

Hope

Romans 8:18-27

June 5, 2011

It's all of God. It's not of us. Anything good is worked in us by our Creator. Two weeks ago we saw that the change God seeks to work in us, and that we seek as His children who want to please Him, takes place because of His grace more than it does because of our effort. We saw that He makes us new, breaks the power of sin in us, and starts to remove our bad habits through the work and power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, making us into the people we ought to be is more God's work than it is ours. It happens more quickly and smoothly when we cooperate, but it is something God does in us. This gives us the freedom to live without condemnation because we are a work in progress. While we are still responsible for our sin, we are no longer bound by its guilt, or under God's wrath because of it. We are free to live and love God as we ought to.

There is a side effect to the fact that the changes in us are the result of God's effort. That side effect is **hope**. It gives us hope because God is stronger than we are. He is smarter than we are. He knows far more than we do. He also loves His people more than they love themselves. All of this means that, if we are in God's hands, we are better off than we are on our own.

This is why Paul says, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" (v.18) This is the essence of hope. It is to look beyond what is to what will be. When we look to what God is doing in us and the future He provides, then the things we suffer in this life are put into

a new perspective. They are still bad. They are still difficult. But we see them in a new light and they take on a new purpose. Seeing what God is doing in us, and the destination to which we are moving with Him, helps us also see what He is doing with our suffering. When His glory shines in us it will all be worth it.

Not only do we hope in what God is doing in us, all of creation shares in that hope. Sin does not just affect the **sinner**. That should be obvious because people sin against us all the time. Sin does not just affect the human race. Sin affects all of creation. The whole planet suffers due to Adam's sin and the way we have propagated and added to it for thousands of years. Paul says, "*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.*" (v.19)

This "eager expectation" is something we are to share. We look forward to the future God has for us, both as He works His will and His way in us in this life, and as we look forward to the next life when the veil of this flesh is pulled away and we see Him face to face. It is then, at the final judgement when God separates those who are His from those who are not, that the sons of God will be revealed. It is easy for a sinner to hide in the church, saying the right things and behaving the right way even as his or her heart is far from God and she or he is leading others to destruction. The wheat and tares go together. Creation waits for the day they are distinguished and sin's power will be no more.

Paul then says that creation was not subjected to frustration by its own choice. We should be surprised if anybody or anything willingly submitted to something that caused frustration. There has to be another reason,

and Paul tells us what it is. “[*Creation was subjected to frustration*] in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (vv.20,21)

Just as sin has affected everything, so the liberation from the power of sin and the freedom to be what God created us to be will extend to everything. Creation has a share in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Salvation begins with the people of God, but it does not stop there.

It is hard for me to read this verse without thinking back to the laws of thermodynamics. The second law states that all systems tend toward disorder. It is a fancy way of saying that everything falls apart unless something outside of it interferes and acts on it. All energy gradually gets converted to heat. Chemicals gradually break down into their components. Mountains erode away into the sea. Even without the formal laws of physics, God told His people, and Paul understood, that the world is falling apart. As Paul wrote, creation is in bondage to decay.

Creation is not alive. Paul does not believe that God is in everything, or that everything is God. He is using symbolic imagery to explain that all of creation has been adversely affected by Adam’s sin and the day is coming when those affects will be taken away. As he looks ahead at the painful hope of a sin-wrecked world awaiting liberation, Paul personifies creation as a pregnant woman beginning labor pains. It has just been a labor thousands of years long.

As creation awaits the time, so do we. Paul wrote, “*Not 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.” (v.23)

If you are in Christ, you have already been redeemed. Jesus’ death on the cross paid the penalty for your sins and purchased you for God the Father. You are His and no longer your own. In that sense you have been adopted as God’s child and are redeemed.

We find here another case of the already/not yet with which we are becoming so familiar. If we are in Christ we are already redeemed, yet Paul talks about our redemption in the future because it is not yet complete. Our spirits belong to God. Our hearts, the core of who and what we are, have been recreated by Him and are under His control. We struggle to get our bodies to follow suit as we seek to be more influenced by the things of God than the things of the world. We await the time when we will no longer be under the influence of a sin-filled world and live in bodies with sinful habits. Paul is looking ahead to the time we are taken out of this world and moved to the holy and sinless world to come. Then we will no longer be betrayed by the desires of our flesh and the sinful habits and influences of the world around us.

This is the hope of our salvation—both that we are rescued from the power of sin over us and that we will eventually be free from all its influences and affects. It is the hope that God is working out His purposes in us and that the final outcome of our lives is up to Him, not us. We both have hope in this, and we find that it requires hope. Paul adds, “*For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*” (vv.24,25) We are

saved into the hope that we are God's workmanship and He keeps His promises.

Now the Christian hope is not like the world's hope. When we say, "I hope it doesn't rain today," we are expressing our desire for a future over which we have no control. That hope takes on even more meaning when the forecast is calling for showers. The world hopes for things to happen that may not take place. For many, if not most, of the people in the world, the hope is for something that is unlikely. Hence we hear about things like "vain hope," and "pipe dreams." The Christian hope is the calm **assurance** that the things we do not yet see are as certain as the things we do. It is the ability to look at God's promises with the same assurance we look at God's past actions. If it were in the past we would call it knowledge. Since it is still in the future, and we have not yet experienced it, we call it hope.

Because the Christian hope is sure and certain we can wait for it patiently. We don't have to be all concerned and worried about how our lives will turn out. Even in the worst moments of our lives we can be assured that the hope still stands before us. Our suffering may cloud it, but it cannot diminish it or take it away. With eager anticipation we live our lives patiently awaiting the fulfillment of God's promises to us and His taking us into the fullness of what it means to be His children.

Many accuse those who live in this hope of being so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. For some this is true. We are not to get lost in the hope as if waiting for heaven is the only thing we are to do.

Still, this hope is the strongest and best motivation we have to be active in the tasks God gives us. What does it matter if I spend myself for God or suffer greatly for His name? If I am His and I am in His will then I will share in the redemption of all creation, I will be liberated from the decay that affects all of this world, and I will see the final results of the work the Holy Spirit is already doing in me! We are not to be foolish. We are not to give ourselves over to sin and the desires of our flesh. We are to give ourselves wholly and completely over to God and the work of His Spirit within us. We can throw **ourselves** into the life God gives us with reckless abandon because we know we are in His care and are being shaped by Him.

Even here we are weak and not able to do what we want. We are limited by this world and the bondage we still experience. Sin affects us so deeply and in such profound ways that we are not even aware of much of its affect on us. Knowing this, and in keeping with the hope he has been talking about, Paul adds, "*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*" (vv.26,27)

This is, perhaps, the greatest hope of all. Not only do those who are being saved have a future in God's presence guaranteed by Jesus' own death and resurrection, we have help and support for life here and now. Eternal life is not only about how long life lasts. It's not even mostly about how long life lasts. **Eternal**

life is about the quality of our lives here and now. It is living life from an eternal perspective. This perspective is given to us by the Holy Spirit working in the hearts and minds of all who, through faith, believe in Jesus.

Where we are weak, the Holy Spirit helps us. He shores us up and supports our feeble spiritual legs. He gives us strength to resist temptation. He brings to mind the things we have learned from God's word that we might stand firm in Christ and avoid sin. He calms our fears when we are persecuted for Jesus' sake. He raises our fears when we stray from the path God wants us on and we begin to choose our own way. He comforts us in our sorrow. He makes us grieve over our sin. He does all these things and more, and He does them quietly, in the background always pointing to Jesus as the way to the Father. We rarely focus on Him, and He wants it that way. He guides those who are His to, and holds them in, Jesus. Jesus brings them to the Father before whose throne they find forgiveness and mercy.

We need this ministry of the Holy Spirit. I said a few minutes ago that we do not even know much of the affect sin has on us. That statement is actually a little weak. We don't know **most** of the impact sin has had on us. The depth of the depravity and decay sin has brought into each of our lives is stunning. As God calls us to be His and begins to use us one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit is to begin to point out this sin and the strength of its affect on us. This is why prophets, from Moses on through history, usually begin by declaring their unworthiness to be God's spokesmen. In the light of His presence and His call to then to speak for Him they see their sin much more clearly. Hence, Moses argued with

God. Isaiah cried out, *"Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."* (Isaiah 6:5) Jeremiah objected, *"Ah, Sovereign LORD, . . . I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."* (Jeremiah 1:6) God spent the rest of the chapter shoring up Jeremiah's nerves and telling him not to be afraid. God's people are not up to the tasks He gives them. This is because He wants us to rely on Him. It is His strength that gives us hope.

We don't know what we need, but **God** does. We don't know for what we ought to pray. The one Who made us does. The Holy Spirit prays for us. In the deep language of creation, at the level of the heart and spirit, He pours out His desires for us before the Father. The Father, in turn, knows the mind of the Spirit and searches our hearts. They work together to form us into the people we ought to be. What a joy this is. What hope it gives us to know that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all working in this way to make certain the salvation they have begun and the hope that it brings are completed!

Don't focus on your failures. Focus on God's faithfulness. Don't focus on the parts of your life that aren't right yet. Give yourself more fully to the work God is doing in you. Quit trying to straighten yourself out. Yes, you need to change a lot of things. You need to change more than you know. Focus on the salvation you have received and the hope that it brings and let God make the changes in you. As His desires for us are worked out His glory will be revealed in us. What more could we want?