

Freedom for the Future

Romans 8:18-30

May 8, 2022

Cindy and I (John) expect to be out of town this coming weekend (May 6-8). So, unless something happens, we don't expect to be there for Sunday Bible Study on May 8. You are all certainly welcomed, even encouraged, to go ahead and meet in our absence. It seems like circumstances have been difficult this month. On May 1, the Bible Study was not announced and only two or three were even at the worship service. The weekend after this, May 15, features a simultaneous talk in Contemporary Issues concerning the Ukraine. So, it is possible that May 28 will be our next, and last, (for the spring) meeting.

As the Lesson Book title implies, we are looking into the future in this scripture from the Apostle Paul. Paul is dealing with the issue of what the future held for the Roman Christians, for himself, and for us. Paul speaks of hope, and of the Holy Spirit, and of God's help in enduring the difficulties of the present while waiting for God's promises to be fulfilled in the future.

It may be helpful to consider what precedes this passage. Paul begins the chapter with the declaration, **8:¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit^[a] of life in Christ Jesus has set you^[b] free from the law of sin and of death.**

[Romans 8:2](#) Or *spirit*

[Romans 8:2](#) Here the Greek word *you* is singular number; other ancient authorities read *me* or *us*

Paul elaborates on this, describing that Jesus has satisfied the Law for our sakes. He concludes this line of thought with: **⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,^[h] since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit^[i] is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ^[j] from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through^[k] his Spirit that dwells in you.**

h. [Romans 8:9](#) Or *spirit*

i. [Romans 8:10](#) Or *spirit*

j. [Romans 8:11](#) Other ancient authorities read *the Christ* or *Christ Jesus* or *Jesus Christ*

k. [Romans 8:11](#) Other ancient authorities read *on account of*

Verses 12-17 follow up with the understanding that we become children of God.

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba!^[m] Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness^[n] with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

m. [Romans 8:15](#) Aramaic for *Father*

n. [Romans 8:16](#) Or ¹⁵ *a spirit of adoption, by which we cry, “Abba! Father!”* ¹⁶ *The Spirit itself bears witness*

Paul has been talking of our future with God as adopted children through the Spirit. So, starting with verse 18, he is actually reflecting back on the difficulties of the present in light of that assurance for the future. We go into that future with freedom from the slavery to sin. Notice the cry of “Abba, Father!” as a child to a loving father. We hear that in our litany for the Lord’s Supper. Jesus addressed his Father this way in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed, prior to his arrest (Mark 14:36). As the pastor says at our Lord’s Supper, He has taught us to do the same.

Romans 8: ¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in^[a] hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes^[b] for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes^[c] with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God,^[d] who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit^[e] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.^[f]

28 We know that all things work together for good^[g] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.^[h] 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

- a. [Romans 8:24](#) Or *by*
- b. [Romans 8:24](#) Other ancient authorities read *awaits*
- c. [Romans 8:26](#) Other ancient authorities add *for us*
- d. [Romans 8:27](#) Gk *the one*
- e. [Romans 8:27](#) Gk *he or it*
- f. [Romans 8:27](#) Gk *according to God*
- g. [Romans 8:28](#) Other ancient authorities read *God makes all things work together for good, or in all things God works for good*
- h. [Romans 8:29](#) Gk *among many brothers*

Paul knew that living in the real world was difficult. He had experienced that first hand. In 2 Corinthians 11:24 and following, Paul recounts what he has been through. I doubt this list is complete. At the time he wrote, there was at least one more shipwreck to come. **24 Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.** Paul suffered, but he knew that he was not alone in this. He talks of the whole Creation groaning, and longing for what is to come.

In verse 23 Paul talks of “first fruits.” “... **we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.**” The idea goes back to Leviticus: “**When you come into the land which I give you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest.**” — Leviticus 23:10. It also applied to the first lamb, and the first son born of a woman. The prophet Samuel was an example. More typically, the parents would “buy back” the first fruits son, as Mary and Joseph did, for an offering given. The general assumption was that the first fruits were the best, just as a lamb or other offering was expected to be perfect and without blemish. In 1 Corinthians 15:20

Paul refers to Jesus as the “First Fruits,” the first to be raised of those who have died. Through the Jesus and the Spirit, we too are saved.

In verse 24, Paul refers to Hope. “**For in hope we were saved.**” We do not yet see with our eyes the fulfilment of this promise that is to come. We must wait for it. The Spirit helps us do that with Faith.

Verses 26 and 27 speak of how the Spirit draws us so close to God that he hears our prayers. The Spirit makes our thoughts and our needs known to God, and helps us where our own thoughts, insights and prayers might seem to fail. Truly, God draws us close to Himself.

Finally, we get to one of the most reassuring scripture verses in the Bible:
28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. I find comfort in this, for when I read it, I am assured that even when I make mistakes, God can use those to His purpose somehow. That is demonstrated over and over again in the life of Israel and Judah in the Bible. Consider David’s many mistakes, or sins. Yet, he loved God, and repented of his wrongs, and sought to be right with God. Bad things did happen, but through David we find examples of God’s love of David and others. Through David’s line we find Jesus, about 1000 years later, and through Jesus, here we all are, blessed a further 2000 years later.

I will confess that I don’t have the intellect and wisdom to fully understand all of this. Paul’s writing is at times abstract, at times difficult to parse, and the concepts beyond my ability to grasp. But then, the amazing truth of the Gospel is that we don’t have to understand it all. We merely have to believe that God in Jesus forgives our sins and cleanses us, so that we may inherit kinship as children of God, that to be realized in the age to come. Jesus’s message wasn’t just for the intellectuals, the elite, or those most wise or learned. The message is for us all: God loves us, and calls us to Himself.

Prayer: God in three persons, thank you for being with us, guiding us, and empowering us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.