

The Eclipse of Now (8:18)

8:18 *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.*

Sufferings of This Present Time

- “...*this present time*” in which we live, the Gospel Age between the first and second coming of Christ, is marked by difficulty for believers.
- Paul has already introduced the topic of Christian suffering in 8:17b, where we learned that God uses Christian suffering in this world to further unite us with Christ, so that we might share His glory forever: “...*if...we suffer with Him...we may also be glorified with Him.*” As we will see in 8:28, God uses everything in a believer’s life for His purpose; He has “*predestined*” us to be “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (8:29).
- Paul uses this reality as an encouragement in his service to Christ. He doesn’t focus on the difficulties of Kingdom work, but keeps his thoughts on the invisible, eternal reality: “*Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal*” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).¹

Christ Is the Glory of God

- How can we see and enjoy the glory of God while we are here in this world? Christ!

- “...*the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14).
- “...*if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, Who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One Who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 4:4-6).
- “*God...in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (Hebrews 1:1-13).

We Are Saved to Enjoy and Praise His Glory Forever

- “The deepest longing of the human heart is to know and enjoy the glory of God. We were made for this. ‘Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth...who I created *for my glory,*” says the Lord (Isaiah 43:6-7). To see it, savor it, and to show it – that is why we exist. The untracked, unimaginable stretches of the created universe are a parable about the inexhaustible ‘riches of his glory’ (Romans 9:23). The physical eye is meant to say to the spiritual eye, ‘Not this, but the Maker of this, is the Desire of your soul.’ Saint Paul said, ‘We rejoice in hope of the glory of God’ (Romans 5:2). Or, even more precisely, he said we were ‘prepared beforehand for glory’

¹ To see more about Paul’s priorities, READ 2 Corinthians 11:24-29; Philippians 1:21-26; 2:17,18; 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

(Romans 9:23). This is why we were created – that he might ‘make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy’ (Romans 9:23)...we were made to know and treasure the glory of God above all things...the healing of the soul begins by restoring the glory of God to its flaming, all-attractive place at the center. We are all starved for the glory of God, not self...there is greater healing for the soul in beholding splendor than there is in beholding self...the Christian Gospel is about ‘the glory of Christ,’ not about me. And when it *is* – in some measure – about me, it is not about my being made much of by God, but about God mercifully enabling me to enjoy making much of him forever.”²

- READ Ephesians 1:6,12,14,17,18. What is the purpose of our salvation?

All We Do Here Is a Longing for that Glory

- READ 1 Corinthians 10:31.

When His Glory Is Not the Center

- All things were made for God’s glory. When humans put other things at the center, the result is shameful idolatry (Romans 1:23; 3:23; Philippians 3:19).

Creation’s Desire (8:19-22)

8:19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him Who subjected it, in hope 8:21 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. 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

² John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 14-16.

Futility’s Origin in Genesis

- Adam, who, along with Eve and their children, was to manifest God’s “*image*” and “*likeness*” in creation by exercising “*rule*” as representative of His absolute kingly sovereignty. Instead, he failed to maintain the holiness of the garden and allowed the serpent to twist and lie about God’s Word and character.³ After submitting to the serpent instead of exercising dominion over it, the arena of Adam’s ministry (creation itself) is cursed:
*“Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you will eat of it
All the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;
And you will eat the plants of the field;
By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground...”* (Genesis 3:17-19).
- Instead of representing God’s authority, he sought his own; God cursed the creation to make sure man would not be able to have dominion in his own power and for his own glory. And so we have natural disasters, everything falls apart, and we have diseases. Ultimately, these things find their root in the sin of Adam and God’s curse of that sin.

³ Adam’s garden commission “*to cultivate and keep it*” (Genesis 2:15) is not a farming responsibility, but a priestly mandate. These Hebrew verbs “*cultivate*” (עָבַד) and “*keep*” (שָׁמַר) are used together elsewhere to describe the responsibility of the Levites in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:7,8; 8:26; 18:7)! The garden was intended to be like a tabernacle/temple, a holy place for God’s covenant communion with His people. Adam, like a Levitical priest, was to maintain the holiness of that place. He failed.

Solomon’s Vanity of Vanities

- Paul’s language of “*futility*” in 8:20 is an echo of Solomon’s in Ecclesiastes. Solomon describes a reality in which man’s efforts, either good or bad, are at best temporary. Everything falls apart and only has temporary significance.
 - “‘*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, ‘Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!’*” (Ecclesiastes 1:2).⁴ This is the comprehensive nature of the curse given in Genesis 3:17-19 and the root of Paul’s “*futility*” language in Romans 8:20.
 - “*It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted...consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent?*” (Ecclesiastes 1:13b-15; 7:13).

⁴ Ecclesiastes confuses people with its message of the futility of life in this world. What Solomon does in this book is teaches the comprehensive reality of Genesis 3:17-19 and how a believer is supposed to live in light of the curse. We are to enjoy what God gives us today (Ecclesiastes 2:24,25; 3:12,13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-9) while obeying Him (12:13,14), never putting our faith or hope that the things of today will last past today. Unbelievers, and, sadly, believers too often put their hopes and dreams in fixing the world in our own power or establishing good things that will last until tomorrow. Ecclesiastes says, “enjoy and be thankful for all that God gives you today, but don’t have an expectation that it will still be there tomorrow, for the curse means that everything on this side of eternity is temporary.”

Restoration

- Creation was created to exist in submission to a human representative of the Creator’s absolute sovereign authority. After the Fall, it was twisted and made to fight against all efforts to order. Entropy and chaos are not natural, however, and creation desires to be restored to its original purpose.⁵ As Paul says here, it “*waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God*” (8:19) and to “*be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God*” (8:20).

Our Desire (8:23-25)

8:23 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. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Just the Beginning of the Spirit’s Work

- While the Spirit moved upon us in our initial rebirth (John 3:5-8), and continually works in us to make us holy, we can scarcely imagine the fullness of what the Spirit is going to do in us in the consummation of all things. We’ve already seen the role of the Spirit in our resurrection (8:11), and this is a further teaching on that change, that longing for eternal renewal.

⁵ The unbelieving worldview is that death and entropy is natural; we even struggle as believers to imagine a reality defined by life and eternity, where things do not break down. Being born in a world cursed by the Fall, and having only experienced that all of our lives, the only way we can taste the next Age is through the help of the Holy Spirit in the reading of the Bible by faith.

The “Not Yet” of Our Salvation

- “...*the whole creation*” is not the only thing that “*groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now*” (8:22). Paul now says that “*also we ourselves...even we ourselves groan within ourselves...*” Since we were created to have dominion over creation (Genesis 1:26-28), and are made of the stuff of creation (Genesis 2:7), humanity’s fall into sin and death meant creation was thrown into entropy and death, as well. Just as believers, who are saved, are being saved, and will be saved, creation longs for the restoration of the right order.
- This is not an external “groaning.” Christians are not to be marked by outward misery in our behavior. For example, the same word for “*groaning*” is used to tell believers how not to live. The writer to the Hebrews tells believers to “*obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and **not with grief** [groaning], for this would be unprofitable for you*” (Hebrews 13:17). James commands believers, “**do not complain** [groan], *brethren, against one another*” (James 5:9).
- We have a perfect illustration of the sort of groaning that comes from a longing for restoration in the life of Jesus Himself: “*They brought to [Jesus] one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him. Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself... and **looking up to heaven with a deep sigh** [groaning], He said to him, ‘Ephphatha!’ that is, ‘Be opened!’ And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly*” (Mark 7:32-35). The impediment of the man reflected the damage sin, the Fall, and the curse had made to creation. Jesus’ sigh/groaning before restoring the

man’s hearing and speech was a longing for all things to made as they were always supposed to be. This should be our experience, as well.⁶

- While salvation has a past tense aspect in our experience of it, and even a present tense aspect as we are being sanctified, the New Testament also speaks of salvation as a future tense event.⁷ This doesn’t mean that salvation is uncertain. It does mean that “getting saved” is not just a once-upon-a-time event, but a process unto perfection in heaven.
READ Romans 8:30; Philippians 1:6.

The Perseverance of the Saints

- READ 2 Corinthians 3:16-18. To behold Him is to become like Him. How do we behold Christ? 2 Corinthians 4:4-6 tells us that we see Christ in the preaching of the Gospel. We are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ through the preaching and hearing of the Gospel.⁸
- READ Philippians 3:21. Having been made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ (justification), we are waiting in this life for Jesus to return and conform us to His perfect, sinless, and joyful glory forever.

⁶ This is what drives a believer’s longing for Jesus’ return, as well (1 Corinthians 16:22; 2 Timothy 4:8; 2 Peter 3:12-14; Revelation 22:20).

⁷ Matthew 1:21; 10:22; 24:13; Mark 8:35; 13:13; 16:16; Luke 9:24; John 10:9; Acts 2:21; 11:14; 16:31; Romans 5:9,10; 9:27; 10:9,13; 11:26; 1 Corinthians 3:15; 1 Timothy 2:15; 2 Timothy 4:18. Paul’s word to Timothy is especially noteworthy in our context: “*Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching [N.I.V. renders this “doctrine”]; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those [lit., will save both yourself and those] who hear you*” (1 Timothy 4:16).

⁸ For more on the connection between the Spirit and hearing, see Galatians 3:1-5.