

London Justice House of Prayer - Donna Taylor

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Romans 8 - Overview

I. The Theme

The introduction in verses 1-11, we find this profound statement that there is no condemnation, because of Jesus' death and the life giving power of Holy Spirit. In verses 31-39, there is no condemnation, because nothing can separate us from God's love revealed in the death, resurrection and ascension of His Son.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Romans 8:11)

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,... nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

In between these, verses 12-30 explain that the spirit provides not only the assurance of sonship and inheritance, even when we are caught up in the groaning of all creation, but also our present calling given by God. By the spirit, redeemed, born again believers have a very decisive role to play within God's purposes.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.” (Romans 8:12)

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:30)

In verses 18-27, it speaks of suffering and glory. This leads us to verses 29-30 that those he foreordained, he also called, those He called He also justified, and those he justified he also glorified. The whole chapter is written in a way to say to anxious Christians, and especially to Christians suffering and/or being persecuted, that their ultimate future salvation (rescue from death itself in the new creation) is secure.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Romans 8:18)

“Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:27)

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:29-30)

It is guaranteed by the work of the Messiah himself (his death, resurrection, ascension and continuing intercession) and by the work of the Holy Spirit leading Jesus' people in the path of holiness and enabling them to share in God's rescuing work through prayer which, inspired by the spirit, arises out of the times of suffering.

This letter is almost like a prophetic warning coupled with assurance; suffering is coming, but God's unbreakable love will hold us close. In Romans chapter 2, Paul writes about the final coming judgment. This causes many believers who are followers of Jesus finding themselves afraid that even though they believe in Jesus and have been baptized, they will still face this final judgment.

Paul is assuring them the verdict has already been given in advance, when he says here, “It is God who justifies, so who is to condemn.” The final judgment is not for believers, but for unbelievers. What we find in this passage is to know because we are called specifically to go through the dark valley of suffering, in one way or another, is part of the overall divine purpose. As Paul states in verse 18, we share the sufferings of the Messiah in order that we may be glorified with him.

Romans 8 has been called the heart of Romans. If so, this passage about suffering and prayer is the dark but vital heart of the chapter. We will get into this in more detail as we go through this study.

II. Romans 8 in Context

Romans is above all a letter about God. That may seem obvious, but the Greek word for ‘God,’ *theos*, is used much more often in Romans than anywhere else in Paul's writings or even in the rest of the New Testament.

In Chapter 8, Paul brings into focus more fully what he wrote in Romans 1:16-17. The gospel of God reveals God's **righteousness**. This is all about God making things right through His justice. Many people have assumed that God's ‘justice’ and God's ‘love’ are not the same. The thinking around this is that God's justice would make him punish us

but his love would find a way not to do that. What we find in the Old Testament, the two work together.

When the Bible speaks of God's justice, it is talking about His determination, being faced with his creation in a mess, to put it all right again. When it speaks of God's love, it is talking about the creator entering into a 'covenant,' a close personal relationship, with His people - *as the means through which he will put the world right*. Paul is drawing from these combined meanings, explaining throughout this letter how God has been faithful to His covenant and how that covenant faithfulness is the means by which He is putting the world right.

We could sum this up in what John wrote, 'God so loved His world that He determined to put it right.' As in what John said, Paul said, 'the way God has done and is doing this is through Jesus and the spirit.' We can see this like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus expounded to them the whole story of Israel from the Old Testament prophecies.

All of this helps us to understand the well known doctrine of justification, which Paul explains in Romans. Personal reconciliation with God is central, but it is part of the larger plan which Romans 8 brings out as the picture of the renewal of all creation. What God has promised in scripture, in Isaiah and the Psalms; He would put the whole world right again. He did this through Jesus coming, death, burial and resurrection and the power of the holy Spirit in putting humans right.

In so doing, *we can be part of His putting-it-right plan for the world*. God always intended to work in his world *through* his image-bearing creatures, and Paul now brings this into clear focus. That's why there is the assurance of salvation, which is what Romans 8 is all about. It *contains within itself* that passage of *vocation, our calling*, described in verses 12 to 30, how by the spirit, we are drawn into the sufferings of the Messiah. Through that, we are drawn into the task of praying to God the father at the place where the world is in pain.

In God's ongoing work of new creation, it can be said again as Paul stated, 'glory.' We, redeemed humans, like the Temple, are to be filled with the divine glory, and be set in authority over the world as the faithful people we are becoming. Being 'glorified' means, being filled with God's own personal presence and power by the spirit, and enabled to fulfill the vocation or calling of image-bearing human beings. 'Being conformed to the image of the son,' is how Paul states this in verse 29.

What has been taught throughout much of church history in Romans, is that it's a story of salvation, and we have been passive about what we are truly called to do. Those who are declared to be in the right, to be God's people, are the *renewed humans*, the people God had in mind when creating his image-bearing creatures in the first place, the people who now, in the present age, have a vital role to play in the coming to birth of the new creation.

As we saw, God always intended to work in the world *through* human beings. That's part of the point of the 'image' in Genesis 1:26. That purpose, was gloriously fulfilled in the ultimate Image, the man Jesus himself, and is now shared with His people by the spirit. Israel was called to this vocation/calling, when God called Abraham and Sarah to undo the sin of Adam. Adam and Eve were told to be fruitful and multiply and look after God's garden. Abraham and Sarah are promised that God will make them fruitful, despite their old age, and give them a land, despite them being wandering nomads.

**“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”
(Genesis 1:26)**

This promise of the land had already been extended in the Psalms and Isaiah, to include the whole world. Paul says this in Romans 4:13. And promises about the family had already been extended to include all the other nations. Paul believed and explained in several places that all these promises had come true in Israel's Messiah, this Jesus of Nazareth, whose public declaration as 'son of God,' through his resurrection, was the very heart of the gospel.

“For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” (Romans 4:13)

Jesus is the rightful Lord of the whole world. This remains a *Jewish* and *Biblical* belief that Israel's Messiah would be the rightful Lord of the world. These great biblical promises may have seemed to have failed, up to the time of Jesus. But in Romans 8, Paul picks up what he had said in Romans 5:12-21, “those who are ‘in Christ,’ part of the Messiah's renewed people, will ‘reign in life,’ Romans 5:17.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

“so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:21)

“For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17)

Those who are in Christ will receive the 'inheritance' of the new creation. They will be the ones through whom God's purposes for his world, to be put into effect

through obedient humans, will come true at last. And that vocation, role/calling, begins here and now even though as may seem contrary, will be in the form of sharing the Messiah's suffering and intercession.

III. **New Creation, New Image, New Covenant**

The original plan of God as set out in Israel's scriptures and then by the early Christians is **new creation**, with *renewed humans* taking care of it. The whole of Romans 8 is as stated earlier, about the *assurance* of salvation. But salvation means rescue. The rescue we question here is the rescue from death and all that leads to it. Rescue from death we find means *bodily resurrection*.

Paul reveals that the resurrection of God's people, is itself to be the way the whole creation being saved from its slavery to decay. We humans, were made to be God's agents in this world, which is part of what is meant as image bearers, made in the image of God. Until humans take up this role, the world will remain unredeemed. Therefore, the resurrection of God's people is what the whole world, creation, is waiting for. In Romans 8:19-21, we are saved, not *from* the world, but *for* the world.

This has already become a reality through the work of the Messiah and the spirit. The 'glory' promised to all believers is found in Psalm 8. We have been crowned with glory and honor, with all things under our feet through what Jesus has done.

“What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.” (Psalm 8:4-6)

Romans 8 has been taught differently, believing it's only about God's people going safely to heaven. That is true, but we need to understand the purpose of what we are called to do here and now. The time will come as Revelation states, we can be the 'royal priesthood,' God's ministers, interceding for the world and ruling wisely over it as it was always intended to be.

That will be the moment when creation itself will be liberated from its slavery to decay, to gain the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified. At the heart of Romans 8, we find that this calling we have in the revealing of the sons of God that will set creation free, has already begun in the present. It is manifesting through our prayers that rise up out of suffering.

What scripture teaches us that we should be reminded of; the new *creation* is always the result of the new *covenant*. When we read in passages throughout Isaiah, especially chapters 40 and 52, we find the prophecies of God returning to dwell in Jerusalem. In chapter 53, God deals with the sins of his people, chapter 54 it's about Him

renewing covenant, and in chapter 55, it's renewing all of creation.

In the book of Exodus we find how God rescues Israel from slavery, giving of the law (Torah) on Mount Sinai, and His coming to dwell with them in their midst in the Tabernacle. This is why God brought his people from Egypt, because he couldn't come and dwell in that land of idols. This is why He gave the people the law, not for good works for them to go to heaven, but to make them into the people that he could come and live. This all points to what God intends for His people now through the redemptive work of Jesus.

God's purpose for creation as a whole providing the answer to the problem of Genesis 3-11. We discussed this in the Kingdom of God teaching. He comes to dwell with His people and through us the rescue and renewal of His whole creation. In Romans 8, the new exodus has made a way for the new genesis to happen.

Most traditional teaching has been God rescuing his people from the world by taking them to heaven. We find in what Paul is teaching here and in his other writings that heaven is a temporary place we live. We are to be here both to renew the covenant and renew the whole creation. God is now dwelling, by His spirit, in the hearts and lives of His people to do exactly that. This has been His plan all along.

This is the "already, but not yet," Paul is describing. In Romans 8, he explains that what the Torah could not do, God has done in the Messiah's death and the gift of the spirit. The spirit now dwells within Jesus' people, as in the wilderness Tabernacle, to give them the life the law had promised.

The *whole world is now God's holy land*. Spirit-led followers of Jesus are to bring God's healing love to his world through their own sharing in the way of the cross, their suffering, and their prayer. We will get into this deeper as we study the whole of chapter 8.