

Expositional Essay of Romans 8:18-28

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ABSTRACT

Romans chapter 8, verses 1-8, is a continuation of the argument of the Apostle Paul from Romans chapters 5-7, where he explains that though one still possesses a body subject to human limitations, God's Spirit lives in one whose mind is set on spiritual matters and one's faithfulness to Christ. However, verses 18-28 provide that one's faithfulness to Christ will be challenged daily. The idea is present suffering with an expectation of future glory. Paul's biblical perspective provides that one must persevere through suffering while exercising faith always in the salvific work of the Savior. The way in which the Spirit guides the believer is personal, though the conflict between spiritual conventions and human limitations continues for believers following Jesus Christ in mortal bodies (in the present age) with an assured victory. Paul's articulation of this process begins with the thesis of Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" (1:16-17). Thus, God's faithfulness is demonstrated in Christ's faithfulness, which enables the believer's security through one's rescue by the Savior. It is through salvation and one's faith in Christ that one is preserved from the oppressive forces of this present evil age. Though these two facts are evident in one's perseverance in present sufferings with hope, one awaits a consummation to be later revealed at one's ultimate redemption.

"The Bible was not revealed via "the tongues of angels." Though inspired of God, it was written in human language and within human cultures."¹ By using the exegetical method, one will endeavor to outline, exegete, understand the original author's meaning of Romans 8:18-28, by applying its theological implications. "Moreover, preachers or teachers must

¹ Grant W. Osborne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral* (Downers Grove, IL: 2008), 23.

proclaim the Word of God rather than their own subjective religious opinions. Only a carefully defined hermeneutic can keep one wedded to the text.”²

Keywords: exegetical methodology, faithfulness to Christ

² Osborne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral*, 23.

I. BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Dating Romans is generally agreed, amongst most scholars, as being written by Paul in A.D. 57. F. F. Bruce describes the book's dating as "the year in which Paul wrote Romans."³ Longenecker and Still indicate that Romans was written from Corinth, citing this location in the book's later chapters (15:17-16:23). "Romans is likely to be dated to the autumn of 57 or so, just prior to his final journey back to Jerusalem."⁴ Other scholars such as Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles register an estimate-only approach by indicating "mid to late fifties,"⁵ a range for various researchers venturing to date the epistle.

Given Paul's itinerary, three localities figure in his travel plans in which he mentions in 15:22-29: Jerusalem, Rome, and Spain, though his immediate destination is Jerusalem in the transport of an offering gathered from Gentile-Christian churches he has established. His only concern is how the offering will be received, uncertain of the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians in this locale.

II. LITERARY STRUCTURE

In light of its literary context, a view of Romans supposes that Paul's epistle sent to the Roman Christians was the composition of the entire sixteen chapters presented in the New Testament. Given this supposition, its examination requires a thorough investigation, for a significant number of scholars challenge this proposal, citing inconsistencies in the canonical Romans. Key to this theory is the location of the doxology at the end of the letter, appearing in modern texts. Though, in some manuscripts, it is omitted altogether. According to Carson and Moo, "several manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate omit 15:1-16:23 entirely, while another

³ F.F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 18.

⁴ Bruce W. Longenecker and Todd D. Still, *Thinking Through Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 163.

⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 516.

codex of the Vulgate (Amiatinus) while containing 15:1-16:24, omits the section summaries from this section.”⁶ Another view suggests that Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Cyprian abandon references to chapters 15 and 16. In recent decades, some scholars believe that Romans did not include chapter 16. However, according to Carson and Moo, “this thesis rests on shaky ground. We have good grounds for concluding that Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians contained all sixteen chapters.”⁷ Longenecker and Still’s words weigh heavy in light of this point: Its sixteen chapters are, after all, an expression of “the gospel of God,” the very “power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).⁸

In relationship to Romans’ thesis statement (1:16-17), 8:1-4 finds this power for salvation as the *indwelling Spirit*. The whole of the Christian life is lived in one’s trust and dependence on the God who justifies the sinner (1:17), Thus this theme, “justification by faith” carries Romans chapters 1-5. As illustrated by Mounce, chapters 6-8, the believer’s substance in one’s relationship with the Savior, is indicated by the illustration of chapters 6, 7, and 8:

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN WHICH WE ARE TO GROW (6:1–8:39)

1. No Longer Slaves to Sin (6:1–23)
 1. Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ (6:1–14)
 2. Slaves to Righteousness (6:15–23)
2. No Longer Condemned by Law (7:1–25)
3. Living in the Spirit (8:1–39)⁹

In Romans 6, the believer’s identity is the old man’s death, whereas in Romans 7, the believer’s identity is in Christ and death to the Law. Romans 8 falls into two parts,

⁶ D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2005), 399.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 400-401.

⁸ Longenecker and Still, *Thinking Through Paul*, 165.

⁹ Robert Mounce, *New American Commentary, Romans* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1995), 264.

considering, first, God’s work in Christ (8:1-11), then humans as the recipients of that salvific work (8:12-39). Romans 8 is the pinnacle expression of the Holy Spirit’s provision for the believer’s new birth. Just as faith in Jesus Christ alone is essential for the believer’s justification, faith resting in the Spirit’s power is the assurance for the believer’s sanctification. Thus, there is the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in Romans 8:1-10.

Chart#1 provides the Trinitarian work associated with these verses:

Father	Son	Spirit
Sent his Son – 8:3		
Condemned sin – 8:3	In believers – 8:10	Indwells believers – 8:9

Observing Paul’s indicatives of the Trinitarian work on behalf of Christians provides the foundation for adequately introducing 8:18, a verse of seeming disparities: suffering is placed adjacent to great glory, while sadness counters lasting joy, despair antagonizes glorious hope, and death is forever swallowed up in everlasting life’s abundance. His reasoning for the present time is grounded in this knowledge of God, where one’s hope is found in the Father, who has made himself known in the Son (8:17, 31, 39). The apostle’s explanations suggest the suffering believer’s future transfiguration as indicated in Chart#2.

8:19-22	the anxious longing of creation
8:23-25	the Christian’s desiring hope related to the Spirit’s first fruits
8:26-28	the Christian’s help through the Spirit’s intercession

These testimonies further imply the fixed idea of Paul’s writing to the Corinthian church: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17). Present suffering is insignificant when compared to future glory.

III. THEOLOGICAL THEMES AND MOTIFS

1. Present Suffering in the Spirit

Given the employment of the Spirit indwelling believers, God's work in them through the atoning work of the Son ensures that they are overcomers (νικάω). The meaning here is two-fold: Christ being victorious over his foes and Christians finding their victory in the Son while holding fast their faith against the power of their foes, temptations, persecutions, even unto death (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4). Believers suffer (πάθημα) for faith in Christ while being conformed to his image. This idea is the believer's assurance of power over indwelling sin and suffering as Paul indicated that one "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Thus, "our present sufferings are not worth comparing to our future glory" (8:18).

Paul indicates Christian struggle— an unpopular idea in today's interpretation and reading of Scripture. The world overrates Christian living because it lacks "on-the-spot results" to solve immediate problems, let alone if one has to suffer. One may desire to be a Christian because of its ethics, but another may prefer "now" answers rather than ethics. The world's view is survival rather than sacrifice (8:5), given φρονοῦσιν where one thinks of oneself. The apostle reminds one that the Holy Spirit has been given for victory to overcome indwelling sin's grip. One must count the "old man" as dead, indicated in Romans 6, and the "new man" alive in the sphere of Christ's resurrection, indicating that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing to our future glory" (8:18). Paul's observation in this context is not referring to any external persecution, but that which is an internal struggle, sin. Edwards offers that "grace does not stupefy a man's, conscience; but makes it more sensible, more

easily and thoroughly to discern the sinfulness of that which is sinful, and to receive a greater conviction of the heinous and dreadful nature of sin.”¹⁰

2. Future Glory

As indicated “as creation awaiting its freedom,” Paul’s explanation of “the present time” begs the question, “What shall we say” as an answer to four “who” rhetorical questions centering on the Creator who stands behind, yet at variance with and prevailing over the powers of the creation beneath sin’s grip. The series of inquiries echo the integration of Isaiah’s third Servant Song (Isa. 50:4-11) into the fourth Servant Song (Isa. 53:6, 11-12), describing the Servant's redeeming work. Paul uses a pattern of ABBA in the descriptions to contrast God and Christ. God, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (8:31-32), occurs with Christ Jesus, “who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (8:34). Questions concerning the believer’s adversaries are raised amid both descriptions. Paul provides that they are real, though not identified, and finally come to nothing (Isa. 41:11-13; 50:7-9; 51:4-8).

IV. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Romans 8:14-17 – Transitional verses

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons^[a] of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Paul explains the provisions of the Law and conversion for righteous Christian living in the transitional verses mentioned above. The Holy Spirit raises the life of the Christian just as he resurrected the dead body of Christ. Therefore, as described in chapter 7, the deeds of

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 1, Sect. IX*, ed. Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: Banner Trust, 1992), 309.

righteousness cannot offer a covering for the moral depravity of its victims. The Holy Spirit adopts one, and we are God's sons through his ministry. He confirms not only the legitimacy of the believer (15-16), but he sustains and strengthens through suffering. The foundation for verses 18-28 lay in two identifiable ideas: God's Spirit is the Spirit of sonship joining the believer with Christ ensuring his reign with him, and though suffering is a prerequisite and necessary for sonship (17), it guarantees the Christian's complete and final sonship at Christ's return (8:23).

8:18 – Sonship triumphs over suffering

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

The reality of Christian suffering is related to 5:3-4, where Paul's words note the benefit of sonship outweighing the price required for payment as sons of God: "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." Christian suffering reaches as the horrible struggle with sin— a reality known more by them than other people in the world. The Holy Spirit operates to bring about suffering by pointing one to Christ and sin's horror resulting in one's betrayal of him over and over again. Thus, the afflictions of a son are for his good where one is looking onward when sin is no longer a hindrance. In this context, God's sovereignty assures one of eventual deliverance. Calvin's words provide this insight in that "he [God] visits us with disgrace, poverty, or bereavement, or disease, or other afflictions... and thus humbled, we learn to invoke his strength, which alone can enable us to bear up under a weight of affliction."¹¹

8:19-22 – The anxious longing of creation

¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it,

¹¹ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 3, Chapter 8, 2*, ed. Thomas Norton (Middleton, DE: Pantianos Classics, 2021), 250.

in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Paul exemplifies the created world as “the subhuman” creation. The Old Testament examples denote the groaning of all creation (Ps. 65:12-13; Isa. 24:4; Jer. 4:28; 12:4). This groaning results from the cursed ground and God’s response to Adam’s original sin (Gen. 3:17). It is part of a bigger picture. Paul’s idea is the liberation of creation, and Peter’s citation of the renovation of the earth— it will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:7-13). The world will be renewed but not replaced (Col. 1:20; Rev.21:5). In these perspectives, the groaning of creation is universal, and its groaning continues through the ongoing sin of man. As Paul reports, sin has resulted in the earth’s divine sentence of immorality and futility. Humans bear the marks of this depravity, with certain death. Though creation bears the magnificence of God’s handiwork, it also suffers the scars of sin’s corruption. However, even in suffering, creation is subject to God’s purposes in the eschatological future and throughout the existence of “all things.”

8:23-25 – The Christian’s desiring hope related to the Spirit’s first fruits

²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Creation’s current state is not its final but bears shreds of evidence of a mother groaning with labor pains. Though not audible, the idea is a way of suggesting the unfulfilled desire for final deliverance (Exod. 3:7). God has planned creation’s destiny, and its longing to be fulfilled is compared to believers whose destiny they long for and patiently await. The Old Testament standing of “firstfruits” is that which is offered to God as the best part of the harvest (Exod. 23:19; Lev. 2:12). Similarly, the evidence of one’s salvation is the inner work of the Holy Spirit as a down payment to God’s heirs while awaiting consummation. Paul’s

premise here is the realization of the believer's adoption in Christ at the resurrection (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13, 14). This indication is the typical tension of the New Testament between the "already" and the "not yet." God's adopted children have now been given the position of sonship and redemption. However, they do not hold all of the adoption's benefits of resurrected or renewed bodies. Thus, waiting in hope with patience is the requirement of the steadfast Christian life.

8:26-28 – The Christian's help through the Spirit's intercession

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because[a] the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The strengthening power of the Holy Spirit intercedes and helps those who are reminded consciously of the weakness born to them. This bewilderment is the Christian's universal experience in not knowing how to pray (2 Cor. 12:8-10; Phil. 1:22-24). The Spirit's intercession brings to God on behalf of the believer unspoken words (groans), prayers that match the Father's will for them. St. Augustine views those whose lives are not based on faith as pursuing an earthly peace based on things belonging to a temporal life as futile, whereas those belonging to the household of faith as looking forward to future eternal blessings based on God's promises. However, one is now burdened with those things weighing heavy on the soul.¹² One is nevertheless obedient to the Spirit's help in recalling the saint's redemption, and the Spirit's pledge confirms that God's intervention in trials preserves one's heart according to his will. The Spirit's intercession provides requests that the Father indeed hears.

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good [b], for those who are called according to his purpose.

The effectual calling of believers is God's initiating sinners drawn to a relationship with him. The premise is Paul's words: "including you who are called to belong to Jesus

¹² St. Augustine, *The City of God*, ed. G. R. Evans (New York, NY: Penguin, 2003), 877.

Christ, and “To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints” (Rom. 1:6-7). This idea is God’s sovereign determination known “ahead of time” (8:29). John acknowledges Jesus’ words, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (6:44). The acts are foreknowledge and predestination (see Acts 26:5; Peter 3:17) of those who would believe in him. These acts on behalf of the believer allow them to wait patiently and confidently (8:25), where God works in all trials, circumstances, and suffering to accomplish his good purpose and will for their benefit in growing into the image of Christ. This accomplishment is a sequence of operations or “chain,” beginning with predestination, calling, and justification, then finally glorification. One is elected in Christ for Christ. The church stands or falls on the article of justification. However, the final link of the chain, glorification, provides that the believer receives the consummation of one’s sanctification— conceivably stepping across “the veil” where one’s sanctification is perfected in God’s holiness. Until then, a chasm exists that separates the most righteous man from Christ. The end of one’s salvation is that God is glorified. Preaching the gospel is necessary for those chosen of God to believe. He has foreordained their existence as the church. “Thus, he makes them sons of promise and vessels of mercy, which he has prepared for glory.”¹³

¹³ Calvin, *The Institutes*, Book 3, Chapter 24, 1, 341.

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