

Romans Summary
Week 15, Wednesday January 11, 2011
Romans 8:18-37

Paul finished his last section by assuring us that we will be glorified with Jesus if we share in his sufferings. He now wants to describe how the present suffering of the church makes sense in light of all he has said. At heart, his opening sentence summarizes his position: the suffering in the present cannot compare with the glory in the future, so we can endure. But there is more to our suffering than something to be endured — God has a purpose for our suffering which Paul launches into.

In the centre of the thought is this in between time of redemption/adoption and full redemption/adoption; the already and not yet of the kingdom. The Spirit has testified that we are children of God, yet the whole of creation eagerly awaits our revelation as children of God. The creation is waiting this because what Paul means by our glory is the fulfilling of our creation mandate — being in the image of God is to be stewards or rulers over God's good creation. The creation awaits the fulfilling of that vocation.

The reason the creation awaits that fulfilling is that it was subjected to futility by God in the sure hope that when the children of God regain their glory, then they will do what they were made for and creation itself will enter the same freedom it was created and meant for.

In the meantime, as it awaits this final freedom, the creation is groaning and suffering. But, because of this sure hope, already begun being fulfilled in Christ and our adoption, its groaning and suffering is purposeful — it is labour pains — creation itself is to be reborn anew.

It is not just creation that is groaning — we, the church, are too. We stand in the midst of this suffering and hopeful creation and we long too for its release through the fulfilling of our vocation or glory. We long for the renewal or resurrection of our own bodies. It hasn't happened yet, so we can't see it, we long for it by faith which means we suffer patiently with all of creation waiting for it all to happen.

And, it's not even just creation and us groaning. The Spirit groans too! He helps us in our weakness. Our inability to see the final, completed picture. So the Spirit intercedes in us giving utterance to what we want but can't describe — renewal. This happens in the heart, and the heart searcher (God) knows it. The result is that because it is the Spirit who is praying in us on our behalf our heart prayers are in line with God's will for us and all of creation.

The Spirit pours a love for God into our hearts, and because of this love for God in our hearts, we know that God is working all things together for good. God is fulfilling his plan and purpose in us and through us — we are the agents of creation's deliverance through the work and empowering of the Spirit. This is the calling, the plan, the purpose of God.

What it means to be called according to God's purpose Paul explains with v. 29. Foreknowledge is about being set apart for our Christ-shaped vocation — to suffer for the sake of the deliverance of the world — and it's this foreknowledge which produces God's foreordained purpose for the world. The emphasis is on our conformity to Christ; being pre-shaped, called, justified, glorified has all been accomplished in Christ.

Called are the people in whom, through the preaching of the gospel, the Spirit works in the heart to produce faith, hope and love. Those who are called, are the ones who are justified or are declared by God to be part of the covenant family, and those who are justified by faith now rejoice in the hope of glory. In summary, those God justified, he also glorified.

God is for us, is the summary of Paul's whole argument to date. All God has done in the Messiah is God being for us. So, If God is for us there is no force on earth that can stand against us — even though there are candidates who try. God has done the difficult thing of giving up his only son, something Abraham didn't do, so he will give us everything else — the easier things and because of that no powers can stand against us.

We are back in the law court scene; previously in 2:1-16 the whole human family faced judgment. Then in 3:19-20 the whole world was in the dock. Now we look for accusers are there are none — in fact it is the judge himself who has declared us justified and his righteousness is not in question; in short, God is both able to be just and able to justify which is what Paul has just finished arguing.

So, no charge, but could someone call for a verdict of condemnation? No, because the Messiah has condemned sin, his resurrection shows that sin has been dealt with, so he has achieved justification, and his glorification means the glorification of his people, added to that the Messiah himself is interceding on our behalf in the heavenly realms.

The law court then gives way to the theme which has run through the whole letter: love. God's love is shown in the Messiah and that bond between God and us is unbreakable. There is a whole list of potential enemies that desire to separate us from that love, but they can't.

“Who is to Condemn?” reflection and discussion questions:

1. Why would adopting the motto “There but for the grace of God go I,” help us appropriate the message of the gospel?
2. If grace is free why is it not cheap?
3. Why is it important that Paul used the word justify rather than forgive?
4. If we Christians are to face judgment then should we be worried for our future with God?
5. Why would “[renouncing] the ways of sin that separate us from Jesus Christ,” doom us?