

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

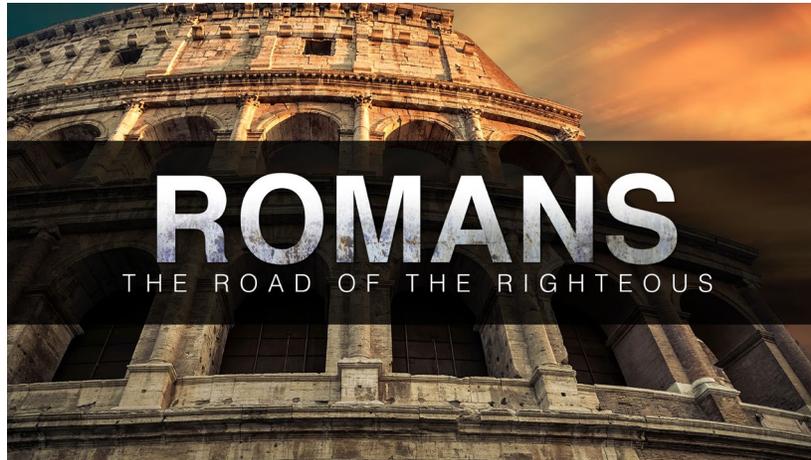
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 8:18

Written By

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For a time, Demas, who's name in Greek (*Δημῶς*) means *popular*, enjoyed being a fellow-worker with Paul. We know this to be a fact because two of Paul's letters, viz. Colossians and Philemon mention him in this capacity (Col. 4:14; Philemon v. 24). And he was not just any old fellow-worker, but one who served Paul in Rome during his first imprisonment when he wrote Colossians (summer of 62 A.D.), Philemon (summer of 62 A.D.), Ephesians (summer of 62 A.D.), and Philippians (early 63 A.D.).¹ I'm sure attending to Paul was personally costly and risky, but the positive mention of this man in this prison letters it appears he ran the spiritual race well for many years.

However, four years later, in 67 A.D., when the Romans authorities held Paul a second time, the beleaguered, persecuted, but wise disciple and shepherd of Christ wrote these haunting words in his second letter to Timothy, which also became his last inspired letter to the Church:

⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸ in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. ⁹ Make every effort to come to me soon; ¹⁰ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4).

¹D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two: The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 205-306.

Sad, isn't it? Just when you needed a good, godly man to stand by you in your hour of trial, when you needed someone you could count on to pray with and for you, when you thirsted for someone to encourage you as you faced martyrdom itself, that man, Demas, deserted you and fled to Thessalonica.

Why this city? Thessalonica, a city of 200,000, had the famous Roman road system called the *Via Egnatia*, passing through the middle of its fortified walls. As such, it enjoyed being "the principal artery of communication between Rome and her eastern provinces."² Its location on the north coast of the Aegean Sea, also made it the major port of Macedonia. Ostensibly, this meant that goods, people, and money flowed in and out of the trendy, face-passed, and idolatrous place. If a young man wanted to be in the thick of the action, that wasn't with Paul in a jail cell in Rome, but smack dab in the confines of Thessalonica.

What happened to Demas? What tripped him up in his spiritual walk? How did he go from a stellar saint to a sordid saint? Paul put his finger on it with one modern rendition of his analysis: *materialism*. Demas fought well against the flesh for many years, however, the monkey on his back, the major pull in his life was always related to the things of this life. I guess you could also say ol' Demas lost hope, hope that he could remain a victor based on Paul's teaching in passages like Romans 8, hope that hardship for Christ is well worth it, and hope that eternal wealth is more valuable than temporal wealth.

Do you identify to some extent with Demas? You're faithful to God now, but a sinful monkey on your back is getting the best of you and can sense your hope for living effectively for Jesus is, well, slipping away? From what we've learned in Romans 7, Paul knew firsthand what it was like to mess with the monkey called the flesh. Also, from Romans 8, he knew how to fight the flesh with spiritual weapons in order to gain victories. Paul knew, as well, how the monkey can wear you down as you set your eyes on winning more than losing. He was privy to how important hope is for the worn out saint fighting, with God's help, the world, the flesh, and the Devil. This is why he wisely paused in Romans 8:18-30 to develop this pivotal concept:

Stay Hopeful In The Fight With The Flesh (Rom. 8:18-30)

Since this pericope (passage) is loaded with jaw-dropping spiritual food, we will work our way systematically through it over the next few studies. For our purposes in this study, we will focus on the first verse, which, in many respects, sets the theological tone for the remaining verses. Let's begin by first reading the text in question:

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Rom. 8).

Although the word hope does not appear here, it is what the Apostle is speaking about. From these twenty-six words we can readily isolate the first reason why we should be hopeful as with struggle with our sinful flesh, seeking to be victors, not victims.

Reason #1: Trials Lead To Triumph (Rom. 8:18)

Perspective is everything, wouldn't you agree? I remember the day in Dr. Howard Hendricks' Bible Study Methods class at Dallas Theological Seminary when he placed this interesting picture

²D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 11.

on the screen for our collective analysis. He, then, asked us, “What do you see?” From one perspective I could see an old, sad-looking old woman with a scarf over her head. From another angle, however, I saw a young woman with a choker-necklace wrapped around her dainty neck, looking in the opposite direction. The professor accomplished his goal in this exercise. Not only did he teach us to pay attention to details, he re-enforced the premise that perspective is everything.

Applied to trials related to our ongoing fight with the flesh, the importance of perspective is not diminished. While the world sees trials, be what they may, as unwanted and unfair, the saint, who trusts in the sovereignty of God sees them as tools of God to accomplish His positive purpose of building enduring, unshakeable hope into our lives.

Trials Do Disclose Precise Purpose (Rom. 8:18). What are some of those purposes?

- Trials keep us from thinking too much of ourselves (2 Cor. 12:7).
- Trials help us sense and appreciate the abounding grace of God when the suffering seems to have no end in sight (2 Cor. 12:9-10).
- Trials can, and should, bring glory to God (John 9:2).
- Trials burn out the dross, or sin, in our lives (Heb. 12:10).
- Trials force you to understand the sovereignty of God at a whole new level (Lam. 3:37-38). Indeed, great is His faithfulness, even if a nation were to fall.
- Trials enable you to live to see the timely provision of God for your need(s) (Deut. 8:3).
- Trials serve to purify our faith (1 Pet. 1:3-7).
- Trials teach us about the proper priorities in life. As we read in Hebrews: 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. (Heb. 11:25-26). Sounds like a verse for Demas-types.
- Trials lead to heavenly reward, especially as they are related to persecution for the faith (Matt. 5:12).
- Trials acquaint us with God’s comfort we so, in turn, can comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4-6).

Behind all of these purposes is one important word: hope . . . hope that God is ultimately in control, hope that God’s love is in action and not AWOL (Prov. 3:12), hope that despite what we sense and think God is gracious toward us (Lam. 3:32; Mic. 7:7-9).

If you lose hope in your match with the monkey, you lose the edge which can give you victory. Hope that God is with you in the suffering, on the other hand, is like owning a gold mine. Hope puts winds in your sails when they go limp. Hope puts gas in your spiritual tank when you’re approaching empty. Hope reminds you in the midst of a darkest spiritual storm that the God of the storm is with you (“*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you,*” Isa. 43:2), He will not desert you (“*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,*” Heb. 13:5), and He has a definite plan to bless you greatly.

Paul knew firsthand what it meant to suffer for Christ in this life. He tells us this much in some of his last words on earth as he wrote to Pastor Timothy:

¹⁰ But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me! (2 Tim. 3).

Not only did he have an eye malady which made it difficult for him to see (2 Cor. 12; Gal. 6:11), not only did he struggle with various aspects of his own sinful proclivities (Rom. 7), he suffered greatly for his belief in Jesus as THE Christ. In Antioch, on his first missionary journey, jealous Jews yelled at and taunted him and said cutting things to him as he taught about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:42-45). In Iconium, jealous Jews agitated the crowds against Paul as he taught truth (Acts 14). In Lystra, jealous Jews from Antioch and Iconium were instrumental in having Paul stoned and left for dead outside the city (Acts 14:19-20). Yet he forged ahead in the faith because he had hope that even in all of this God's purposes for his life were being achieved.

Can you say this? Will you say this? If you are at the point where you feel like the struggle of being a saint is almost more than you can bear, if you are struggling to spiritually breathe in the battle, please, refresh your spirit by shifting your perspective from the pain to purpose(s) of God. Hope is yours because the God of all hope is with you every step of the way. That's some much needed perspective, but there is more. Trials can give you the hopeful perspective that God's purposes are in play, and they can also show you something else.

Trials Do Disclose Precise Perspective (Rom. 8:18). To wrap our minds around this concept, let us read the verse one more time:

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Rom. 8).

Translated, what embattles you now, what blasts your soul, what causes you real angst as you attempt to walk a holy life before God, pales into insignificance with what God has for us in His presence. Put differently, present sufferings, be what they may, are worthless and inconsequential in light of our eschatological hope which will be realized in God's presence. The word Paul uses to introduce this conclusion is most instructive. "For I consider," is from the Greek *logisomai* (λογίζομαι), which is an ancient accounting term. From Paul's calculations in what he knew about God and God's ways, a saint's present trial has absolutely no weight when put on the scales of God. With trials and sufferings on one side, and glory on the other, you can guess which way the scale tips. It slams down hard on the side of the greatness of future glory. Let's drill down into this intriguing concept.

Paul uses the article before the word glory, and for good reason. Grammtically this is the monadic use of the article, stressing there is only one glory of this kind being spoken about. What is "the glory"? Biblical evidence supports the conclusion that "the glory" speaks of God's spectacular, brilliant, and blinding glory. Consider supportive evidence:

¹⁶ And the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. (Exod. 24).

Thick clouds surrounded the mount to protect people from the resplendent brightness of God's awesome presence.

When God later filled the tabernacle, clouds, again, shielded man from His absolute brilliance:

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (Exod. 40).

The same thing occurred when God descended upon the new Solomonic temple:

¹¹ so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. ¹² Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud (1 Ki. 8).

To stand in God's holy presence without the addition of clouds would be like trying to stand on a mountaintop and peer directly at the sun itself. Impossible. Why? His glory is too great, too intense, and simply too overpowering for human eyes.

But note carefully what Paul teaches. One day we, as saints, will see *the glory* of God. When will this occur? At three possible times.

One, at the moment of death we will see the glory. Paul addresses this in his second letter to the Corinthians believers:

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; ³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. ⁴ For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. ⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight-- ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5).

To be absent from this tattered tent, is to be present before God's glory in a body which is about as magnificent as a temple. To close your eyes here, is to open your eyes there and instantly see God's magnificent glory. No wonder the hymnist wrote these words:

When all my labors and trials are o'er,
And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore,
Will through the ages be glory for me.

When, by the gift of His infinite grace,
I am accorded in heaven a place,
Just to be there and to look on His face,
Will through the ages be glory for me.

Refrain:

Oh, that will be glory for me,
 Glory for me, glory for me,
 When by His grace I shall look on His face,
 That will be glory, be glory for me.³

As saint Stephen lay dying from being stoned for his faith, God renewed his hope by permitting him to see the glory which already exists in His presence:

⁵⁵ But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶ and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7).

At this moment, the pelting of the stones were replaced by the pulsating light of God's brilliance. Such is the sight of all those who are justified by faith. Will this not be enough? Indeed.

Two, if we are alive at the rapture of the Church of Jesus Christ prior to the tribulation, we shall see the glory of God.

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4).

The doctrine of immanency teaches, and rightly so, that nothing needs to occur in order for Jesus to come for His Church prior to the institution of Daniel's 70th prophetic week of cosmic, worldwide judgment (Dan. 9:24-27). This is why, at several key places in the New Testament, we learn how the ancient believers were waiting expectantly for the Lord's return. They knew it could, and would, occur at any moment.

⁵ Let your forbearing *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near (Phil. 4).

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; (Tit. 2).

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you

³Charles H. Gabriel, *O That Will Be Glory*.

yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. (Jas. 5).

Since the Judge, Jesus, was standing at the door dividing His glorious dimension from ours (Rev. 4:1-5) some 2,000 years ago, how close must we be to His coming for His Bride, the Church? Better yet, we must ask, "Are we living in a way which will bring Him honor or dishonor?" Is all of this not worth thinking about constantly? In the here and now we have afflictions and we suffer, but in the next five minutes we might all be transported into the very presence of God's magnificent glory. What could be better? Is this not hope-inducing?

Three, if you happen to miss the rapture and are saved in the tribulation (Rev. 7), you will either see God's glory when you are martyred, but if you are not martyred, you will live to see Jesus at His Second Coming when He will break through the darkness and descend to earth with the armies and saints of heaven. Jesus taught this most clearly and definitively:

²⁹ But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, ³⁰ and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. ³¹ And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (Matt. 24).

At this ominous, spectacular moment all eyes will see Him, including those of the saved and the unsaved, the saint and the sinner. For the saint who has lived through the most ruthless and tortuous times on earth, the sight of Jesus will be full of joy and wonder. For the lost, it will be one of dismay and fear. Don't you know that when those saints see Jesus on His beautiful white war horse (Rev. 19:11) it will make the afflictions they endured seem like nothing?

Glory. This is what awaits God's people. This is what is waiting for you right now. To keep this in mind is to be motivated to fight all this old world can hurl at you and to not lose hope, ever. Hence, we should always stay hopeful in our fight with the flesh because trials do lead to triumph. Further, we should stay hopeful because the glory of God awaits us.

I can only imagine what that day will be like to trade the temporal for the eternal, the sinful for the sinless, the terrestrial for the celestial, the brightness of the sun for the brilliance of the Son, the Son of God, Jesus the Christ. Friends. That perspective changes everything, doesn't it?