

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

Putting Suffering into Perspective

Romans 8:18-27

2000

Introduction

In the opening verses of Romans 8, we discovered that we, who are in Christ, are set free from the law of sin and death. Our lives are now marked by the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit who is able to do in and through us what we were unable to accomplish in our sinful and weak flesh.

However, life's challenges are not immediately over. There is still the inescapable reality of suffering and pain in this life. The question is why? And how should we respond?

I God's Perspective On Suffering

A. Suffering in the believer [verse 18a]

Consider = Logizomai = It refers to reaching a settled conclusion as the result of careful study and reasoning.

Paul came to the settled conclusion that:

1. Present sufferings are an **expected** part of the Christian life

a. Jesus suffered

Heb 2:10 "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."

Heb 5:8-10 "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

b. **Paul** suffered

Paul's life was marked by hard work, hunger, and imprisonment. And when he wasn't being shipwrecked or stoned, he was being beaten to within an inch of his life (2 Cor 11:23-27)

2 Cor 1:8-9 "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

c. We will suffer

In John 16:33, Jesus told us that we would have trouble in this life, but that we should take heart, knowing that He had overcome the world.

1 Peter 4:12-13 “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.”

Application: Everyone Suffers

Those who do not know Christ have no hope when they suffer. Their suffering produces no spiritual blessing or glory. Their pain, loneliness, and afflictions serve no divine purpose and bring no divine reward. Christians on the other hand have every reason to hope when they suffer because our suffering will one day end and even in the midst of it, we have the knowledge that our suffering actually provides us with the opportunity for enormous growth in this life and eternal glory in the life to come.

How should we respond? With rejoicing and joy! Why??

1. 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.” Rom 5:2-5
2. Suffering “develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4

2. Present sufferings are not worth comparing: [verse 18b]

Sufferings = Pathema = “Hardship, trials, pain, or affliction”

Worthy = Axios = “Deserving, appropriate or suitable of praise”

a. With the future **glory** that will be revealed in us

Glory = Doxa = “Dignity, honor, and praise”

Revealed = Apokalupto = “To take off the cover, unveil or disclose”

Same word from which we get the title for the final book of the Bible.

2 Cor 4:16-18 “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.”

1. Glory in this life

2 Cor 3:18 “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2. Glory in the life to come

1 Pet 1:6-7 “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.”

Application: Self-glory or God's glory

Before we came to Christ, most of us were driven by a desire for self-glory. But only in Christ can this God-given, God-implanted desire be fulfilled.

Quote: John McArthur

1. Our suffering comes from men, but our glory comes from God.
2. Our suffering is earthly, but our glory is heavenly.
3. Our suffering is short, but our glory is eternal.
4. Our suffering is trivial, but our glory is limitless.
5. Our suffering is in our mortal and corrupted bodies, but our glory will be in our perfect and imperishable bodies.

B. Suffering in creation [verse 19]

1. Creation waits for the sons of God to be revealed

a. With eager expectation

Eager expectation = Apokaradokia = “Watching expectantly, craning the neck and standing on tiptoes with intense anticipation” “Rubber-necking”

Is 65:17 “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”

2 Pet 3:10-13 “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 ... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

2. Creation was subjected to frustration: [verse 20]

Frustration = Mataiotes = “Without success, unable to achieve a goal or purpose”

a. Not by its own choice

- b. But by the will of **him** who subjected it
Not Adam or Satan, but God Himself!

Prior to the fall of man, the earth was paradise. There were no weeds or poisonous plants, no thorns or thistles or anything else that could cause man misery or harm. It was enormously productive and fruitful. But after the sin of man, God cursed not only man, but the earth as well.

Gen 3:17-19 “To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Illustration: Entropy and gardening

The physical law of entropy – the premise that the natural world is in a continual state of decline, moving from order to disorder.

If we fail to tend our garden or lawn for a month or two, weeds will choke out the good plants preventing them from bearing fruit. It takes continual, regular maintenance to counter the physical laws of entropy.

You might want to consider that the next time you are weeding the *HilaHila* grass out of your lawn.

3. Creation hopes to be: **[verse 21a]**

Hope = Elpis = “To anticipate with pleasure, expectation and confidence”

- a. **Liberated** from bondage to decay

Liberated = Eeleutheroo = “To deliver or exempt from liability”

Bondage = Douleia = “Slavery”

The earth is a dim reflection of what it was in its original glory. And although there is still a great deal of beauty and wonder in it, it is in bondage to decay.

- b. Brought into the glorious **freedom** of God’s children **[verse 21b]**

Despite man’s best efforts to protect the environment, decay, disease, pain, death, natural disasters, pollution and all other forms of evil will never cease until the One who sent the curse removes it and creates a new heaven and new earth (2 Peter 3:13; Rev 21”1)

Ecclesiastes 7:13 “Who can straighten what God has made crooked?”

1. Acts 3:21 “He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

2. 1 Jn 3:2 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”
3. Rev 21:1 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.”
4. Rev 22:3 “No longer will there be any curse.”

II The Effect of Suffering

A. The whole **creation** is groaning [verse 22]

Groan = Sustenazo = “To moan jointly over a dreadful situation and has no immediate prospect of resolution.

The earth is groaning and moaning environmentally. It is interesting to note that man’s solution is to tackle earth’s problems like he does his own; from a purely human approach. But just as man’s problems will never be ultimately solved through human means, neither will the earth’s decay be resolved by human effort.

1. Like a woman in child birth

Like Eve, whose sin brought the curse of painful human childbirth, nature endures its own kind of labor pains.

John 16:21-22 “A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

2. Up to the present time

Lev 18:24-25 “Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.”

B. **Believers** are groaning inwardly: [verse 23a]

Groan = Stenazo = “To sigh, murmur, or pray inaudibly”

2 Cor 5:1-5 “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”

1. We have the first fruits of the Spirit [verse 23b]

First fruits = “The first gleanings of the full crop”

James 1:18 “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”

- a. God has poured out his love into our hearts – Rom 5:5
 - b. We have received sonship – Rom 8:15-16
 - c. The Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come - 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14
 - d. The fruit of the Spirit – Gal 5:22-23
2. We wait eagerly for our **adoption** as sons: [verse 23c]
Wait eagerly = Apokaradokia = “Watching expectantly, craning the neck and standing on tiptoes with intense anticipation”
- a. The redemption of our **bodies**
 Phil 3:20-21 “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.”

As believers, we are already new creatures possessing the divine nature, and our souls are, at this very moment, ready for heaven and eternal glory. But our bodies remain bound by earth and are still influenced by the corrupting effects of the world, the flesh and the devil. It is only the body, the outer shell of our human flesh, that is yet to be redeemed. The inner person is already a completely new creation, a partaker of God’s nature and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

III God’s Provision in our Suffering

- A. God provides us with the **hope** of redemption [verse 24-25]
Hope = Elpis = “To anticipate with pleasure, expectation and confidence”
 1 Peter 1:13 “Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”
- 1. It is **unseen**
 Heb 11:1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”
 2 Cor 4:18 “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. It is not yet realized
 Rom 4:20-21 “Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”
- 3. It is to be **waited** for patiently
Patience = Hupomone = “Cheerful endurance”

Lam 3:25-26 “The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”

James 5:7-8 “Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming ... and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.”

B. God provides us with His Spirit [verse 26a]

1. He helps us in our weakness

Because of our flesh, we will continue to struggle with spiritual weakness. But the Holy Spirit empowers us to do what we could never do alone – to walk in obedience to the commands of God.

a. We don't know what to pray for

Because of our imperfect, flawed perspectives, our finite minds, human frailties, and spiritual limitations, we are not able to pray in absolute consistency with God's will. Many times we are not even aware that spiritual needs exist, much less know how best they should be met. Even a believer who prays sincerely, faithfully and regularly cannot possibly know God's purposes concerning all of his own needs or the needs of others for whom he prays.

Illustration: Groaning in Honolulu under a blanket!

Often times I don't know how to pray. I don't know what to do. So I groan. In times of distress and uncertainty I have found groaning to be the only thing that meets my inner need to cry out to God.

Eph 6:18 “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Jude 1:20-21 “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”

2. He intercedes for us with groans that words can't express [verse 26b]

Intercedes = Entugchano = “To confer with or to make a request for another”

Creation groans, we groan and even the Holy Spirit groans! Even when we do not know what God wants, the indwelling Spirit himself intercedes for us, bringing our needs before God.

Rom 8:34 “Who is he that condemns? 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.”

If it were not for the sustaining power of the Spirit within us, His continual intercession in our behalf, and Christ's continual mediation for us as a High Priest

(Heb 7:25-26), we would be helpless before the powerful influences of the world, our unredeemed flesh and the devil.

C. God provides us with “connection”

1. He searches our hearts [verse 27a]

1 Sam 16:7 “But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Ps 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

2. He knows the mind of the Spirit [verse 27b]

a. Who intercedes for us in accordance with God’s will

1 Cor 2:10-12 “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

In prayer it is the indwelling Spirit who prays, and his mind is immediately read by the Father to whom the prayer is addressed.

Conclusion

1. Suffering will be a part of our lives until death or Christ’s coming. The only question is, *Will we benefit from it or not?* For the believer, there is tremendous benefit that can be produced only by the trials and suffering in this life.
2. Only God can straighten what He has made crooked. Therefore, it would be wise to yield ourselves to Him knowing that He will one day restore all things.
3. We have the hope of the final phase of our adoption – the redemption of our bodies.
4. We have the promise of the Holy Spirit’s intercession on our behalf.
Rom 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

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