

Children of God | Living with God as Your Father

Final Destiny

Romans 8.18-39

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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.¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.²⁴ For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

²⁶ *In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?³² He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?³³ Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?³⁶ Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."³⁷ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

For the past couple months we've been looking at the New Testament teaching that God adopts us when we believe in Jesus Christ... We were helped along by a book written by Sinclair Ferguson called *Children of the Living God*...and today, we finish the series...ON the topic of "Final Destiny".

This chapter, especially vv. 28-29 gets quoted a lot when we need a kind of pick-me-up...BUT...as we saw last week, it isn't really saying what we might think it's saying. And IF you're looking for a little encouragement today...you've come to the wrong place and the wrong passage!...

BECAUSE THIS TEXT ISN'T interested in giving you a little cheering up... THIS PASSAGE IS A FLOOD OF HOPE and a TIDAL WAVE of help beyond what we can dream!

If you GET what this text is saying ...and if it sinks in and if it DAWNS on you... all other encouragements are ... n i c e ... but just weak in comparison with this one. This one can beat any life-difficulty you could ever face.

When the early Christians GOT this truth...it enabled them to face THE ARENA... and martyrdom. And not because they were some sort of brain-washed fanatics who'd stopped thinking...BUT because they got this LOGIC...a truth that liberated them to live great lives in the face of really difficult circumstances. They became willing servants of the downtrodden and helpers to the needy and their SELF-SACRIFICE was so exceptional that when the ROMAN EMPIRE FELL...the Christians were still standing...and they literally changed the world and the course of history forever.

This passage is intellectual but also EMOTIONAL... it's lyrical but also LOGICAL... uses legal and judicial language but is also deeply PERSONAL AND RELATIONAL. It's a remarkable case-study in pastoral warmth and also REAL doctrinal CONTENT.

So let's look at it: 1st The Congregation's Problems 2nd The Pastoral Method and Message

First, the CONGREGATION'S PROBLEMS –

All congregations have problems..don't they?

I MEAN anytime people congregate...there's trouble...not just churches ... but any group.

And ...we could add ... that especially the Christian group (and this might help some of you, BTW, if you've had problems with church people). The church has problems in congregating...because, the church is expressly FOR messed up people...just like you'd expect to find sick people in a doctor's office ... so, in the church, people come who are looking to be healed... coming because Christianity isn't FOR good people... it's for weak and sinful people (1 Cor 1.26-31).

This congregation in Rome had problems in common with their non-Christian friends and neighbors AND other problems that were peculiar to their new way of life, their being Christians.

In terms of the general universal difficulties THESE Christians lived in a very crowded urban situation ...and I know that we feel, here in So. FL we may feel crowded and a bit claustrophobic ... but the ancient city of Rome was extremely crowded ... more crowded than the most crowded cities of modern India or China AND without electricity or running water ... or sewers ...or sanitation trucksno refrigeration/food preservatives ... very little clean water ... a lot of disease ...A LOT of disease (with no antibiotics or vaccines or even aspirin) and frequent earthquakes and firesno security systemsfrequent looters andVERY VERY dangerous to be out after dark ... thugs and gangs roaming the streets – Rodney Starke (sociologist from

University of Washington)... has accumulated a lot of data to paint a realistic picture of life in these ancient cities and it wasn't like the movies Ben Hur or Gladiator ... it was squalor and danger!....and squalor: "The sufferings of the present time" (v.18).

And the Christian were NOT immune...in fact, as we mentioned last week, not only did they suffer in all these ways (like their non-Christian neighbors) but they were beginning to suffer discrimination... and would eventually face The Arena.

And the Book of Romans makes it clear that they also had their OWN peculiar problems. They were trying to live in a worshipping community made up of former enemies. Jewish people and Gentile/pagan people were now trying to relate to one another as family – a social experiment like no one had ever seen! IN THE CHURCH there were different customs and manners. Some felt free to do things OTHERS DIDN'T feel free to do. Big divisions between the strong and the weak...They couldn't get how the "BODY thing " worked, that they were all organs in a single Body, all unique and yet all essential and all important. They'd come from a very hierarchical/categorized society of haves and have-nots and that made it hard for them to congregate.

They were LIKE ALL CHRISTIANS...they were NOT USED to the unique way of life that Christianity IS. They were, LIKE ALL CHRISTIANS...strangers to the basic dynamics of true spirituality. They were conditioned, LIKE ALL PEOPLE ARE, conditioned to live by karma and NOT by grace through faith. They needed a wholesale renovation of their entire way of thinking and that's why the practical part of this long letter begins with the words "...do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." (Rom 12.2-3).

Living by grace, through faith was foreign to them AND to us... THIS congregation has problems...in Rome and here in Hollywood, Florida. We have trouble with the life that is judged RIGHTEOUS before it actually IS righteous. We are conditioned all our lives to think: first comes the performance and THEN comes the evaluation! AND the Gospel turns that on its head – in the Good News of Jesus Christ we are BY GRACE credited with His obedience before we ourselves have done anything to earn, deserve or obtain it... but simply give up...and receive it as a gift.

We are first COUNTED beautiful and obedient and morally perfect and THEN, little by little we start to become what God has declared us to be...and destined us to BE. We have a problem with that. They had a problem with that.

And we have a problem...grappling with the reality...that I AM a son/daughter of God...but sometimes..., let's face it, often time, I act like a child of the world or even a child of the devil.

And now Paul, THE PASTOR, sits down and...counsels these urban believers. And look how he does it:

He begins with this outrageous statement – a sweeping statement that covers “all things” and then he goes on to employ philosophy and theology and mystery AND then, logic and very engaging Q&A, a series of questions meant to make them stop and think and dream and imagine ... imagine ANY and ALL possible scenarios that might await them.

And right beside the logic and images taken from the courtroom... he, also, uses emotion and affection and talk about love ...

AND he wraps it all up with this series of what seem to be poetic couplets, pairings of words....”I am convinced that neither

- death nor life
- angels nor demons
- things now and things not yet
- not powers
- not height nor depth
- nor any created thing”

It’s like a song appealing to these suffering people on every level – we think of Romans as dense theology and as the heady part of the NT message...and it IS. Mysteries like predestination and God’s mysterious calling a person to believe ... but always geared to these very practical issues and always presented as part of a warm pastoral appeal.

Appealing to every person in this troubled congregation...no matter how they’re wired... whether the more analytical minds or the more relational and affectionate or the more artistic and lyrical. Appealing in every possible way: mysteries to ponder...possibilities to imagine ... logic to follow ... questions to answer ...lyrics to sing ...theology on fire!

Warm, intelligent, sympathetic, pastoral, counsel given to many types of people using a variety of connections BUT only one main message... and that is: if you are a believer in Jesus Christ it is because God has intimately related Himself to you...has chosen you...has mysteriously liberated your heart to TRUST Him and hear His voice and enter a New Creation!

God the Father has adopted you. God the Spirit has applied what Jesus Christ accomplished to your life (justified you...counted YOU right because of Jesus) and God has determined your destiny. He holds your past, present and future in His almighty and tender hands.

God has declared your verdict and has declared that you are eternally significant – has determined to glorify you i.e. has determined to make you eventually sinless and morally radiant ...to be all that a human being, made in His image, was intended, by God , to be.

AND PAUL’S POINT IS: “If you see what this means, you will begin to see any and every circumstance in your life as God’s instrument to bring you to that end... that indescribably glorious end.”

And both at the beginning and the end of this CORE section (in ch 5 and here at the end of ch 8) ...Paul deals with the problem of suffering in the Christian life and the Christian Congregation.

He gives them a picture of the World and of the Christian life as existing in a kind of tension - the "now and the not yet" ...groaning as they have been birthed into a NEW CREATION but still living in this realm of death ... the fallen world and all the symptoms that things aren't as they should be...but this is a tidal wave of HOPE. Faith looks back to what God HAS done and HOPE looks forward to what He WILL DO...in the future.

All creation sits in a theatre waiting for the curtain to rise – the revelation of the children of God' history's finale and the start of the real play!

He will set us free from everything that troubles us. Flaws in our character, our motives, thoughts, words and actions, even our bodies – are awaiting their full adoption - we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (23).

We live in the tension of the "already and the not yet" what God our Father has started and what He will complete. It's the destiny God has decreed for His children and NOTHING can keep that decree from being realized ...and in fact, all things are working toward that realization ...

Even, my unemployment?...Yes.
Even, current events and politics? ... Yes.
Even, a very stressful marriage? ... Yes.
Even, a debilitating accident?
Even, my own failings and weaknesses and
hurts ...some which are self inflicted? YES and Yes!

What a tremendous contrast, the thinking of Richard Dawkins, one of the "new atheists" and the great Russian writer Dostoyevsky. The atheist Dawkins writes this, "... you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." (Richard Dawkins, River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life)

And then the Russian Christian states his hope in future grace, "I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage...that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened." (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov)

It's why, as many have said, "If you're trying to figure out if Christianity is true – you should at least WANT it to be true!" Because if it's not true, there is "nothing but pitiless indifference (in the universe)" as Dawkins says. But if (as v. 34 says) Jesus Christ died and rose again and is at the right hand of God who also intercedes for us... then it all makes sense...or at least WILL make sense. "In the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments"

In the meantime, a great chorus of groaning: creation groans (the environment, the plants and animals sense that it's NOT the way it's supposed to BE); the Spirit of God groans as He informs our prayers, we feel the weeping of God for this fallen world AND WE TOO groan, eagerly waiting, looking ahead in hope for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies – the World's Finale!

Are you groaning? As you deal with your body...an awkward adolescent body...a body showing the ravages of age? Are you feeling the groans of oppressed people and groaning with them, praying for people in Syria...in Ethiopia...in Somalia...in N. Africa...risking their lives to get on tiny unsafe boats ...because they have nothing... but groaning?

Are you groaning as you confront your own prayerlessness, self-centeredness and wondering, "How can a child of God be so selfish and anemic in the pursuit of God and the love of others?"

Are you groaning under a sense of guilt...feeling a failure...wondering if you're raising your kids well...or "Christianly"? Are you mired in regrets from the past and FRETTS in the present and fears about the future?

Well, go ahead and pose any possible disaster...use your imagination and posit your worst-case scenario... "what SHALL we say? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

Be as negative as you want...God invites all the "Debbie Downers" to take their best shot. Even if you should die all day every day...be like a sheep being slaughtered...what is THAT when you know that IN THE END, we will be kept, we are guaranteed to overwhelmingly conquer through HIM who loved us, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (38-39)

Paul said, "I AM CONVINCED." Are we? Are YOU?

Oh, let us only be convinced.