

Romans 8:18

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For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Before we go any further, I want to help put some of the things I've been saying into perspective for us, because I realize that all of this discussion about *inheritance* and *rewards* and *reigning* can potentially be perceived in an unfavorable light, as if it's from a selfish or self-centered motivation.

As we'll learn later in Romans, the doctrine itself has built within it things that eliminate that very type of thinking in us. God's kingdom has no place for selfishness or pride or arrogance, and God wants to correct us of that ungodly thinking. And that is exactly what the doctrine is meant to accomplish.

Remember the context within which we currently find ourselves. We have only recently been oriented to our identity and status as *sons of God* and what that means, and the scriptures are now undertaking the task of getting us established so that we can walk this process out on sure footing.

In orienting us with our identity as *sons of God*, it is essential we understand what that means and entails—what God means to accomplish *in* us and *with* us. We must come to see that this isn't about *us* but rather about *Him* and His *purpose*. This is why we spent the time we did on that phrase *Abba Father*; but in order to properly make that inner cry, one has to *perceive* the Father's greater purpose and will, and *desire it*. Thus, it is no accident that the concepts of being *joint-heirs with Christ* and our future glory come right on the heels of that phrase—they come right on the heels of the cry of *Abba Father*.

What I've been trying to do is get us to correctly perceive the immensity of God's eternal purpose for us, even if only in a very general sense, so that we have a desire to engage in this process. One of the things we receive simply by virtue of our identity as *sons* is the freedom from the fear of *penalty* or *punishment*, so that our motivation comes from a heart that is sincere, one after

God's own heart, and not one that is motivated by fear. God is not going to make us do this, and He's not even going to be mad at us *if we don't*. But He does *desire us* to engage in this; as I've said, He is investing something in us because of what it is going to *produce*, because what it's going to produce is actually of eternal benefit to His kingdom.

But in trying to get us to see this and motivate us to that end, I have neglected a very important aspect of how this process will actually work, and how it will *not* work. It will *not* work on the basis of *selfish ambition*. It will not work on the basis of *pride* or *self-centeredness*. It will not work on the basis of *vain glory*. It will not work on the basis of "*me, me, me.*"

Remember, that *to Israel pertaineth the adoption*:

Romans 9:3-4

3 *For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:*

4 *Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises...*

We now know that the adoption has to do with one's inheritance as a mature, adult son, of being placed into a position of responsibility and authority. Israel was given a mission statement right at their inception—that they would be a *holy nation*, and a *kingdom of priests*, and that they would essentially be God's governmental agency in the earth. And while discussing this issue of *the adoption*, we briefly discussed Israel's future inheritance so that we could properly understand what Paul meant when he used that phrase. But I neglected to give you the full picture. And so, in order to drive this point home, I want us to consider a few passages:

Mark 9:33-35

33 *And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?*

34 *But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*

35 *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*

Notice Jesus doesn't berate them or correct them for wanting to be great, but what He does do is correct their understanding of what greatness truly is. Greatness is measured by selflessness and servitude.

Mark 10:35-45

35 *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.*

36 *And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?*

37 *They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.*

38 *But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*

39 *And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:*

40 *But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

41 *And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.*

42 *But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.*

43 *But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:*

44 *And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

45 *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

We see here that positions of authority, in God's economy, are actually positions of service. And isn't that what we all understand in our conscience as we look out at the political climate we find ourselves in? We often see humanities affairs in government and know instinctively that this isn't the way it should be—that those who are given charge over others actually have a responsibility to them, that officers in positions of authority are in reality *public servants*, and are meant to look out for the wellbeing of the people; and yet, oftentimes that is not the case. But that *will* be the case in God's kingdom, all throughout creation, both heaven and earth. All of creation will be filled with His righteousness.

Interestingly, we also see in this passage Jesus allude to the reality that the glory of reigning is directly correlated to the issue of suffering. James and John ask that they sit on the left hand and on the right of Jesus *in His glory*. This certainly sounds like being *glorified together with Him*, does it not? But notice Jesus's response: He alludes to *the cup* which He is to drink from, and *the baptism* with which He is to be baptized with, and whether or not they themselves are able to partake of those same things. He is referring of course to His passion and death. Remember what He prays in the garden: *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* (Matt. 26:39).

We understand of course that there is some level of discontinuity between how God was operating and *will* operate in His prophetic dealings with the believing remnant of Israel, and how He is operating today as He is building up the Body of Christ. But there are certain principles which remain the same, because they are based in God's very *character* and *moral goodness*. Thus, though the doctrine itself may in some ways be different, some things remain the same, and this is one of those things. Those who wish to be great in the kingdom of God must understand what greatness in the eyes of God actually *is*.

Look at what Proverbs 8 says:

Proverbs 8:13-21

13 *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.*

14 *Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.*

15 *By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.*

16 *By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.*

17 *I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.*

18 *Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness.*

19 *My fruit is better than gold, yea, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.*

20 *I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment:*

21 *That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.*

For anyone wondering what *the fear of the Lord* is, one of the defining characteristics is told to us right here—it's *to hate evil*. Scripture goes on to say that *godly wisdom* hates *pride*, and *arrogancy*, and *the evil way*, and the *froward* or *contrary mouth*. God hates pride, and that will forever be true, because self-pride and arrogancy are contrary to *who He is*.

I want us to take note of the remainder of these verses: wisdom and understanding say that *By me princes rule*, and that *riches are honor are with them*. One of the connotations of *honor* is *glory*. Wisdom and understanding say that they cause those who love them to *inherit substance*. And so, what have we been learning in Romans 8? That those of us who *suffer with Christ* will actually *inherit glory* as joint-heirs with Christ, and as I've alluded to, there is a mechanism in place for this to be accomplished, and that mechanism will require *godly wisdom*. And if God hates pride, and arrogance, then this wisdom must exclude these things.

I have done my best to demonstrate that this idea of *suffering with Christ* in order to *reign with Christ* is not arbitrary, but perhaps we don't truly see it for what it is.

Suffering with Christ requires our participation in the doctrine, does it not? It does. And our doctrine is actually going to teach us how to *love and serve one another*, how to *love and serve the lost*, how to *love and serve under governments*—it's going to be the context in which we *learn to be servants of all*, thereby *equipping us* for those roles in our heavenly vocation. You see, it's not disconnected. Our doctrine is going to build us up and bring us unto a perfect man, unto *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13). It's that same image, Jesus Christ who is the image of the invisible God, that the Father is going to fill creation *with*. And that image is not one of selfish ambition, or pride, or arrogancy, but of selfless, godly love.

It is clear from the scriptures that Paul was very concerned about believers and their maturity, their engagement in this process. While Paul was at Miletus, on his way to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost, he sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus, because it was clear to him that this would be the last time he ever saw them, knowing that *bonds and afflictions* awaited him. But look at Paul's final words to them:

Acts 20:29-32

29 *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*

30 *Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.*

31 *Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

32 *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.*

Paul was very concerned with the state of the church and the work that was meant to be taking place within it, within the very souls of those saints. It wasn't an issue of "trying to stay saved,"

and it's clear there was something else *above and beyond* merely *being saved*. What Paul was concerned about was their continual maturing, their *godly edifying in Christ*. And this is accomplished by *the word of His grace*. That is what is *able* to build us up—to *edify us*—and to give us an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Now, as we prepare to move forward in this chapter there are some things that we have to discuss first. We first must have the proper outlook on the subject matter of *suffering*. That is in fact what Romans 8:18 brings into view, after all—*the sufferings of this present time*. We *know* what the sufferings of this present time *are*. We all encounter them. We all see them. We know they are in fact inescapable, and that every one of us in these mortal bodies are inching closer every day to being, as Paul would say, *sown in dishonor*.

But why is this the case? Why does it *have* to be this way? Why doesn't God step in and do something? Sir Robery Aderson addresses this in His book, *The Silence of God*, and correctly concludes that the next time God does intervene, it's going to be to judge the earth in righteousness. See, we have the idea that God should judge the sinners of this world, but what we don't realize is that all men outside of Christ are sinners, and that God is not going to show any partiality to any man, but the man who told a "white lie" is going to share in the same judgment just as the murderer. And so, we need to approach this subject with the correct perspective. God is not presently intervening in this world to stop the evil that so prevails. And atheists and skeptics point to this as proof that He does not exist.

If God is all powerful, then He may have *the ability* to stop the evil in this world, and yet may not want to. *If God is love*, then He may *desire* to stop the evil in this world, but not have the ability. And yet God is both *omnipotent*, that is, all powerful, and He is by His very nature *perfect love*. So why, when we behold the world we live in, do we see such evil, such suffering? If He is in fact perfect love, then what we see in life is somehow connected to that love, no matter how disconnected to love it may appear from our perspective.

This concept theologically is what is called a *theodicy*, and attempts to reconcile God's nature itself with the state of affairs in which man finds himself. Not properly understanding this issue has resulted in men turning away from the faith, and has prevented countless others from coming to faith in the first place.

One of the central things to understanding this is the issue of free will. And here the Calvinist and reformed theologians run into a huge problem. Because free will is not only a reason as to *why* evil exists in the world, but it is *the mechanism* by which a world without sin and suffering will one day exist.

God obviously created man in the beginning and so valued his free will that He placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil within the garden, giving him the option to choose his own path,

to obey or rebel. Man was created in the image of God, and one aspect of God's "image" is free will itself. God is a free-will, moral agent, meaning He is free of His own volition to exercise His agency in a moral capacity. Thus, we too are made to be able to exercise our own personal will in a moral capacity. Unlike God however, we are capable of rebellion.

There are what are called the *communicable attributes of God*, which are things such as freewill, love, compassion and empathy, creativity, wisdom and knowledge, mercy and grace, an inherent sense of righteousness and need for justice. These are all things that are *characteristic of God*, but which can be shared *with us*. But there are certain things that *cannot* be shared with us because they are characteristic of the Divine Godhead Himself: things such as *omniscience*, that is, being *all-knowing*; *omnipotence*, or being *all-powerful*; *omnipresence*, that is, being in all places at all times because He transcends space and time itself; He is eternal and self-existence and fully complete in Himself. He does not just *have* love, He *is* love, and does not have any need of anyone or anything outside of Himself, because He is eternally complete within Himself. Thus, His motive for creation is not one of *lack*—He has never lacked anything. He is One, thus, He is not a composite of various attributes, nor subject to change, as we are. He is sovereign, and stands independent of His creation, completely *Holy*.

There are things that God, by virtue of His very nature, cannot do. He cannot lie. He cannot pervert justice. He cannot sin. Man however, though we may bear His image, are not able to bear the very essence of God Himself nor of His incommunicable attributes, as He is *Holy*, that is, He is so entirely *other* and *set apart* that there is no way for any created thing to be endowed with them, or even in most cases *understand* them. Mankind may have been created as free will moral agents, and may have been created perfect and without sin, but man is a finite being, and is incapable of bearing the infinite, and the soul of man is not of the eternally incorruptible nature of the Holy God.

And so, this begs the question: why would God even place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden to begin with, knowing what Adam would eventually do, and knowing that Lucifer had already rebelled and was seeking to possess heaven and earth for himself, and seeking to corrupt the other created beings in those spheres of creation? Why did God even create Lucifer in the first place, knowing what *He would become*?

The first thing we have to understand is that God cannot create free-will moral agents to occupy His creation and ensure that each and every one of them will *choose* righteousness. That is the inevitable paradox in this whole scheme: God wants to fill His creation with beings to serve alongside Him, who have a will of their own—not with beings who robotically and slavishly do what they should do. God obviously values a *genuine relationship* with His creation. For God to make beings who were only capable of doing what is right would be of no glory to Him. But for Him to create beings who could do anything they so choose, and yet who choose *God*, who choose *righteousness*, choose *obedience*, choose *love*, who choose *a relationship with Him*—this is a glory to God. And yet in raising up this kind of creature, what is the inevitable result? The

result is that some *won't* choose God. Some will choose their own way and reject that relationship with God altogether. God so values this *real, freewill relationship* with His creatures that He is willing to allow some of those free-will, moral agents to reject Him. Otherwise, there would be no way to accomplish this at all. God *is* loving *and* righteous no matter what, and for Him to allow His creation to exercise their freewill is actually a demonstration of this. It is a righteous thing to allow another person to make their own choice. We understand this naturally. If you force someone to do something against their will, how is that a righteous thing? Mankind *so understands this* that there are actually laws in place against this in many cases.

We understand all of this clearly enough I think; many men have reached these same conclusions. But what is a little less understood is that, in order for man to serve God in eternity *without sin, without rebellion, without suffering*, there must have first been a creation in which sin, rebellion, and suffering were the defining characteristics. What do I mean when I say this?

God's incommunicable attributes cannot be translated into existence—we will never be “Gods,” or be *god-like* in the sense that we capture those incommunicable attributes. But what *can* be communicated to us are truths and experiences that are able to produce within man an *identity*, one that sees what rebellion *is* and that will forever choose *obedience*.

If you will recall, many lessons ago we looked at a few passages from Ecclesiastes, and we saw Solomon make reference to this very thing:

Ecclesiastes 1:12-15

12 *I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.*

13 *And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.*

14 *I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.*

15 *That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.*

The vanity and vexation of this world, of the things done “under the sun,” that is, of the natural fallen world and its evils, God is allowing in order to exercise man unto a knowledge of *something*. God has given the curse of the natural world unto the sons of man *to be exercised therewith*. The sufferings of this present time are meant to lead man to a specific knowledge. They are first meant to bring man to the knowledge of God. That which we *are*, the crookedness of our very identity *in Adam*, cannot be simply made straight. We have learned from Romans that in fact death itself was the only answer to that problem. And the lost man knows *naturally* that

something is as it shouldn't be, and yet he cannot identify it; there is something *wanting*, and yet it cannot be numbered.

For instance, have you ever heard from the lips of an unbeliever, *there's got to be something more to life?* When he says that, he is essentially testifying that his very *soul* is being *exercised* by the vanity of this world, and the purpose of this is so that he actually turns to God; the pain and suffering of this world is meant to sufficiently impact his soul *for eternity*. God, through this present world, is trying to demonstrate something to man, not only so that they would turn back to Him, but so they would see what the end result of rebellion and sin *actually is*. It is similar to letting a young adult go out on their own and "learn things the hard way." But if and when they learn the lesson, it's *real*. It produces *lasting change*. It was something that couldn't be taught second hand in that case, but was something that had to be learned *by experience*. Free will, properly utilized for God, requires an education based upon consequence. *Humanity* needed an education in *consequences*.

Satan was created perfect and without sin, and yet chose rebellion against God. Adam was created perfect and without sin, and even he chose rebellion against God. Do you see the paradox of God creating beings capable of exercising their free will, and yet somehow forever choosing righteousness?

See, we think that we're going to get to heaven and that God is just going to entirely override our free will so that we cannot choose sin. And that's not what He's going to do. It is true—we will *never again* choose rebellion against God, but it is going to be because of something that was done in our inner man, something that is aligned with our own will. Of course we know that we have received a new identity in Christ spiritually that is free from sin, and we know that we will be delivered from this body which currently has sin in its very members. But here is the thing: Adam was free from sin. Lucifer, when he was created, was free from sin, and yet both, with their free will, chose rebellion.

The only way for God to actually ensure a creation where all of humanity is going to forever choose righteousness is to first have a creation where they *didn't*, to first allow a creation by which those subjects experience firsthand the *painful, deadly* ramifications of sin, so that this experience works within them *a knowledge*, and that knowledge produces within them something that becomes a very part of their soul.

The Christian apologist, William Lane Craig, has actually argued this point in his refutation against atheists, stating that if God created a world characterized by all of the things "the end of history" would ultimately bring about, such as creating things as they will be in the *new heaven* and *new earth*, then humanity still may not have chosen to freely accept Him. He has argued that *suffering* acts as a catalyst which works alongside freewill so that mankind actually sees the inherent problem with rejecting God, with sin, so that they forever reject *rebellion* as a feasible option.

And we see this typified in some sense even with the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament, Paul says, was a *ministration of death*, and was meant to give the knowledge of sin itself. It wasn't some lasting *solution*—it in fact only clarified *the problem*. And yet the New Testament is a *ministration of life*. Similarly, this antecedent world in which we live, and the suffering which so characterizes it, is actually giving us a lesson in what sin actually *is*.

When you see someone in pain, what is the connection your mind most naturally makes? You empathize with them, right? You say, *I wish there was something I could do*. We naturally understand their pain, and want to help. But one of the things we *don't do*, that we *should be* doing, is connecting that pain with sin itself.

The consequence of sin and rebellion is pain, it is suffering, and it is death.

God told Adam that in the day he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die. That word surely is there for a reason. If Adam had thought that he would die immediately in the physical sense the very day he ate of it—I don't see how much of a temptation it would really be. Of course this death included physical death, as well as spiritual and functional death. But what God was saying to Adam when He said, *"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,"* was that in the day that you eat of that tree, Adam, your death will become sure. Thou shalt surely die. His eventual death would become certain, a sure thing. Adam sees Eve eat first—and she doesn't die right then and there. But he knows what God said to him. And in that moment he weighs his options, and decides that it's worth it.

And this is the way it often is with us, with mankind; we see that there are consequences, but they're further down the road, and we tend to weigh that out in our lives and say, *well it's worth it in the moment, and I'll just pay for it later*. This is exactly what Adam did. He knew that the day he ate of the tree he was certifying, or making sure, his death sentence, but because it wasn't immediately apparent he thought *why not*.

Adam was given an opportunity to be educated by God as His Father, to be educated in good and evil by God's wisdom, but instead Adam chose a counterfeit wisdom; but God is still educating mankind in good and evil, and He is doing so by allowing us to see *the fruit* of sin. We have to understand the consequences and seriousness of sin. There is no such thing as a "small" rebellion against God. We have to learn to see sin for what it is, no matter how small it may appear to us. It is the same heart of rebellion against God, and it is death.

God has set us who have trusted the gospel free from sin, we've been made *dead to sin*. All unrighteousness is sin, and the sin we struggle with in our lives may be very small in our eyes, they may be the small daily decisions we make to walk after the flesh and not after the Spirit, to not live out of the doctrine, but those "minor things" are a huge deal to God because that is the same heart of rebellion that was in Adam. We know it will have consequences, but maybe we won't see them right away. So we pretend as if it doesn't matter.

We need to apply the doctrine to those areas of our lives so that we can truly begin to learn what it is to be educated in godliness. We are training in this life for that which is to come, and we are going to have a free will there just like we have free will here. Christ is going to get this corrected in us, whether here and now, or at the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10-11

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

God has a purpose He is accomplishing in all of this, and the times when He has stepped in to intervene and disrupt the natural order that is in place has been to *demonstrate* something. When He intervened on Israel's behalf under the Old Covenant, it was to demonstrate His identity as JEHOVAH, as the source of life, and to demonstrate the futility of man's attempt at self-righteousness. When men in Biblical history performed miracles, it was to validate the message they were given—it was not some arbitrary display of God's power.

God is allowing suffering in this world to sufficiently impact us for the next world. He is educating humanity in good and evil and He is educating His saints on what sin produces, so that we will know how to live in eternity with our free will intact and yet never again choose sin.