

Romans – Justified through faith

Week 15 – Romans 8:18 - 27 (The glory of God's Children)

Introduction

The second section of Romans 8 (v18-27) is about sharing in the sufferings and glory of Christ. The sufferings and the glory also characterize the two ages – the present age and the age to come. The sufferings include not only the opposition of the world but all our human frailty as well, both physical and moral which is due to our 'half-saved' condition (a work in progress not the finished article). The glory, however, is the unutterable splendour of God, eternal, immortal and incorruptible.

The sufferings and glory may be contrasted but are not comparable (see v18 and 2Cor 4 17). The suffering and the glory are also inextricably linked – you cannot have the glory without the suffering (see v17 last week)

1. The sufferings and glory of God's creation (v20 – 22)

Paul personifies the creation (a common O.T idea, seas, rocks etc rejoicing and singing praise to God) and states it is frustrated and groaning as if in childbirth. God himself subjected it to frustration when man fell but He also included hope for its future restoration. The ground was cursed when Adam fell (Gen 3:17) and produced thorns and thistles. When Jesus returns we are not the only things to be made anew – the whole earth will be restored. (Rev 22: 3)

2. The sufferings and glory of God's children (v23 – 27)

There is a parallel drawn between us and creation in v22 and v23 – as creation groans for renewal we too groan inwardly as we eagerly await the redemption of our bodies. The tension of the times we live in – our 'half-saved' nature – causes us to groan and long for the time when we are made perfect. Paul notes five things about our condition...

- i. *We have the first-fruits of the Spirit* - this is both the foretaste and the promise of the blessings that will be ours when the work is completed.
- ii. *We groan inwardly* – the presence of the Holy Spirit in us is a reminder of the incompleteness of our salvation. We groan and long for it to be complete. See 2 Corinthians 5: 2-4. It is not only our fragile body that causes us to groan (illness, infirmity, and death) but also our fallen nature, which hinders us from behaving as we should, and would altogether prevent us from doing so if it weren't for the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- iii. *We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies* – Our adoption has happened (v15) already but there's a deeper level to our child-father relationship when our bodies are redeemed by Jesus (Philippians 3:21)

"And if the question is asked, 'What sense can there be in saying that the sub-human creation – the Matterhorn or the planet Venus, for example – suffers frustration by being prevented from properly fulfilling the purpose of its existence?' then the answer must surely be that the whole magnificent theatre of the universe, together with all its splendid properties and all the varied chorus of sub-human life, created for God's glory is cheated of its true fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his rational part."

- Charles Cranfield

iv. *In this hope we were saved* – The Greek tense for this allows for both past events (we have been saved) and future events (we will be saved on the day of judgement). Hence our ‘half-saved’ lives lived in the tension between the cross/resurrection and Jesus’ return. Our fallen nature hasn’t yet been obliterated and our bodies haven’t yet been redeemed. This is the future hope of verses 24 & 25.

v. *We wait for it patiently* – This is the balance to the eagerness of v23. We mustn’t be so eager and enthusiastic that we try to force God’s hand nor must we be so patient we lapse into lethargy, apathy and pessimism! We mustn’t forget the promises of God and become guilty of unbelief nor act out of presumption and impatience and deny the reality of our physical condition.

Paul then goes on to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit aiding us in the ambiguity and frailty of our ‘already-not yet’ existence – especially in the area of prayer. The Holy Spirit does three things for us...

i. The Spirit helps us – because of our weak, half-saved situation.

ii. The Spirit intercedes for us – because of our ignorance of what to pray for.

iii. The Spirit intercedes according to God’s will – and therefore God listens and responds.

“...the children of God have two divine intercessors. Christ is the intercessor in the court of heaven... the Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theatre of their own hearts.”

- John Murray

Q1. Is our theology prepared to accept the groans (pain, suffering etc) or does it just expect us to grin (live happy, contented, healthy lives)?

Q2. What does it, in practical terms, mean to wait for eagerly await something with patience – especially in the context of Jesus’ return and the completion of the good work God started in us?

Memory Verse:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”

– Romans 8:26