

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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Romans 8:18-25

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.



Is It Worth Being a Christian?

Tim Keller

Sooner or later, every believer wonders if being a Christian is worth it.

Many people – including, most likely, some we know – answer *no*. They profess faith as Christians and seek to live God's way for a while, but in time they find their present sufferings aren't worth it and they fall away. But in Romans 8:18-25, Paul answers the question with an emphatic *yes*. In fact, he says, "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (verse 18). Paul is saying: If you know where you are heading in the future, you won't even entertain the idea that your current problems and pain aren't worth it.

So what is this glorious inheritance toward which the Christian walks, sometimes with painful steps, day by day?

The apostle says, "The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" (Rom. 8:19). A glory is coming that will be so blindingly powerful that when it falls on us it will envelop the whole created order and glorify it along with us. We will bring nature with us into a renewed, restored, redeemed reality. Our sonship will be publicly revealed and acknowledged, and we will finally and fully be "conformed to the likeness of [the] Son" (Rom. 8:29). We will be as perfectly holy as Christ and as dazzlingly beautiful as he is. That's what glory is.

Creation Is Groaning

And this is why we don't yet enjoy this glory. When humanity fell into sin, the created order shared somehow in that fall (Rom. 8:20). It's now "subjected to frustration." Nature isn't what it ought to be or what it was created to be. It's alienated, both from us (who were meant to live in harmony with nature, as its directors, or rulers – see Gen. 1:29), and from itself. It's become frustrated, not by its own choice, but by "the will of the one who subjected it" (Rom.

8:20). This refers to God, since the subjection was accompanied by “hope” of liberation (Rom. 8:20-21). This is why creation can wait “in eager expectation.”

For now, though, creation is in “bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:21). It’s caught in a continuous cycle of death and decomposition. It’s wonderful to see how nature’s life-giving quality continually seeks to reestablish itself, bringing new life out of death (e.g., flowers grow from the fertilizer of dead organisms). But everything in nature wears down and dies. And so nature is a realm of pain and suffering. It “has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth” (Rom. 8:22). There’s relentless pain that comes from first to last, as things decay. In this creation, no experience is untainted by pain, even if it’s only the pain of knowing the experience cannot last.

Creation Will Be Liberated

But none of this is the last word. “The creation itself will be liberated...and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Instead of frustration, there will be fulfillment. When we consider the majesty and greatness of the oceans, mountains, valleys, forests, and so on now, it staggers the mind to imagine what the world will be like when it’s free to be itself! And instead of pain, there will be only joy. This is why the best metaphor for the current state of creation is childbirth (Rom. 8:22; Matt. 24:8). The pangs aren’t meaningless because the world is giving birth to a new version of itself.

This is the future – the fulfilling, renewing, joy-giving future – creation can look forward to since it’s the future God’s children look forward to. This is Paul’s answer to the question about whether our future glory makes our present sufferings worth bearing. Even creation, he observes, urges you to say *yes!*

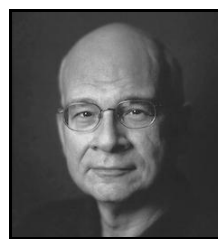
We aren’t there yet, but we will be. And in Romans 8:23, Paul points us to something sons of God already have, and something they don’t. We “have the firstfruits of the Spirit.” The

firstfruits of an incoming harvest were, quite literally, the first batch—the foretaste of what was to come. Presently, the Spirit is making us internally alive (Rom. 8:10). He is giving us gradual and internal freedom from the effects of sin and death, slowly making us more like Christ (Rom. 8:29). But this is only the firstfruits – just a taste of the total freedom from the effects of sin and death in our bodies and spirits the Spirit will one day give us. This will come only when we have what we currently do not and yet eagerly await: “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). Though we’re legally adopted, we’ve not yet received the fullness of family resemblance. We’ve not yet enjoyed the final celebration of our status – but we will.

It’s Worth It

At times we realize we’ve grown more like Jesus in some respects. Perhaps we notice a way in which we are less flawed than we were before, or more loving than we used to be, or we act more godly than we used to. In those moments we should remind ourselves that the pain of both being part of Christ’s family in a world of frustration and rejection and of being conformed to the image of Christ cannot be compared to the glory we’re awaiting.

We know we’re not what we one day will be and we don’t have now all that we one day will (Rom. 8:24). We know all our best days lie ahead and all our painful days will lie behind us then. And so, even on our worst days and in our hardest moments, we know this: *It is worth it.*



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