

“How the Lord Knows Suffering in the Life of the Believer”
The Normal Christian Life – Paul's Testimony Still Speaks, Part 5

Review: Our Opportunity Today Under Grace Is to Live After the Spirit

- ***We Are No Longer Debtors to the Flesh but to the Spirit***
- ***As the Sons of God, We Have a Godly Leading Always, So Rejoice!***
- ***Now We Are Free Indeed to Walk in the Spirit Rather Than the Flesh***

- ***We Are No Longer Debtors to the Flesh but to the Spirit***

Romans 8:12-14

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

- The implications of this teaching in verses 10 & 11 are indeed very great. We will see that as we continue. And so what does the “therefore” reveal about what was already taught here?
- That “we are debtors . . . , not to the flesh, but to the Spirit indwelling.” Indeed. Such great blessings poured out upon us so freely ask of us a reasonable response, do they not? And we must have liberty, therefore, for the apostle to make this otherwise potentially life-changing statement.

As we pointed out in our last study, it helps us to comprehend better Paul’s intent with these words here if we consider the contrary truth: that as unbelievers **we were debtors, not to the Spirit but to the flesh!** In other words, as the first verses in the previous chapter show, the bondage to the nature of the fallen nature derived from our father Adam was unbreakable. It may have seemed otherwise to us, but we were deceived.

- The implied exhortation here in verse 13 troubles some, as what kind of punishments might be appropriate for carnal living for those saints living under grace? Surely not what the law of Moses demanded, for failures to keep that law often even required the death penalty. But that seems to be the understanding of the KJV translators here in using the future tense: “for if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” In other words, this is just as it would have been under Moses.

In the Greek text, however, though the language does have future tenses, here we do not find future tenses of the verb “to live” as implied in the

translation here, but rather future tenses of the verb “to be about to be”.

It is helpful to render it quite literally in this way: “For when you are living after the flesh, you are about to die, but if you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you shall live.”

- Therefore, since we are now liberated and no longer debtors to the flesh, we have the privilege of living after the Spirit. Sin had bound us before, but now we have been liberated by the full consequence of abundant and free grace. Amen.
 - What we are learning here is the greatest of encouragement indeed, especially in contrast to Paul’s teaching concerning his time as a believer living under the supposed condemnation of the law that went before. For as sin has reigned unto death, now grace may gloriously reign unto life in its place, as Romans 5 proclaims in its closing verses.
- ***As the Sons of God, We Have a Godly Leading Always, So Rejoice!***

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

- So now we reach verse 14, this wonderful statement, again, like the others, true of ALL of us who have believed and have been so transformed by God as Paul has so faithfully shared with us here: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” This leading is something we all have by virtue of the indwelling Spirit of God. Praise God.

The essence of Paul’s teaching on the Normal Christian Life is that grace and its full knowledge have the power to transform one’s life apart from any of the legal structures of religion. So that bold statement about our sonship, implying full rights and privileges over our inheritance, is intended to be such a motivator that, together with all the helps of God Almighty, we shall shine like lights in the world. These are precious words indeed.

- ***Now We Are Free Indeed to Walk in the Spirit Rather Than the Flesh***

Yes, we are free indeed to live above and beyond the desires of the flesh. We are no longer debtors. But the flesh still resides in each of us And law encourages the flesh ... so the issue for us today is very much one of our motivations. The teaching of our apostle makes clear that relationship.

Legal motivations vs gracious motivations for our living are, of course, at the very center of all of this. Law **demand**s obedience to its countless requirements,

while grace provides enablements and asks for our compliance, our recognition of those provisions. What a difference indeed that is. Amen?

- The tone now shifts significantly from doctrinal teaching to that which is very practical. That now becomes the major subject here in this foundational Pauline letter: the suffering of believers, its purpose, and its glorious consequence.

That is a large subject indeed, but an important one. For the suffering of God's dear children is the basis for the enemy's lies so often, isn't it? How many have been led astray and their faith shattered as a result?

In this study, we have the blessing of continuing on this glorious note here in Romans, chapter eight:

Our Outline Today: "How the Lord Knows Suffering in the Life of the Believer"

- ***Our Privilege As Sons Is to Suffer and to be Glorified Together With Christ***
- ***Our Sufferings Today Are Nothing Compared with the Coming Glory!***

I. Our Privilege As Sons Is to Suffer and to be Glorified Together With Christ:

- We are no longer debtors but sons indeed, and therefore privileged to walk in newness of life. The very Spirit of the living God dwells within us as well as the Father and the Son, praise God. We are the temple of God!

However, there is another part of this story that comes next, and that cannot be left out. The former may seem rather "doctrinal", but this part is "practical". It has to do with our suffering. Paul writes of it in his first letter, the letter to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 2:13-20

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

14 For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they *have* of the Jews:

15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men:

16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

17 But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

18 Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.

19 For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?

20 For ye are our glory and joy.

- Paul writes of this suffering in our passage here in Romans 8 in the verses we have now reached:

[READ] Romans 8:15-17

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

- So God's ending for us is glorious indeed. But the pathway there is also ordained, he writes, and it will include our suffering. The Lord always knows the end from the beginning, for he has planned and engineered our salvation, our lives, and our glorious eternity! And he knows our road to that glory as well.
- "... ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father": We have an intimate relationship, and we therefore have no reason to fear due to our previously unsaved condition of spiritual bondage to sin and death. Why? Because of the intimacy of our new relationship with the Trinitarian God as revealed here, all in three verses. Here it is with the Father, our heavenly Father! Then it is with the Spirit and finally with the Son. And our blessed Lord Jesus is right in the middle of it all, most wonderfully. We are so blessed together with him, even in his sufferings! See Colossians 1 for that teaching in all of its power.
- "... the spirit within witnesses with our spirits" that indeed we are children of the Father. This is an interesting verse indeed.
- And now the wonderful promise and one that includes not only our future glorification together with Christ but also our current trials and burdens of suffering, but, as he writes, also "together with him", praise God!
- The whole point of the apostle's teaching here is what this all means (or should mean) for us, considering the burdens we do bear here and especially as we live godly in Christ Jesus. And we are called to live godly, are we not?

Philippians 1:27-30

27 Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

28 And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

29 For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

30 Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

- These verses speak of a serious engagement in living the normal Christian life, one that is so visible that the contrast with the world and its ways is undeniable. But there are consequences of such living:

[READ] 2 Timothy 3:10-12

10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,

11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

- So what is our expectation to be? First the sufferings, and then the glory. And this is a fundamental principle our Lord has taught as well:

Luke 24:25-26

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

- So we have every reason to be hopeful because we are part of the Lord's eternal plan and we are in the very center of his working. But our suffering is part of the plan, and that is fundamental here, isn't it? Paul had learned this through his sufferings, and he is testifying to that here. Amen.

So again, knowledge is right in the center of this teaching, for our experience of God's great working under grace is dependent upon it. One can never reckon upon what one knows nothing about.

II. Our Sufferings Today Are Nothing Compared with the Coming Glory!

[READ] Romans 8:18-21

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the **earnest expectation** of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

- This is the teaching now that underscores verses 15-17: To summarize, we now learn the facts presented and the reckoning as our example through Paul (as before his testimony was also so important, wasn't it?).
- In one sentence, he presents the facts as he knows them: "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us". And don't forget, this is his testimony. Is it ours? And then he explains this further in verses 19-21:
 - The whole creation and we ourselves surely "wait" earnestly and expectantly "...for the manifestation of the sons of God": such a hopeful expectation indeed is ours, IF we will receive it and reckon on it! The Greek word translated "earnest expectation" here (and also in the other place it is found) means to "stretch out the neck in anticipation"! To repeat, one cannot reckon upon what one knows nothing about!

[READ] Philippians 1:19-21

19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

20 According to **my earnest expectation** and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

- So we have the ultimate expression of this critical truth, that Paul is our example of how God is working today under grace. It was Paul's "earnest expectation", with outstretched neck in anticipation, that made the difference for him, and that is his testimony there in the Philippian letter and also here in the Romans. Is it ours? May it ever be, praise God.

- And now he goes even deeper in his explanation (note the word “for”). First, the statement of fact and then the details needed for our understanding: “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope ...”. First, the statement of hope, if we are willing to by faith receive it (so we therefore can reckon upon it):
 - For despite Adam’s Fall and its consequences for him, Sara, and their offspring, and the entire creation as well that has been tainted with its many effects, there is nevertheless hope, he writes here. Any why?
 - “... Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” A glorious future indeed awaits the creation, and we ourselves, who are not only a part of that but the central focus of the work of God under grace. Praise God for such a positive and encouraging hope! But what does verse 20 say?
 - “For the creation was made subject to vanity”: Vanity means perishable or subject to decay; it is the opposite of salvation in the Greek language.
 - “ ... not willingly”: Or, through no personal choice or of its own will? Here, it seems to refer to Adam and all others of humankind, but even the entire creation is implied.
 - “... but by reason of the creator himself...”: This is perhaps the best translation according to the context here and in the next verses. The creator rules the creation. He “owns” it as it were. And he allowed Adam’s sin and brought the consequences as he willed. Can we stand in judgment of that? God forbid.
 - “... because ...”: Here we see the culmination of it all and therefore the implied purpose and final end behind the Lord’s judgment and curse upon Adam and the creation itself. The mark of hope for his final resolution is there, and the word of hope opens our hearts and minds to it. Amen.

This is indeed the hope against hope, the hope in the

unseen, our ultimate deliverance into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Amen. Encouraging?

Conclusions / Exhortations:

- Such encouragement we have received here at Paul's feet in this study.
- Praise God that Paul's mind and heart were in the heavenlies where ours should be also.
- I have been encouraged by Paul's teaching here today, and I sincerely hope you have been too! Even our sufferings are part of his eternal plan of glory, for us and for the creation in general. And so much is contained in that one word in verse 20 "... by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Subject to vanity Not willingly ... but by reason of the creator himself, because ...
 - "... Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." May we all gain the same understanding Paul had as he suffered so much indeed "for the glory of God"!
 - Our Lord God has a purpose therefore for everything, even our suffering.

[READ] 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

6 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.