

# Suffering and Conformity to Christ

## Romans 8:18-30

Pastor Paul Anthes

**Introduction:** What is...“The problem of suffering?” Satan who is at the root of all sin, suffering has become the master of this argument since the Garden. It goes like this: “If God is good then He must not really be Sovereign or else He would stop our suffering. If God really is Sovereign then He must not be good because He will not stop suffering.” The modern version of this is: “I can’t believe in a God that can let a child be born damaged!” or “Where was God when 911 happened?” Both of these bogus conclusions produce a false God which suits the purposes of Satan to diminish God, His glory and ultimately to take His place on the throne of the creation. It is a rhetorical trap, is like asking someone if they have quit beating their wife. Either answer leads to a false conclusion. God is not shy to tell us the purpose of suffering. Even many believers still don’t accept His reasons. Let’s read it:

**Romans 8:18-30** <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. <sup>26</sup> In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; <sup>27</sup> and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*. <sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to *become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; <sup>30</sup> and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

God is neither powerless nor evil, but uses all things for His purposes. The hopelessness of creation is His response to Adam’s belief that humanity can live apart from our creator. Because God made us He perfectly knows our desires and needs. God, in grace has seen to it that creation will never meet those needs. This is by design.

Adam’s sin and fall caused spiritual death to fall upon all humans. Humanity is alive only to this world, taking all pleasure, fulfillment and hope in this world. Never in God! But all men inevitably encounter the bait and switch. Promising pleasure it gives pain

and grief. Promising life it gives only death and as for hope....not a chance....only despair. In the end everything obtained in this world is lost to death. But...Christ came bringing life and calling men back to God through the preaching of the Cross. Love for a loveless world. Hope for hopeless men. Christ brought forgiveness, mercy, compassion, love, goodness, patience and joy into a world starved for them. He alone is the source and giver of all the good men desire....This is by design.

So Christian....when God saved you, His Holy Spirit broke your human bond with Adam and joined you spiritually to Christ. You died to this world and its power to kill you... BUT, God has left us here in this broken fallen world and many of you want to know why. Most believe God is punishing us with our trials and sufferings! But He is NOT! Christ took our punishment at the Cross.

He is instead proving Himself more powerful than the world. He is bringing sons to glory! He is making Himself our greatest treasure! He is revealing His loving care by giving everything what the world promises but cannot ever give. In short...God is glorifying Himself [making Himself known and seen] in your life on earth and even to unbelievers by using the frustrations and trials of this fallen world. All the while...

**Romans 8:16-17** <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. Three important things:

- These present troubles are bringing us glory. [18-22]
- The Holy Spirit sustains us in our present troubles [23-27]
- The Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ through our present troubles [28-30]

### **These present troubles are bringing us glory. [18-22]**

**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time [18a]:** Notice that these are the “sufferings of this present time.” They are not specially made to punish you or vex you! They are what everyone living in the world at any given time will encounter. The actual word “suffering” means that which befalls you. Difficulty, sickness, need, fear, rejection, sadness and grief, struggles with family and life.

Prosperity preachers have filled Christendom with the lie that God has promised ease, wealth and health! But Scripture says He has ordained difficulty in this present time to produce an eternal weight of glory for you. They are God says....

**.... not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [18b]:** If you have ever said, “I wish I was more like my Savior,” then this is God’s way of bringing that about. Do you trust God? I know you do! Let’s understand and embrace what He Himself is teaching us now. The troubles of this present life are supposed to be here and we are supposed to be experiencing them. The question is “to what end!” The

answer is that God...our infinitely wise and loving God...is using this present world to produce and Eternal Glory in His children. Can we just decide to believe Him about this?

**For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God [19]:** Creation is personified here! It is expecting relief and waiting impatiently for it. Literally “craning its neck” to look for its relief. This “creation” is separate from humanity. The creation is waiting for the sons of God or believers to appear. But...aren’t we already here?

Yes but we don’t appear much like glorious sons of the living God. In fact we are a sorry lot in many ways. Evil seems to be on the march. Our government has spent 4 decades at least trying to marginalize us and silence us in public. They have had some success. Paul explains that our glory [which is Christ Himself] is hidden in dirt pots. The glory in this present age is that we are not smashed and ground into dust.

**2 Corinthians 4:7-9** <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup> *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

John describes present state this way....

**1 John 3:2-3** <sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we **are** children of God, *but* it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

What this fallen world is waiting for is Christ’s return and the resurrection and glorification of the sons and daughters of the living God. This is where a lot of believers go terribly wrong. They sit down to wait with the rocks and hills. NO! NO! NO! This is not for us to do. We are alive in Christ.

**For the creation was subjected to futility [20a]:** When relationships go bad, people disappoint, your children don’t take the paths you hoped for, your spouse is struggling with depression or sickness.... it is wrong to conclude that God is mad at you for not being good enough. This is how I know. You are never good enough. You were not good enough to be saved and you are not worthy to be kept by God. He just does it anyway. This does not mean that we do not need more holiness and humility, but the futility of this life is normal and it is your default state . We all have things in this world that we want above all else because we think they will fulfill us and bring us joy. But it is futile to hope that this creation will fulfill your desires. It is not wrong to want our relationships to be good and our marriages to be strong and our children to be godly and our finances to be prosperous. But this world is futile by design. It is empty in its ability to provide these things. If you want a frustrating life then seek fulfillment in this world. It is simply not there to find. This is what Paul told the Philippians about it....

**Philippians 1:29-30** <sup>29</sup> For to you **it has been granted for Christ's sake**, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, <sup>30</sup> experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

**Not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it [20b]:** So... God takes full credit for the futility of this world. God is NOT the cause of sin, but He is the cause of futility. God has befuddled mankind and made it impossible for them to find meaning and purpose in creation apart from Him. Why? So that they will seek Him and return to Him. In a perfect creation mankind does not have a single reason to every come back to God and love Him. A frustrated creation is intended to cause us to look for God.

**Acts 17:26-27** <sup>26</sup> and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, <sup>27</sup> that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;

**In hope 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 [21]:** Creation is hoping for its own liberation. The death that grips everything will become life with the appearing of God's redeemed. This hope resides in the glorious transforming resurrection of the sons of God.

**1 Corinthians 15:53-57** <sup>53</sup> For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. <sup>54</sup> But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. <sup>55</sup> "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" <sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; <sup>57</sup> but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now [22]:** Until then...this is what we know and can count on. Creation is groaning like a pregnant woman who cannot deliver the life within her and rejoice in it. She can only suffer with the lead up to it. Life is coming. For now we are surrounded by death. Like the disciples we are afraid of this world, but Jesus made provision for us to make it through this world.

**John 14:16-18** <sup>16</sup> "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; <sup>17</sup> *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

**The Holy Spirit sustains us in our present troubles [23-27]**

**And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit [23a]:** So here we are. In this world there is groaning and dying, but we have the Holy Spirit in us.

The “first fruits” means the promise of more to come. God gives the spirit to you as a down payment.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

**Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. [23]:** That groaning you hear in your heart...that is supposed to be there...by design....to turn your heart to your heavenly Father who will never leave you behind. He is coming for you. Rom. 8:15 says we have been adopted but we have not gotten safely home to our Father's house. Scripture is full of these “already / not yet” tensions. We too are waiting to be done with our dying bodies and to revel in our immortal and sinless ones. How glorious we will all be in that day.

**For in hope we have been saved [24a]:** We are saved in hope of heaven. “Hope” means patient expectation. IT will take some time, but we absolutely know it is coming. This is how...

**Romans 8:16** <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

**But hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? [24b]:** Hope is given so that we will realize that while we are living in a dying creation we should not expect the glories of heaven. We do not see glory here! We hope for it! We expect that and we have an incessant inner witness from The Spirit to its coming.

**But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it [25]:** This is why we are not giving up or getting depressed or accusing God of injustice or impotence. God is King of Creation and He is good to the very core. But creation is dying and groaning and we are still in it. We need perseverance to wait eagerly.

The church in our day lacks this entirely. It has relegated end times to the trash bin of irrelevancy. They are concerned with prosperity and relief from the problems of this world. Perseverance is for the birds. And waiting? Why would I do that when I can have my best life now?

**In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; [26a]:** God is so kind to His children. The Holy Spirit is sent into the world to help us live in this fallen world. What you need for joy, peace and fulfillment is found in Him. If you are struggling with your life God is not going to tell you to be stronger or suck it up. He is going to help you.

**Galatians 5:22-23** <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

**For we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words [26]:** We don't even know what to pray for sometimes. Have you ever had that happen? You end up just asking God to make it all go away. But thankfully, the Holy Spirit does know exactly what to pray for and HE DOES!

**He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is [27a]:** God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, are of a single mind as The Spirit prays for your safety and welfare.

**Because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*. [27b]:** His prayers are exactly what God wants to do. So what do you think? Is God going to answer the prayers of the Holy Spirit for you if they are exactly what God the Father wants to do for you and with you in the first place? This is what we call a "win, win!"

### **The Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ through our present troubles [28-30]**

**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His purpose* [28]:** Now you know how this happens. The Holy Spirit knows what God's purposes are for His children in a fallen world. We are part of a groaning creation until Christ returns and we are resurrected and glorified. For now... we are persevering in hope. We are waiting in weakness. We are not strong enough to defend ourselves in this fallen world and we are not able to escape until death or resurrection. SO...The Holy Spirit helps our weakness and prays for us in our weakness because He knows exactly what God is planning and will do for His adopted children ...IN THEIR WEAKNESS!

"Work together" is an active present. It means that God causes all things in your life to combine for your good. God does not respond to circumstances.... He actively causes them to combine for your good. "All things" means all circumstances, people and events. Good is the adjective "agathos." It is used to describe fertile soil, happy days, clear conscience, perfection, beneficial and even pleasant things....like the sound of wind in the trees. How can imperfect children living in a creation that is groaning believe a promise like this? Because of the promiser! AND...because of the power of The Holy Spirit to keep us, protect us and deliver us safely home to our Father.

**Ephesians 1:13-14** <sup>3</sup> In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

This seal is a guarantee of safe and untampered deliver. It is a down payment on the debt to bring you to glory. It is a taste of your inheritance....just a few hundred thousand

advance on your millions. When Christ returns....and He will....the universe will explode with praise to God and Christ.

**For those whom He foreknew [29a]:** There is only one reason given in the text for such confidence. God always knew you! The outcome has never been in doubt...not for your eternal salvation and not for your blessed conformity to Christ.

**He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son [29b]:** I love this word predestined. Apart from it you are on your own. Your fate is in your own hands. Can you be good enough, wise enough, holy enough to be like Jesus? Do you even know what Jesus is like? Have you ever looked into His eyes to know Him? But God the Spirit has!!! And the Holy Spirit is active and alive....producing Christ in you...your ultimate Good is Christ. Christ is the light of the world but He shines into our hearts. This light is life giving it is Christ Himself.

**2 Corinthians 4:6** <sup>6</sup> 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.

Christ then.....formed in you.....is the goodness of God....the pleasant breeze in the trees and the fertile soil in which God's Word grows. All this and more is the fruit the Spirit gives you and... it is your destiny. It does not start at death....it starts at salvation. It is going on now and will go on until we see Christ. It happens in the context of our fallen humanity and a groaning broken creation. In a world that is ultimately futile and corrupt. It happens through trials. It is the purpose for your choosing and it is driven by God's surpassing love and kindness.

**Ephesians 1:4-5** <sup>4</sup> just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

**So that He would be the firstborn among many brethren [29]:** Why does He do this? To make you his child! Because he wants you to be in heaven with Him for eternity and this is absolutely not possible unless He left that home to travel to this faraway land filled with desperate and dying children. Lost and hopeless and fatherless.

**And these whom He predestined, He also called [30a]:** Scripture is clear that there are two kinds of calling. The general call goes out into the whole world. Jesus issued it again and again. Come to Me! Come and Drink! Come and Eat! It is the call that has been issued for 2000 years. Men harden their hearts to it and even plug their ears not to hear. They kill those issuing the call and yet it continues unabated. About it Jesus said this...

**Matthew 22:14** <sup>14</sup> "For many are called, but few are chosen."

But then there is the voice of The Lord Himself. There is no denying this call. If you hear it today you can come. Jesus is calling and he said....

**John 10:27** <sup>27</sup> “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

**And these whom He called, He also justified [30b]:** He lived the righteous life you could not live and died the sinners death that you could not die. Jesus paid it all....all to Him you owe! The calling leads to the Christ and Christ will make you righteous by faith alone.

**And these whom He justified, He also glorified [30c]:** I have heard it said that we are as certain for heaven as if we were already there. Here is the verse. As surely as justification was in His predetermined will so was your glory.

**CONCLUSION:** God does all this while we live in this groaning and fallen creation. It is virtually as impossible for this to happen in this context as our salvation was. The dead cannot live without the resurrection of the Spirit of the Living God.

God is glorifying Himself in creation by conforming you to the image of His Son against all odds and with the opposition of Satan and a fallen world arrayed against us. He does it using the very things that we so long to be delivered from. The sufferings of this present time! Like the miracle of your regeneration... your transformation brings Glory to God.

Can we just decide together this morning to embrace what God says about this world. We are not just being crushed here. We are waiting and hoping for Christ. We are trusting in The Holy Spirit to sustain us here. We are looking at the trials of this life through God's eyes. We are being transformed into the glorious image of Christ. Don't despise the treasure of Christ in you because of the way God had determined to produce it. Rejoice in that! Rejoice in the Lord....say with Paul.....

**2 Corinthians 4:7-18** <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; <sup>8</sup> *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;..... <sup>13</sup> But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak, <sup>14</sup> knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. <sup>15</sup> For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. <sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> 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.