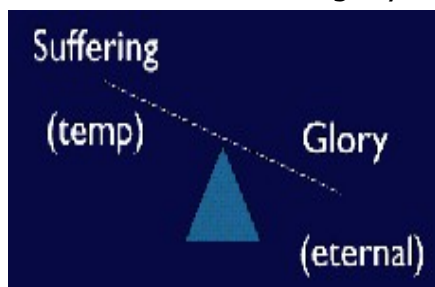


If that is not enough, we can extend this a bit further:

**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.**

II Corinthians 4:17-18

Notice the same subject is in view: our current troubles in contrast with future glory. But now, the contrast isn't



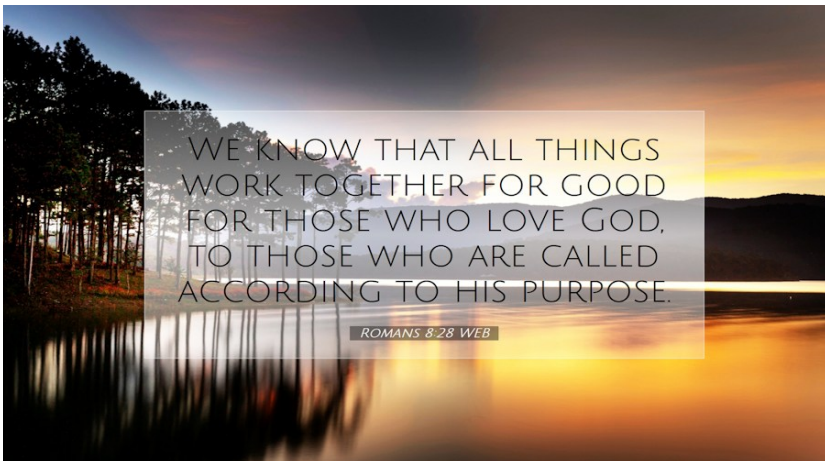
between the present and the future. It is about the temporary nature of our suffering in comparison with the eternal duration of the glory to come. Once again, which one should carry

more *weight* in our thinking? Paul answers it for us: The unseen glory to come should carry far more weight, because it is eternal in duration!

## Our Future Glory

Allow me to give you a few things to consider regarding our future glory:

- The glory to come for the child of God is not, I repeat not, a *you must earn it* kind of promise! Nor is it contractual. This is a very hard lesson for most of us to learn, in part because there is a lot of bad theology out there which is trying to get us to believe otherwise. Go back and look at the Scriptures we have covered: We become a child of God through faith alone in Christ alone. Once saved we have an inheritance on reserve in heaven. We are heirs—in fact joint heirs with Christ—so glory is coming in spite of suffering in the present. The promise is not dependent upon our faithfulness. So do we push the call to faith aside? Of course not! The whole point of fixing our eyes upon the glory to come is to help us walk-by-faith in the present!



- These truths are very simple. No matter the hand you are dealt, no matter the trial or tribulation that comes your way, future glory is incomparably greater than current suffering! Furthermore, one is temporary and the other, the glory, will last forever!
- At a minimum, the glory to come is a reference to our inheritance as joint heirs with Christ, which includes:

His home

His glorified body

His access to the Father

His destiny

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**All of it is on reserve and guaranteed!**

## In Closing

I trust the topics in this booklet have been a blessing to you! But perhaps you are wondering, "*Where do we go from here?*" To answer that question, we are going to take up the consideration of a marvelous collection of things we can know with absolute certainty from the second half of Romans Chapter 8!

As we look at our nation and our world, so many things seem uncertain. If we are honest, that even includes our own faithfulness. Let me suggest we can greatly improve our walk of faith as we keep our attention upon those things that are certain, because they are the work of a faithful, sovereign, and almighty God!

So look for the next publication in the series to encourage you in the fullness of the Gospel of Christ.



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