

God's Perspective Toward Us in Uncertain Times:
Passage that Speaks Comfort from Heaven

I am motivated in this very short series on the love of God for His people considering the cumulative impact of the events that fills the major new networks. Covid following by the omicron virus brought such isolation that in our experience of pain we came to value the benefit of community. Our nation seems to be fractionalized to such a degree that the symbol of our nation was pillaged, a nation built on the foundation that a collective people would lay aside individual good for the benefit of the citizenry. A potentate currently threatens the use of its ultimate military capacities creating international uncertainties. Additionally, reasons for concern appear to abound on more fronts than I care to enumerate. All that said, are there solid reasons that we should not despair in anguish. I think the answer is an astounding "YES." I desire to explain how we can be positive in a world, and country, that seems to have forgotten the enormous privileges we have in a land of plenty.

Turn our eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

The purpose of this series is to help us all think of how very much we are loved of God, through the mercies of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit. Simply stated, what you fill your mind with, what occupies your thoughts, will determine the extent of your peace of mind and joy in life. The key to the Christian life is found in filling our minds with good thoughts. What God has done for us, how much He loves us, how much He has acted on our behalf, is to find peace in troubled circumstances.

We now turn to Romans 8:18-39

Before glory and the crown, there is suffering. As one has said, "There is a final valley to cross before Mount Glory is reached; it is Mount Suffering." The suffering defined within the broader context is that of struggle with the remnants of sin in the believer's nature (there is no hint in the book to this point of any threat of

physical suffering due to their confession of Christ though we do know it existed in Rome). All believers make their way through it; it is not inconsistent with God's affection for us.

a. Sufferings anticipate glory, vv. 18-30

This section is bound together by a threefold groaning (vv. 22, 23, 26). In comparison to glory, the sufferings of this life are insignificant; there is glory to follow suffering, and the Spirit aids believers in their suffering.

1) The groaning of creation, vv. 18-22

a) The fundamental principle, v. 18

The "for" explains the relationship of the sufferings in verse 17 and the glory that is to be revealed. Suffering is the path to incomparable glory.

b) The grand anticipation, v. 19-22

(1) The fact of hope, v. 19

The "for" is the beginning of an explanation of the preceding statement. The incomparable glory awaiting the believer is anxiously anticipated by the sub-human creation, animals. Paul personifies this creation to convey to his readers a sense of the cosmic significance of humanity's fall into sin and the believer's restoration to glory.

(2) The need for hope, v. 20

Paul explains this further ("for") in v. 19; it is his commentary on Genesis 3:17-19. Because of the curse on the creation, it cannot glorify God as it should or will. Creation became twisted and perverse; its original intent seemingly aborted by its grotesqueness. However, someday the curse will be removed.

Also "in hope" relates to "made subject to vanity." Paul may have in mind Genesis 3:15. Creation waits, as Christians do, in expectation of a better day.

Who is the one who subjected creation "not of its own will?" It seems that it was God who did this (Gen 3:17) who alone has the right (His own divine justice) and power (His omnipotence) to do so.

(3) The reason for hope, v. 21

“Because” gives the reason creation hopes. Creation too will experience redemption, a restoration after the blight of the fall. The destiny of the earth is not annihilation, but transformation.

It is rather amazing that nature will be part of eternity; heaven is coming back to a recreated earth. The “garden of Eden” will return! I bet the animals will be something to behold.

(4) The surety of hope, v. 22

The final explanatory “for” (v.22) suggests a general truth. Creation agonizes in “childbirth” as people do.

The metaphor of childbirth seems on the surface a little strange. In the Jewish mind, the concept was associated with the dawning of a new age (Mark 13:8). This new “day” that is yet to come will not be without problems and struggle.

2) The groaning of God’s children, vv. 23-25

a) The fact of believers’ groaning, v. 23

We are the first fruits of the Spirit’s promised groanings in anxious anticipation of the greater harvest. One has said, “The man who is satisfied with the earth does not know heaven.”

b) The confidence in believers’ groaning, vv. 24-25

(1) The nature of hope, v. 24

It is interesting that our future redemption is described in verbal tenses that are past suggesting that in the mind of God it is an already completed action. Redemption has tenses (past, present, and future) and one ultimate conclusion, but God, who is timeless, sees it only as present. The unseen is a sure thing to us!

(2) The manner in hope, v. 25

The manner of our waiting until hope is realized is described as characterized by “patience” or perseverance. The expression of hope is continuance in trust and delight in what we have not received yet knowing that someday we will!

3) The groaning of the Spirit, vv. 26-30

Not only do believers have the promises of deliverance and the reminder that they were saved in the sphere of hope, but believers also have the help of the Holy Spirit in dealing with the infirmity of the body. In a broken environment or world, broken people make broken requests of God. God’s people need help!

a) In intercessory prayer, vv. 26-27

The Spirit aids believers in their struggle with sin. The word “infirmity” is singular, not plural, indicating that the weakness felt in the struggle is the indwelling sin principle (7:21). There are two intercessors: one in heaven and one in the believer. The Spirit labors in prayer when the child of God is too weak to pray adequately for release from sin.

The “groaning” of the Spirit is His intercessory prayer language. When believers do not know the will of God in praying, the Spirit does and asks properly (that is, in conformity with the will of God).

The word “help” literally means “to take hold of with someone.” Implied is that believers have a part in appropriating the Spirit’s help. The manner of doing so is unclear to me.

b) In ordering a complete salvation, vv. 28-30

The source of all blessing believers have is here; it is rooted in divine actions in ages past and will be consummated at the end of time. As one has said, “These are rich cordials for a fainting spirit.”

(1) The principle of the purpose of God, v. 28

(a) The objects of God’s purpose humanly considered, v.28a

It is for those “that love God” which, in turn, are described as those called according to His purpose (i.e., redemption).

(b) The nature of God’s purpose explicated, v. 28b

It is a plan that proceeds from the heart of a loving Father.

(c) The objects of God’s purposes divinely considered, v.28c

It is those “called according to His purpose.”

(2) The program of the purpose of God, v. 29

Five parallel terms describe the process of the realization of God’s purpose; it has been called the “golden chain.”

(a) The first step: foreknowledge, v. 29a

The “for” introduces the reason that all things work together for good for His children. The term “foreknowledge” means to love or enter into a relationship; it means to “to know intimately” (Acts 2:23; Rom 11:2; 1 Pet 1:2, 20). It is not to have a prior knowledge upon which decisions are made. God’s decisions rest in His love for the creature, not the creature’s love for God. If the latter were the case, God would be obligated to us. God’s love is uncaused by us. The

words are “for whom he foreknew,” not “what he foreknew” (i.e., faith). Paul’s point is to highlight the divine initiative in the outworking of His purposes.

(b) The second step: predestination, v. 29b

Just as “foreknowledge” stresses the past love of God, the word “predestinate” looks at the aim or end of that love. God’s intent is that those He loves might share in His likeness that Christ already enjoys. The terms literally mean “to point out on the horizon;” it looks at the end, ultimate destiny, of the believer. We have been appointed to ultimate redemption someday!

(3) The process of realizing God’s purpose, v. 30

The above two steps relate to God’s eternal purpose; the initial two below relate to His temporal endeavors and the last to finality.

(a) The third step, calling, v. 30a

The “call” of God is the same as regeneration or the new birth since the next clause states that all the called are justified.

There is no failure in the accomplishment of God’s intent. The point is that “calling” here is not a generalized beckoning; it is specific, and the consequence is the inauguration of true life.

(b) The fourth step: justification, v. 30b

By divine declaration, believers are given God’s righteousness to cover their sins (3:21-4:25).

(c) The fifth step: glorification, v. 30c

The tense of the verb, “glorified,” indicates that Paul’s sees it as an accomplished fact already; it is certain.

b. The surety of glory, vv. 31-39

The same God who three times is said by Paul in Romans to have given mankind up (1:24, 26, 28) is now said by the apostle to have given up His only Son (8:32). The emphasis in this section is upon the security of the believer. There is no condemnation because we have been freed from the condemning power of the law. We have been freed from servitude to the law because we have been given the Spirit who helps us overcome the bent to wickedness. There is no uncertainty of the divine promises because we are people of hope. “What can separate us from the love of God (v. 35)? What is most interesting is the occurrence of legal terms in this passage (“against,” “charge,” “justifies,” “condemns,” and “intercedes”). The scene presented is that of a formal court proceeding in heaven. There assertions followed by rebuttals.

1) The question posed, v. 31

The “if” states the condition as the basis of the apostle’s argument because it is a first-class condition, a fact,” it would not be wrong to translate it “since.” What an absurdity even to think that the finite can oppose the will of the infinite being. See also, Jerm. 29:11.

“Who,” as in “who is against us,” is repeated in vv. 33, 34, 35. The pronoun refers to Satan, the master accuser of the brethren.

2) The answers posed by more questions, vv. 32-37

a) Can the purchase cost be fruitless, v.32?

The argument is one of the lesser to the greater (if the greater, surely the lesser). If God gave His son to us when we were thankless reprobates, would God forsake His promises now that we have been brought by His kindness into His family? The verse seems clearly to be rooted in Genesis 22:12, 16. It was the Father (not Judas, not Pilate, not the Jews) that delivered up His Son, just as Abraham did his son.

b) Can God’s action be reversed, v. 33)?

This verse is composed of two interconnected concepts: God’s election and His declaration of acquittal with the accompanying reality of imputed righteousness. Can the election of God be reversed? Can the divine declaration of our righteous standing be altered? If God will not accuse us, can anyone effectively do so? God’s actions are rooted, limited, and define by His character. God cannot act out of congruity with His character, and He has declared us righteous before Him. That ends the discussion.

c) Can anyone bring a just accusation of condemnation, v.34?

Condemnation is out of the question, not because of the creature stands uncondemnable, but because of the one who secured our acquittal. In Christ, Paul finds four grounds for confidence in this life. They are all about Christ (He died, He rose from the dead, He is with God, and He intercedes for His people). The enumeration of the actions accomplished by and through Christ occurs in ascending order, with the emphasis falling on the last in the series.

d) Does anyone or any tragedy have the power to change the mind of God, vv. 35-3)?

(1) The fact of surety, v. 35

Not even death or tragedy can separate His people from God; in fact, it draws us to God. The phrase “love of God” indicates God’s love for us, not our love for God.

(2) The surety amid contrariety, v. 36

Troubles abound; they always have and always will. Believers’ ultimate defeat is impossible. Paul quotes Psalm 44:22 (“For thy sake we are killed all day long”).

(3) The declaration of surety, v. 37

Wow! What an answer the apostle gives us! No condemnation because of the law! No obligation to obey the law (remember the contextual topic is salvation, not sanctification)! No Frustration because of the law! No separation over the law!

4) Paul’s great persuasion, vv. 38-39

The tense of the verb to bring out its proper nuance can be rendered “I have been and continue to be convinced.” The passage consists of contrastive pairs.

“Death and life” are states of existence. “Angels and rulers” are inhabitants of the spirit world, either good or evil.

“Powers” is alone without explanation. If it goes with rulers, it may denote supernatural forces. In Paul’s writings, “powers” denotes miracles. “Things present or future” are temporal things.

“Height and depth” refer to the spatial world, the entire universe. “Any created thing” means everything and anything that has life.

Paul’s point is that believers need have no fear that neither circumstances (past, present, or future) nor events will call into question our relationship to God in Christ.

The chapter begins with “no condemnation” (v.1). It ends with “no separation” (v. 39). God’s people cannot be separated from God’s love!

Teaching Points:

1. It is often, and falsely supposed, that God’s love for us is such that it will spare us from the pains, disappointments, and sorrows, the negative circumstances thought of as products of God’s displeasure or our lack of obedience. I do not

think that God has spared us from the consequences of life in a hostile world. Simply put, God does not shelter his people from difficulties. What God has spared us of is several-fold: first, He has spared us from the terrors and horrors of divine wrath. Second, He has spared us from the necessity of enduring our struggles and failures alone. Third, He has spared us from a life of a life without growing intimacy with God. Fourth, He has spared us of hopelessness

2. I think because of our fallenness and the fact that we live in a world that is cruel at times that God does not have our best interests in mind, that His love is inconsistent at best and inadequate often. Such a notion of God's relationship to us is why He seemingly withholds the best and, at times, allows the worst. The point of our passage is that there is absolutely nothing that can drive a wedge between God and His children. God has been far more committed to us, more deeply devoted to us, than we ever have to Him. God loves us and nothing can separate Him from us. Does that not bring peace to your soul? Can you rest in the promises and declarations of God?
3. Our passage describes the depth and immensity of God's love for us, so great that He spared not His own Son for us, so great that His omnipotence preserves us, so great that the minions of hell cannot shake us. If God's love is so great and constant, it is a great sin to distrust and doubt it. Do you find yourself not believing, not resting in the words and promises of God? Should we not ask God to remove from us our doubts? To know the magnitude of God's love for us should cause us to rest in that love.

4. You and I can confidently sing to God:

"The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

Have you come to the realization that God is not the problem; we are the problem. God tells the truth; we create falsities.

5. There are basically three potential reasons to express gratitude through obedience to God. Some people obey, or at least seek to, in the hope of manipulating God to extend favors. Another motive for compliance to God is the quest to preserve what God has already given so as not to lose it. Neither of these motives are Christian. So, what is the Christian motive if it is not to acquire to keep? It is because we have already. Biblical obedience is a fruit of thankfulness. If God spared not His own Son to die for us, are there any sacrifices too great for us to show our appreciation?

6. Because God gave the greatest possible gift to us in Christ, we must never doubt His goodness toward us amid disappointments and sorrows. For most of us good thoughts about the Lord are proportionate to the satisfaction of our needs and wants. When doubts flood into our mind concerning God's commitment to us, the cure is to think of Calvary. Look at what Jesus did for us, look at how God demonstrated His complete satisfaction with the work of His Son in raising Him from death. Do we have any right to doubt His goodness to us?
7. Afflictions and trials are not so much to be avoided as they are to be triumphed over by resting in the declarations and promises of God. Do we allow the troubles of life to separate us from thinking that we are loved of God. The Christian is secure in the love of God simply because God spared not His own Son as an expression of His love. To doubt God's love is unwarranted because God has said that He loves us; to doubt God's love for us is a tragedy. What is the biblical remedy for doubt?