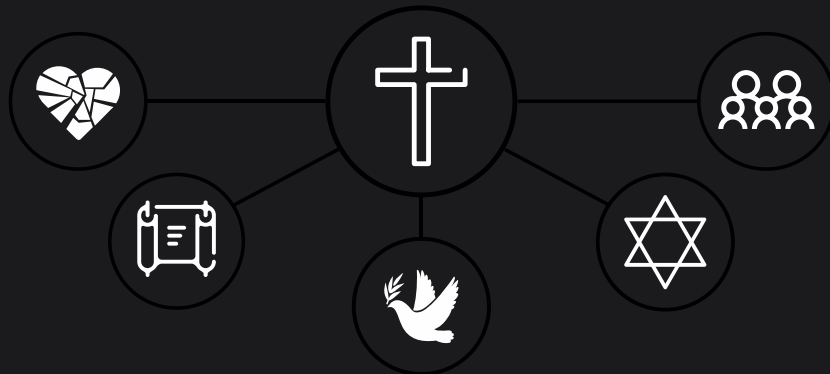




# ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



**Title:** Romans and the Future Gospel

**Text:** Romans 8:12-17

**Date:** March 26, 2023

**Main Idea:** Present suffering in our broken world pales in comparison to the future glory to be revealed to the believer.

## Personal Study Guide

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READ ROMANS 8:18-27

# Highlight – What stands out?

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## Keep Reading Romans 8!

1. What words, phrases, or themes stand out to you in these verses? Do you see any that are repeated, and if so, why do you think Paul focused on them? Does this passage call to mind other themes or arguments from elsewhere Romans?
  
2. Paul builds this section around the contrast of two key themes. First, drawing on v. 18, he compares two distinct time frames of the present time compared with a future defined by glory. Second, within these time periods, he considers the experience of creation as a whole compared to the experience of the children of God.

Use the table below to group Paul's statements in this passage to better understand this contrast:

	Present	Future
Creation		
Children of God		

3. How does Paul's characterization of suffering and strain strike you? What impacted you the most? Does anything in this passage that surprises you?

## **Explain – What does this mean?**

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Paul weaves together these themes effectively. But to understand them more fully, it is worth considering the specific elements/arguments of each one briefly before looking at the passage as a whole. Ultimately, he has an encouraging word for the Believer that is made more meaningful when considered in light of the full sweep of the future restoration He has in store.

### **Present Suffering v. Future Glory**

1. Paul has mentioned suffering a few times in Romans (e.g. Rom. 5:3-5). In fact, he concluded last week's passage with a reference to suffering with Christ and continues the theme here. What does he mean when he refers to suffering? What does this look like in our lives today?
  - o Note: Collin Kruse notes in his commentary on v. 18, "The word Paul uses here refers to 'sufferings' in any form; and certainly the 'travail' of creation, with which the sufferings of Christians are compared (vv.19-22) cannot be restricted to sufferings 'on behalf of Christ.'"
2. Paul clearly paints a picture of suffering as universal, but perhaps there are crucial distinctions. Is there a difference in the suffering for "creation" in v. 19-22 and that of believers in v. 23-27?
3. How would you describe the future state Paul foresees? Why does he repeat his references to "glory"? What characteristics define this future and make it wonderful? Consider 2 Cor. 4:16-18 as well.

## **Creation v. the Children of God**

1. Why do you think Paul uses “creation” in v.19-23? What might this indicate about the scope of the type of experience Paul is alluding to? How does this inform our understanding of the magnitude of the change that must occur to result in the future glory he points to?
  
2. What does Paul say went wrong for creation? Look carefully at his argument in v. 20-21. Who did the subjugation (consider Gen. 3:17-19)? Why can there still be hope? Is there a clue in the “until now” at the end of v. 22?
  - a. Note: Collin Kruse considers the implications of this portion of the passage and the ultimate fate of creation. He concludes the resurrection and glorious freedom the future holds for believers will likewise result to a renewal and restoration for creation. But, Kruse indicates, the more meaningful restoration is that of humankind, God’s image bearers.
  
3. Paul pivots in v. 23 to present a contrasting experience for believers, or “we ourselves” (ESV). Read v. 23-27 again. What about the experience for the believer is the same as what he presented for “creation”? What is different and why?
  
4. How does the time element come into play here? Compare Rom. 8:15-17 with v. 23-24. Look closely at the verb tenses. Does there seem to be a difference in timing of our adoption as sons? Since these references occur in the same chapter, how do you believe Paul reconciles this? How does this encourage me now and for the future?

## **Apply – How does this change me?**

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1. In this and other passages in Romans, Paul depicts suffering as a fact of life. How does the Christian experience this suffering differently than non-

believers or even creation itself? When we consider v. 23-27, what tools or resources does Paul point to? How can this encourage us in our lives today? How does this shape how you see the future?

2. Look again at v. 24-25. Paul describes hope as central to our salvation but a reality that remains unseen (by definition), to be waited on patiently. In the Knowing Faith podcast (see link below), there is a discussion of this “already/not yet” dynamic of our adoption as the children of God. As believers, we are already children/heirs. It is a fact, foundational to our faith, but our experience now is not what it will be one day. There remains a remarkable future glory for us to experience—but not yet. How does this impact the way you view your daily life and cope with challenges/setbacks/frustrations? Can it be a source of encouragement for a believer? How so? Look up 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 to help answer.
3. How would you summarize the role of the Holy Spirit in this passage? Have you experienced what Paul describes in v. 26 as intercession “with groanings too deep for words”? Based on what Paul says here, how might you begin to pray differently in the future? Have you ever experienced something where the Holy Spirit gave you the words to say in prayer, or you knew he was with you, but you couldn’t explain it?

## **Respond – What’s my next step?**

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1. Paul wants the Christian to experience suffering differently, seeing it as far less significant than the future glory we look toward. Has your life been characterized by a different approach to suffering? If not, how does this passage change your perspective? How can you handle it differently in the future?

- a. Read 2 Cor. 4:16-18 to consider how Paul advances a similar argument about suffering in light of the “eternal weight of glory.”
2. Considering the role of the Holy Spirit in your prayer life, how might you change your approach in prayer? Are there new habits or patterns that you need to work on?
3. Is your life hope-filled? If not, how does this passage provide a reset? Consider Rom. 5:3-5 as well.

## Commentary: Taken from John Stott’s Commentary on Romans

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**Note to Group Leaders: You also have your F.F. Bruce Commentary on Romans you were given on Team Night. You can use that one, in addition to this one, to help you grasp the text. Reach out to Courtney Reissig if you need one or haven’t received yours.**

### **The glory of God’s children (18–27)**

Paul now moves on from the present ministry of God’s Spirit to the future glory of God’s children, of which indeed the Holy Spirit is *the firstfruits* (23). What prompted this development was clearly his allusion to our sharing in the sufferings and glory of Christ (17). For ‘suffering and glory’ is the theme throughout this section, first the sufferings and glory of God’s creation (19–22) and then the sufferings and glory of God’s children (23–27). Four general, introductory points about them need to be made.

First, the sufferings and the glory belong together indissolubly. They did in the experience of Christ; they do in the experience of his people also (17). It is only after we ‘have suffered a little while’ that we will enter God’s ‘eternal glory in Christ’, to which he has called us. So the sufferings and the glory are married; they cannot be divorced. They are welded; they cannot be broken apart.

Secondly, the sufferings and the glory characterize the two ages or aeons. The contrast between this age and the age to come, and so between the present and the future, between the already and the not yet, is neatly summed up in the two terms

*pathēmata* (sufferings) and *doxa* (glory). Moreover, the ‘sufferings’ include not only the opposition of the world, but all our human frailty as well, both physical and moral, which is due to our provisional, half-saved condition. The ‘glory’, however, is the unutterable splendour of God, eternal, immortal and incorruptible. One day it *will be revealed* (18). This end-time disclosure will be made ‘to us’ (RSV), because we will see it, and *in us* (NIV), because we will share in it and be changed by it.<sup>88</sup> It is also ‘in store for us’ (REB), although the precise nature of ‘what we will be has not yet been made known’.<sup>89</sup>

Thirdly, the sufferings and the glory cannot be compared. *I consider*, writes Paul, expressing ‘a firm conviction reached by rational thought on the basis of the gospel’, *that our present sufferings*, or literally ‘the sufferings of the now time’, of this continuing age, painful though they are (as Paul knows well from experience), *are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us* (18). ‘Suffering’ and ‘glory’ are inseparable, since suffering is the way to glory (see verse 17), but they are not comparable. They need to be contrasted, not compared. In an earlier letter Paul has evaluated them in terms of their ‘weight’. Our present troubles, he declared, are ‘light and momentary’, but the glory to come is ‘eternal’ and ‘far outweighs them all’. The magnificence of God’s revealed glory will greatly surpass the unpleasantness of our sufferings.

Fourthly, the sufferings and the glory concern both God’s creation and God’s children. Paul now writes from a cosmic perspective. The sufferings and glory of the old creation (the material order) and of the new (the people of God) are integrally related to each other. Both creations are suffering and groaning now; both are going to be set free together. As nature shared in the curse, and now shares in the pain, so it will also share in the glory. Hence *the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed* (19). The word for ‘eager expectation’ is *apokaradokia*, which is derived from *kara*, the head. It means ‘to wait with the head raised, and the eye fixed on that point of the horizon from which the expected object is to come’. It depicts somebody standing ‘on tiptoe’ (JBP) or ‘stretching the neck, craning forward’ in order to be able to see. And what the creation is looking for is the revelation of God’s children, that is, the disclosure of their identity on the one hand and their investiture with glory on the other. This will be the signal for the renewal of the whole creation.

But what is meant by *the creation* (*hē ktisis*), an expression which occurs four times in verses 19–22, once in each verse? The REB translation ‘the created universe’ is something of an anachronism, since Paul had no knowledge of the galaxies. His focus will have been on the earth, as the stage on which the drama of fall and redemption is being played. By *the creation*, then, he will have intended ‘the earth, with all it contains, animate and inanimate, man excepted’, or ‘the sum-total of subhuman nature’.<sup>96</sup>

#### *a. The sufferings and glory of God’s creation (20–22)*

Paul personifies ‘the creation’, much as we often personify ‘nature’. Indeed, there is ‘nothing ... unnatural, unusual or unscriptural’ about doing so, since such personifications are quite common in the Old Testament. For example, the heavens, earth and sea, with all their contents, the fields, trees of the forest, rivers and mountains are all summoned to rejoice and to sing to Yahweh.<sup>98</sup>

The apostle now makes three statements about the creation, which relate respectively to its past, future and present.

First, *the creation was subjected to frustration* (20a). This reference to the past must surely be to the judgment of God, which fell on the natural order following Adam's disobedience. The ground was cursed because of him. In consequence, it would 'produce thorns and thistles', so that Adam and his descendants would extract food from it only by 'painful toil' and sweat, until death claimed them and they returned to the dust from which they had been taken. Paul does not allude to these details. Instead, he sums up the result of God's curse by the one word *mataiotēs*, *frustration*. It means 'emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness' (BAGD). The basic idea is emptiness, whether of purpose or of result. It is the word chosen by the LXX translators for 'Vanity of vanities!... All is vanity', which NIV finely renders 'Meaningless! Meaningless!... Utterly meaningless!' As C. J. Vaughan comments, 'the whole Book of Ecclesiastes is a commentary upon this verse'. For it expresses the existential absurdity of a life lived 'under the sun', imprisoned in time and space, with no ultimate reference point to either God or eternity.

The apostle adds that the creation's subjection to frustration or 'futility' (RSV) was *not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope* (20b). These last two words are enough to prove that the person in mind, whose will subjected the creation to futility, was neither Satan nor Adam, as a few commentators have suggested. Only God, being both Judge and Saviour, entertained hope for the world he cursed.

Secondly, *the creation itself will be liberated* (21a). The word 'hope' is the pivot on which Paul turns from the past to the future of creation. Its subjection to frustration will not last for ever, God has promised. One day it will experience a new beginning, which Paul terms a 'liberation', with both a negative and a positive aspect.

Negatively, creation will be *liberated from its bondage to decay* (21b). *Phthora* (*decay*) seems to denote not only that the universe is running down (as we would say), but that nature is also enslaved, locked into an unending cycle, so that conception, birth and growth are relentlessly followed by decline, decay, death and decomposition. In addition, there may be a passing reference to predation and pain, especially the latter which is mentioned in the next verse. So futility, bondage, decay and pain are the words the apostle uses to indicate that creation is out of joint because it is under judgment. It still works, for the mechanisms of nature are fine-tuned and delicately balanced. And much of it is breathtakingly beautiful, revealing the Creator's hand. But it is also in bondage to disintegration and frustration. In the end, however, it will be 'freed from the shackles of mortality' (REB), 'rescued from the tyranny of change and decay' (JBP).

Positively, creation will be *liberated ... into the glorious freedom of the children of God* (21c), literally 'into the freedom of their glory'. These nouns correspond to those of the previous clause, for nature will be brought out of bondage into freedom, out of decay into glory; that is, out of corruption into incorruption. Indeed, God's creation will share in the glory of God's children, which is itself the glory of Christ (see 17–18).

This expectation that nature itself will be renewed is integral to the Old Testament prophetic vision of the messianic age, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah. Vivid images are used to express Israel's faith that the earth and the heavens will be changed like clothing; that God 'will create new heavens and a new earth', including a new Jerusalem;<sup>103</sup> that the desert will blossom like the crocus, and so display the glory of



Yahweh; that wild and domestic animals will co-exist in peace, and that even the most ferocious and poisonous creatures 'will neither harm nor destroy' throughout God's new world.<sup>105</sup>

The New Testament writers do not take up the details of this poetic imagery. But Jesus himself spoke of the 'new birth' (*palingenesia*) of the world at his coming; Peter of the 'restoration' (*apokatastasis*) of all things; Paul here of the liberation, and elsewhere of the reconciliation, of all things;<sup>108</sup> and John of the new heaven and earth, in which God will dwell with his people, and from which all separation, sorrow, pain and death will have been eliminated. It would not be wise for us to speculate, let alone dogmatize, how the biblical and the scientific accounts of reality correspond or harmonize, either in the present or in the future. The general promise of the renovation and transformation of nature is plain, including the eradication of all harmful elements and their replacement by righteousness, peace, harmony, joy and security. But we should be cautious in pressing the details. The future glory is beyond our imagination. What we do know is that God's material creation will be redeemed and glorified, because God's children will be redeemed and glorified. This is how Charles Cranfield has expressed it:

And, if the question is asked, 'What sense can there be in saying that the sub-human creation—the Jungfrau, for example, or the Matterhorn, or the planet Venus—suffers frustration by being prevented from properly fulfilling the purpose of its existence?', the answer must surely be that the whole magnificent theatre of the universe, together with all its splendid properties and all the varied chorus of sub-human life, created for God's glory, is cheated of its true fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his rational part.

Thirdly, *the whole creation has been groaning ... right up to the present time* (22). So far the apostle has told us that the creation 'was subjected to frustration' in the past (20) and 'will be liberated' in the future (21). Now he adds that meanwhile, in the present, even while it is eagerly awaiting the final revelation (19), the creation is *groaning* in pain. Its groans are not meaningless, however, or symptoms of despair. On the contrary, they are like *the pains of childbirth*, for they provide assurance of the coming emergence of a new order. In Jewish apocalyptic literature Israel's current sufferings were frequently called 'the woes of the Messiah' or 'the birthpangs of the messianic age'. That is, they were seen as the painful prelude to, indeed the herald of, the victorious arrival of the Messiah. Jesus himself used the same expression in his own apocalyptic discourse. He spoke of false teachers, wars, famines and earthquakes as 'the beginning of birth-pains' (NIV) or 'the first birth-pangs of the new age' (REB), that is, preliminary signs of his coming.

Verse 22 actually brings together the past, present and future. For not only is the creation groaning now, but it is groaning 'until now', which makes the NIV *has been groaning* legitimate. And since its groans are labour pains, they look forward to the coming new order. Although we must be careful not to impose modern scientific categories on Paul, we must hold on to his combination of present sufferings and future glory. Each verse expresses it. The creation's subjection to frustration was *in hope* (20). The bondage to decay will give place to the freedom of glory (21). The pains of labour will be followed by the joys of birth (22). There is therefore going to be both

continuity and discontinuity in the regeneration of the world, as in the resurrection of the body. The universe is not going to be destroyed, but rather liberated, transformed and suffused with the glory of God.

*b. The sufferings and glory of God's children (23–27)*

Verses 22–23 draw an important parallel between God's creation and God's children. Verse 22 speaks of the whole creation groaning. Verse 23 begins: *Not only so, but we ourselves ... groan inwardly ...* Even we, who are no longer in Adam but in Christ, we who no longer live according to the flesh but *have the firstfruits of the Spirit*, we in whom God's new creation has already begun, even we continue to groan inside ourselves *as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies* (23). This is our Christian dilemma. Caught in the tension between what God has inaugurated (by giving us his Spirit) and what he will consummate (in our final adoption and redemption), we groan with discomfort and longing. The indwelling Spirit gives us joy, and the coming glory gives us hope (e.g. 5:2), but the interim suspense gives us pain.

Paul now highlights different aspects of our half-saved condition by five affirmations.

First, *we ... have the firstfruits of the Spirit* (23a). *Aparchē*, the firstfruits, was both the beginning of the harvest and the pledge that the full harvest would follow in due time. Perhaps Paul had in mind that the Feast of Weeks, which celebrated the reaping of the firstfruits, was the very festival (called in Greek 'Pentecost') on which the Spirit had been given. Replacing this agricultural metaphor with a commercial one, Paul also described the gift of the Spirit as God's *arrabōn*, the 'first instalment, deposit, down payment, pledge' (BAGD), which guaranteed the future completion of the purchase.<sup>14</sup> Although we have not yet received our final adoption or redemption, we have already received the Spirit as both foretaste and promise of these blessings.

Secondly, *we ... groan inwardly* (23b). The juxtaposition of the Spirit's indwelling and our groaning should not surprise us. For the very presence of the Spirit (being only the firstfruits) is a constant reminder of the incompleteness of our salvation, as we share with the creation in the frustration, the bondage to decay and the pain. So one reason for our groaning is our physical frailty and mortality. Paul expresses this elsewhere: 'Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling [meaning probably our resurrection body] ... For while we are in this tent [our temporary, flimsy, material body], we groan and are burdened....' But it is not only our fragile body (*sōma*) which makes us groan; it is also our fallen nature (*sarx*), which hinders us from behaving as we should, and would altogether prevent us from it, were it not for the indwelling Spirit (7:17, 20). We long, therefore, for our *sarx* to be destroyed and for our *sōma* to be transformed. Our groans express both present pain and future longing. Some Christians, however, grin too much (they seem to have no place in their theology for pain) and groan too little.

Thirdly, *we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies* (23c). Just as the groaning creation waits eagerly for God's sons to be revealed (19), so we groaning Christians wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, even our bodily redemption. We have, of course, already been adopted by God (15), and the Spirit assures us that we are his children (16). Yet there is an even deeper and richer child-Father relationship to come when we are fully 'revealed' as his children (19) and

'conformed to the likeness of his Son' (29). Again, we have already been redeemed, but not yet our bodies. Already our spirits are alive (10), but one day the Spirit will also give life to our bodies (11). More than that, our bodies will be changed by Christ to be 'like his glorious body'. 'Bondage to decay' will be replaced by the 'freedom of glory' (21).

Fourthly, *in this hope we were saved* (24a). *we were saved* (*esōthēmen*) is an aorist tense. It bears witness to our decisive past liberation from the guilt and bondage of our sins, and from the just judgment of God upon them. Yet we remain only half-saved. For we have not yet been saved from the outpouring of God's wrath in the day of judgment (5:9), nor have the final vestiges of sin in our human personality been eradicated. Not yet has our *sarx* been obliterated; not yet has our *sōma* been redeemed. So we were saved *in hope* of our total liberation (24a), as the creation was subjected to frustration *in ... hope* of being set free from it (20). This double hope looks to the future and to things which, being future, are so far unseen. For *hope that is seen*, having been realized in our experience, *is no hope at all*. *Who hopes for what he already has?* (24b). Instead, *we hope for what we do not yet have* (25a).

Fifthly, *we wait for it patiently* (25b), that is, for the fulfilment of our hope. For we are confident in God's promises that the firstfruits will be followed by the harvest, bondage by freedom, decay by incorruption, and labour pains by the birth of the new world. This whole section is a notable example of what it means to be living 'in between times', between present difficulty and future destiny, between the already and the not yet, between sufferings and glory. 'We were saved in hope' brings them together. And in this tension the correct Christian posture is that of waiting, waiting 'eagerly' (23, *cf.* 19) with keen expectation, and waiting 'patiently' (25), steadfast in the endurance of our trials (*hypomonē*). The same verb occurs in both verses (*apekdechomai*, 23 and 25, as also in 19), and includes in itself the note of 'eagerness', whereas 'patience' or 'perseverance' is added to it in verse 25. The combination is significant. We are to wait neither so eagerly that we lose our patience, nor so patiently that we lose our expectation, but eagerly and patiently together.

Yet it is hard to keep this balance. Some Christians overemphasize the call to patience. They lack enthusiasm and lapse into lethargy, apathy and pessimism. They have forgotten God's promises, and are guilty of unbelief. Others grow impatient of waiting. They are so carried away with enthusiasm that they almost try to force God's hand. They are determined to experience now even what is not available yet. Understandably anxious to emerge out of the painful present of suffering and groaning, they talk as if the resurrection had already taken place, and as if the body should no longer be subject to weakness, disease, pain and decay. Yet such impatience is a form of presumption. It is to rebel against the God of history, who has indeed acted conclusively for our salvation, and who will most assuredly complete (when Christ comes) what he has begun, but who refuses to be hustled into changing his planned timetable just because we do not enjoy having to go on waiting and groaning. God give us a patient eagerness and an eager patience as we wait for his promises to be fulfilled!

In this life of expectancy Paul now brings us another encouragement. It again concerns the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This ministry he has so far portrayed in relation first to the law which he enables us to fulfil (2–8), secondly to our fallen nature which he subdues (9–13), thirdly to our adoption into God's family, of which he assures us (14–17), and fourthly to our final inheritance of which he is the guarantee and foretaste (18–23). Now, fifthly, he writes of the Holy Spirit in relation to our prayers (26–27). Indeed,

true Christian prayer is impossible without the Holy Spirit. It is he who causes us to cry 'Abba, *Father*' (15) when we pray. Prayer is in itself an essentially trinitarian exercise. It is access to the Father through the Son and by the Spirit. The inspiration of the Spirit is just as necessary for our prayers as the mediation of the Son. We can approach the Father only through the Son and only by the Spirit.

*In the same way*, Paul begins (26), probably meaning that as our Christian hope sustains us, so does the Holy Spirit. In general, *the Spirit helps us in our weakness* (26a), that is, in the ambiguity and frailty of our 'already-not yet' existence. In particular, he helps our weakness in prayer. In this sphere our infirmity is our ignorance: *We do not know what we ought to pray for* (26b). But he knows what we do not know. In consequence, *the Spirit himself intercedes for us* (26c). Thus 'the children of God have two divine intercessors', writes John Murray. 'Christ is their intercessor in the court of heaven ...,' while 'the Holy Spirit is their intercessor in the theatre of their own hearts.'

Moreover, the Holy Spirit's intercession is said to be *with groans that words cannot express* (26d), or 'sighs too deep for words' (RSV). Strictly speaking, these translations are inaccurate. For the adjective *alalētos* simply means 'wordless' (BAGD). The point Paul is making is not that the groans cannot be put into words, but that in fact they are not. They are unexpressed, rather than inexpressible. In the context, these wordless groans must surely be related to the groans both of God's creation (22) and of God's children (23), namely 'agonized longings' (JBP) for final redemption and the consummation of all things. Why do we not know what to pray for? Perhaps because we are unsure whether to pray for deliverance from our sufferings or for strength to endure them. Also, since we do not know what we will be,<sup>123</sup> or when or how, we are in no position to make precise requests. So the Spirit intercedes for us, and does so with speechless groans.

It is truly amazing that, having written of the groaning creation and of the groaning church, Paul should now write of the groaning Spirit. Indeed, some commentators have resisted this, declaring that the Spirit never groans, and that Paul means only that he causes us to groan. Yet Paul's language is clear. The Spirit intercedes for us in unspoken groanings. That is, his intercession is accompanied by them and expressed in them. True, God's creation and God's children groan because of their present state of imperfection, and there is nothing imperfect about the Holy Spirit. It must be, therefore, that the Holy Spirit identifies with our groans, with the pain of the world and the church, and shares in the longing for the final freedom of both. We and he groan together.

These groans can hardly be *glossolalia*, since those 'tongues' or languages were expressed in words which some could understand and interpret.<sup>125</sup> Here Paul is referring rather to inarticulate groans. Although wordless, however, they are not meaningless. For God the Father, *who searches our hearts*—a uniquely divine activity—*knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints* (that is, the people of God) *in accordance with God's will* (27).

So three persons are involved in our praying. First, we ourselves in our weakness do not know what to pray for. Secondly, the indwelling Spirit helps us by interceding for us and through us, with speechless groans but according to God's will. Thirdly, God the Father, who both searches our hearts and knows the Spirit's mind, hears and answers accordingly. Of these actors, however, it is the Spirit who is emphasized. Paul makes three statements about him. First, 'the Spirit helps us' (because of our weakly, half-saved situation); secondly, 'the Spirit intercedes for us' (because of our ignorance

of what to pray for); and thirdly, 'the Spirit intercedes according to God's will' (and therefore God listens and responds).<sup>1</sup>

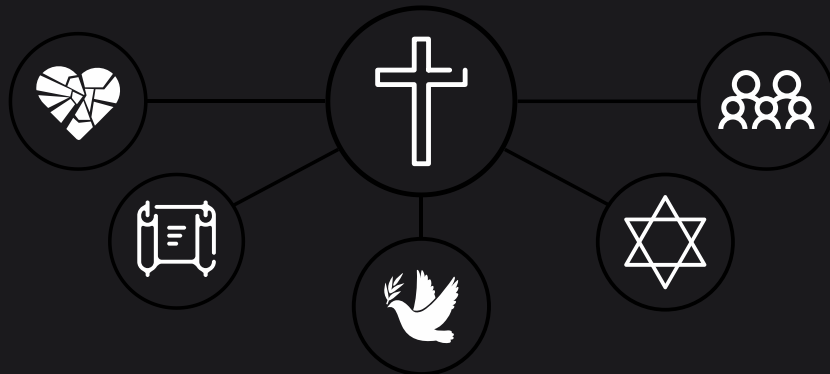
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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, [\*The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World\*](#), *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 237–246.



# ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



## Group Study Guide

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\*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

**Tip:** You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

## Introduction

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**Icebreaker Question:**

What do you know about childbirth? Look at Romans 8:22. Why is childbirth a helpful image to use when talking about living under the weight of sin and the hope of our future glory?

## Personal Study Guide

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READ ROMANS 8:18-27

## Highlight – What stands out?

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**Keep Reading Romans 8!**

**Now as a class read Romans 8:18-27**

1. What words, phrases, or themes stand out to you in these verses? Do you see any that are repeated, and if so, why do you think Paul focused on them? Does this passage call to mind other themes or arguments from elsewhere Romans?
2. Paul builds this section around the contrast of two key themes. First, drawing on v. 18, he compares two distinct time frames of the present time compared with a future defined by glory. Second, within these time periods, he considers the experience of creation as a whole compared to the experience of the children of God.

Use the table below to group Paul's statements in this passage to better understand this contrast. **Teacher Tip: Use the board in your class to show these contrasts.**

	Present	Future
Creation		
Children of God		

3. How does Paul’s characterization of suffering and strain strike you? What impacted you the most? Does anything in this passage that surprises you?

## **Explain – What does this mean?**

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Paul weaves together these themes effectively. But to understand them more fully, it is worth considering the specific elements/arguments of each one briefly before looking at the passage as a whole. Ultimately, he has an encouraging word for the Believer that is made more meaningful when considered in light of the full sweep of the future restoration He has in store.

### **Present Suffering v. Future Glory**

1. Paul has mentioned suffering a few times in Romans (**Look up: Rom. 5:3-5**). In fact, he concluded last week’s passage with a reference to suffering with Christ and continues the theme here. What does he mean when he refers to suffering? What does this look like in our lives today?
  - o Note: Collin Kruse notes in his commentary on v. 18, “The word Paul uses here refers to ‘sufferings’ in any form; and certainly the ‘travail’ of creation, with which the sufferings of Christians are compared (vv.19-22) cannot be restricted



to sufferings 'on behalf of Christ.'”

2. Paul clearly paints a picture of suffering as universal, but perhaps there are crucial distinctions. Is there a difference in the suffering for “creation” in v. 19-22 and that of believers in v. 23-27?
3. How would you describe the future state Paul foresees? Why does he repeat his references to “glory”? What characteristics define this future and make it wonderful? **Have someone in your class read: 2 Cor. 4:16-18 as well. How does this help?**

### **Creation v. the Children of God**

1. Why do you think Paul uses “creation” in v.19-23? What might this indicate about the scope of the type of experience Paul is alluding to? How does this inform our understanding of the magnitude of the change that must occur to result in the future glory he points to?
2. What does Paul say went wrong for creation? Look carefully at his argument in v. 20-21. Who did the subjugation (**Look up: Gen. 3:17-19**)? Why can there still be hope? Is there a clue in the “until now” at the end of v. 22?
  - a. Note: Collin Kruse considers the implications of this portion of the passage and the ultimate fate of creation. He concludes the resurrection and glorious freedom the future holds for believers will likewise result to a renewal and restoration for creation. But, Kruse indicates, the more meaningful restoration is that of humankind, God’s image bearers.
3. Paul pivots in v. 23 to present a contrasting experience for believers, or “we ourselves” (ESV). **Read v. 23-27 again.** What about the experience for the believer is the same as what he presented for “creation”? What is different and why?
4. How does the time element come into play here? **Compare Rom. 8:15-17 with v. 23-24.** Look closely at the verb tenses. Does there seem to be a difference in timing of our adoption as sons? Since these references occur in the same chapter, how do you believe Paul reconciles this? How does this encourage me now and for the future?

## Apply – How does this change me?

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1. In this and other passages in Romans, Paul depicts suffering as a fact of life. How does the Christian experience this suffering differently than non-believers or even creation itself? When we consider v. 23-27, what tools or resources does Paul point to? How can this encourage us in our lives today? How does this shape how you see the future?
2. Look again at v. 24-25. Paul describes hope as central to our salvation but a reality that remains unseen (by definition), to be waited on patiently. In the Knowing Faith podcast (see link below), there is a discussion of this “already/not yet” dynamic of our adoption as the children of God. As believers, we are already children/heirs. It is a fact, foundational to our faith, but our experience now is not what it will be one day. There remains a remarkable future glory for us to experience—but not yet. How does this impact the way you view your daily life and cope with challenges/setbacks/frustrations? Can it be a source of encouragement for a believer? How so? Look up 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 to help answer.
3. How would you summarize the role of the Holy Spirit in this passage? Have you experienced what Paul describes in v. 26 as intercession “with groanings too deep for words”? Based on what Paul says here, how might you begin to pray differently in the future? Have you ever experienced something where the Holy Spirit gave you the words to say in prayer, or you knew he was with you, but you couldn’t explain it?

## Respond – What’s my next step?

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1. Paul wants the Christian to experience suffering differently, seeing it as far less significant than the future glory we look toward. Has your life been characterized by a different approach to suffering? If not, how does this passage change your perspective? How can you handle it differently in the future?

- a. **Read 2 Cor. 4:16-18 to consider how Paul advances a similar argument about suffering in light of the “eternal weight of glory.”**
2. Considering the role of the Holy Spirit in your prayer life, how might you change your approach in prayer? Are there new habits or patterns that you need to work on?
3. Is your life hope-filled? If not, how does this passage provide a reset? Consider Rom. 5:3-5 as well.

## **Additional Resources:**

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**Podcast:** [Knowing Faith Podcast: Episode #130 – The Spirit and Our Waiting with Dr. Jarvis Williams](#)