

4. The Hope of New Creation (8:18–25)

8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

8:18 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.

In verse 17, Paul says we are “fellow heirs with Christ, *if indeed we suffer with Him*, so that we may also be *glorified* with Him.” Verses 18 to 25 explain the suffering and the glory Paul has in mind.

The sufferings we share with Christ (8:17) are described as “the sufferings of this present time.” In Greek the word for “present time” is *καιρός* (*kairos*), and means “this age” or “the present age;” it contrasts the age to come (Murray, 300). We live in an age that is under the judgment of God, in a time when all creation suffers (8:20–22) and we “groan within ourselves” (8:23). Thus, in this context, the suffering we share with Christ is not persecution for the sake of Christ per se, but the “normal” suffering that is present in this period of history. In this age we are weak, perishable, and mortal (1 Cor. 15:42–54); we experience illness, bereavement, hunger, poverty, and death.

Verse 18 is an appeal to endure with Christ due to the great disproportion between the sufferings in this life and the weight of glory reserved for the children of God (Murray, 300). Suffering is *not* inconsistent with being a child of God, but it is relatively insignificant when compared to the glory to come (8:18–23; cf. 2 Cor. 4:17). As Paul says, our “momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17). Though we suffer, we know that this is not a “closed system”; there is an age to come that is glorious. For this reason we long for the redemption of our bodies (8:23).

In these verses our salvation is conceived of as something that Christ, our forerunner, has already experienced. Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh (8:3) and suffered as we do. Nevertheless, He committed no sin and entrusted Himself to God (1 Pet. 2:22, 23). If we endure the difficulties, live for God’s glory, and submit to the Father’s will as Jesus did, Jesus’ glory will become our glory. If we don’t, we will perish.

These verses in isolation may appear to be saying that we earn glory by means of enduring with Christ. However, Romans 8:29 says that *God* has predetermined that we will be conformed to the image of the Son. Hence, though glory is conditioned upon suffering with Christ, God’s work within us will ensure that we will not fail to persevere to the end.

8:19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

Verses 19–25 focus on the anticipation of creation in the *revealing* of our glory as sons of God. The glory we will receive is so great that all creation yearns to see it. The Greek word *ἀποκαρδοκία* (*apokaradokia*), translated as “anxious longing,” is intensive. The picture is of creation standing with

head raised, looking intently without rest until the object of its expectation is fulfilled. We might say creation is “craning its neck” or “standing on its toes” to see what’s coming.

Paul personifies creation in order to convey “a sense of the cosmic significance of both humanity’s fall into sin and the believer’s restoration to glory” (Moo, 514). Creation understands the magnitude and the implications of the revealing of the children of God. “The ‘revelation of the sons of God’ that creation keenly anticipates is the ‘unveiling’ of the true nature of Christians. Paul has already made clear that Christians are already ‘sons of God’ (vv.14–17). But, experiencing suffering (v. 18) and weakness (v. 26) like all other people, Christians do not in this life ‘appear’ much like sons of God. The last day will publicly manifest our real status” (Moo, 514, 515).

8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;

8:21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Verses 20 and 21 tell us why creation longs for the revealing of the sons of God; namely, because when the sons of God enter into glory, it too will be delivered from the bondage of corruption that it presently experiences.

Creation was subjected to futility. “Futility” or “vanity” (8:20) speaks of the frailty of creation. It is antithetical to “glory” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51–54) and synonymous with “corruption” (8:21). Creation is in bondage of corruption.

Creation is not what God intended it to be; it is out of whack with the glorious state it was created in. Instead of flourishing it suffers violence, famine, drought, earthquakes, flooding, disease, plagues, weakness, and death. But creation’s failure is not its fault; it was subjected to these things against its will by God, as part of the judgment against Adam. When God had originally made the earth and the inhabitants of it He declared His creation to be “good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Once Adam sinned He called it cursed. God said to Satan, “Cursed are you *more than* all cattle, and *more than* every beast of the field” (Gen. 3:14). “More than” is a comparative. The cattle and the beasts of the field were cursed, but Satan was cursed *more than they were*. Genesis 3:17 says, “Cursed is the ground because of you [Adam].”

This pattern of the earth suffering because of man’s rebellion is repeated throughout history. Isaiah 24:5–7 states, “The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, *because* they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. . . *Therefore* the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate . . . The new wine fails, the vine languishes.” Jeremiah asked, “How long will the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither? The beasts and birds are consumed, *for* the wickedness of those who dwell there. . .” (Jer. 12:4). In the Book of Revelation at God’s great outpouring of wrath on the unbelieving world, creation is also targeted. Revelation 6:12–14 says, “I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the

earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of their places.”

The ground was originally cursed *because* of Adam and the curse continues to devour the earth *because* man transgresses the law of God. Waters rage, storms unleash their fury, cold freezes and kills, and the sun scorches the earth. The land mourns, plants wither, and animals fight to survive. Our world is in a frail, dying, miserable condition, but it is not in a hopeless condition. Although God subjected creation to corruption, He subjected it in hope! When the sons of God are glorified, all creation will be delivered from the bondage it must now endure (8:21).

The freedom from the present age comes *first* to the sons of God but then it comes to creation. Thus, creation also longs for the day of our redemption to come.

8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Verse 19 had said that creation longs for deliverance. Verses 20–21 tell *why* it longs to be delivered. Verse 22 explains why the creation will come into the enjoyment of the glory of the freedom of the children of God. Even though God subjected the world to corruption, the pain it suffers does not end in death; it ends in birth— “After sorrow comes the joy of new existence” (Hodge, 275). Therefore, the creation lives in hope. (Compare the joy of creation at the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on the earth; Psa. 98:6–9; Isa, 35:1, 2, 6, 7; 41:18–20; 51:3; 52:9; 55:12–13).

In Revelation 21:1 John writes, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.” And in Revelation 22:1–3: “Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. *There will no longer be any curse.*”

8:23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

The whole creation groans under its present condition and we also groan. Groaning “within ourselves” is talking about an inward sigh that expresses weariness and frustration we presently experience with our infirmities and moral lapses. And because we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, our desire for the redemption of our body is intensified.

“Firstfruits” was the offering from the first of the harvest that was given to God. It became the assurance that the rest of the harvest would follow. For this reason Christ is called the firstfruits of those who sleep (I Cor. 15:20), not simply because He was raised from the dead first, but primarily because His resurrection was the assurance that our resurrection would follow. In Romans 8:23 the firstfruits of the Spirit alludes to the initial work of the Spirit in starting the process of our salvation, a process which has

an unbreakable connection to our final redemption. In fact, the Spirit Himself is the “first installment,” the “down payment,” the “pledge” that guarantees that we reach the end of our salvation.

The “already/ not yet” tension of our salvation continues in these verses. We “already” have salvation, but we have “not yet” severed the ties with the old world, sin, and death. We have “already” been adopted as children of God (8:14–17), but we are still eagerly awaiting our adoption (8:23). We have the firstfruits of the Spirit’s work but we don’t experience our salvation in full; we only have a taste of the glory to be revealed, so we groan inside.

“A healthy balance is necessary in the Christian life, in which our joy at the many blessings we already possess should be set beside our frustration at our failures and our intensive yearning for that day when we will fail no more – when ‘we shall be like Him’” (Moo, 520).

8:24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?

8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Hope is the confidence that the future promises of God will come to pass and it is the hope of our future glorification that helps us endure present trials. If hope is our assurance in an unseen future, it follows that it must be waited for. Our need is patience.