

ROMANS 8:17-39

Certainty

Putting to death the deeds of the flesh and setting the mind on the desires of the Spirit means nothing less than sharing in Christ's sufferings (see 8:17). On top of that, we have to face the normal afflictions of human life—health, money, work, people, and so on. What is Paul's perspective on our plight? Read 8:17-39.

1. Make a quick list of everything Paul says in 8:11-27 that the Spirit does or demonstrates.

8:2 _____

8:6 _____

8:11 _____

8:13 _____

8:14-16 _____

8:23 _____

8:26-27 _____

Future glory (8:17-25)

If indeed (8:17). This phrase does not imply that our suffering is a condition for attaining glory, since Christ's suffering assures us of glory. Instead, the phrase means that sharing Christ's suffering points toward, and is evidence of, sharing His glory. Present suffering does not contradict future glory.

2. Why is sharing Christ's sufferings worth the pain (see 8:17-18)?

Frustration (8:20). "Vanity" or "futility." When Adam sinned, God announced the inevitable consequences: the ground that Adam would have to cultivate was cursed (see Genesis 3:17-19). The creation was meant to glorify God, but it could not do this perfectly as long as mankind, to whom God gave dominion over the creation (see Genesis 1:28), was not perfectly glorifying God. Therefore, the creation is frustrated, unable to fulfill its purpose. However, God did not leave it without hope of redemption through a descendant of Eve (see Genesis 3:15).¹

3. The creation is waiting, frustrated but with hope, for something to happen. What is it waiting for (see 8:19-22)?

4. In one sense, we have already been adopted as God’s children and heirs (see 8:15-16), but in another sense, our adoption has not been fulfilled. The Spirit is the pledge, guarantee, and down payment of our adoption (see 8:15-16,23).

What will happen when our adoption is fully realized (see 8:11,23)? (*Optional: See 1 Corinthians 15:35-44.*)

For Further Study:

On question 4, see 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 and Philippians 3:20-21.

For Thought and Discussion: Why is it significant that our *bodies*, not just our disembodied souls or spirits, will be redeemed?

For Thought and Discussion: Recall the meaning of “hope” from 5:2,4-5. Why do you think God saved us “in the hope of the glory of God,” rather than giving us our full inheritance of resurrection glory immediately (see 8:24-25)? Consider what waiting in hope accomplishes in us.

Intercession (8:26-27)

5. Hope of glory sustains us in the midst of suffering and frustration (see 8:17-25). Another support we have is the Holy Spirit. How is His aid in 8:26-27 an enormous help to us?

Optional Application:

a. Think about your present status with God and the Spirit you have as a down payment. Then think about your hope. What specific areas of your life can your hope and down payment help you deal with patiently? Specifically how does your hope affect your attitude toward those circumstances?

b. Meditate on 8:17-25 this week.

For Thought and Discussion: Are you aware of the Spirit doing in you what 8:26-27 describes? How is this promise a comfort to you?

For Further Study: Read part or all of 8:28-39 aloud with feeling. Listen to God’s promises.

6. Summarize what Paul says in 8:17-27.

God’s sovereignty (8:28-30)

Paul has been discussing how we become holy, how we acquire the righteous character that conforms to the status we received when we were justified. He has acknowledged that this process of sanctification (being made holy) will be a long struggle full of suffering (see 7:14-25; 8:5,10,12-13,17-27). However, he has encouraged us with the knowledge that hope of sharing Christ’s glory lies at the end of our path, and the Spirit is in us praying and empowering us all along it.

Now Paul reaches the climax of his teaching on sanctification.

7. How does 8:28 encourage you as you face suffering and the struggle against sin?

Called (8:28). Effectually called. The word assumes a positive response.² God loved and called us not only before we became perfectly holy but even before we were declared righteous.

Foreknew (8:29). Many people think Paul intends the kind of knowing in Genesis 18:19, Jeremiah 1:5, and Amos 3:2—a knowing that implies choosing by grace.³ Others note that in Genesis 4:1 and Hosea 13:5, “know” suggests the intimate knowledge of a marriage relationship.⁴ However, others feel that Paul means no more than “that in eternity past God knew those who by faith would become His people.”⁵

Predestined (8:29-30). To appoint beforehand (see Romans 9:1–11:36; Ephesians 1:4-12).

8. To what has God predestined us? What is God’s purpose in choosing us (see Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:11-12)?

Glorified (8:30). Our future glory is so certain that Paul can speak of it as an accomplished fact in the past tense. Paul does not mention sanctification, partly because he has been speaking of glory (see 8:17-18,21,23,29) and possibly because “Sanctification is glory begun; glory is sanctification completed.”⁶

Study Skill — Defining Words

Sometimes a word in the Bible has a richer or more precise meaning than it has in everyday speech. Sometimes the Greek or Hebrew original means something slightly different from what we think the English word means. You can use study aids to discover these fuller meanings.

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For Further Study:

See the words *know* and *foreknow* in John 10:14-15, 1 Corinthians 8:3, Galatians 4:9, 2 Timothy 2:19, and 1 Peter 1:20. You can also look these words up in a concordance.

For Thought and Discussion:

In what two ways does Paul describe us in 8:28? Why is each significant?

For Further Study:
Give a brief definition in your own words of what it means that God (see 8:29-30) . . . foreknew you, predestined you, called you, justified you, has glorified and is glorifying you.

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An ordinary English dictionary is often a great help. Comparing several translations of the Bible will also reveal different shades of meaning. Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias define words and give cross-references. If you write down your own brief definition after using study aids, you will be more likely to remember what a word means when you encounter it again.

9. How is 8:29-30 an encouragement to you as you suffer and battle sin in this life?

God's love (8:31-39)

10. Why can we be certain that God will give us everything necessary for our glorification (see 8:32)?

11. How can we be sure that in God's court of law, we will be found "not guilty"?

8:31 _____

8:33-34a _____

8:34b _____

12. Christ intercedes for us and offers His own life in our place because He loves us. However, because we have pain and affliction, we might wonder whether Christ has ceased to love and intercede for us (see 8:35-36). How does Paul calm this doubt (see verses 37-39)?

For Thought and Discussion: What does 8:28-39 reveal about God’s and Christ’s will, character, and attributes?

Optional Application: For the next week, meditate and pray about what God has predestined you to be (see 8:29). Ask Him to give you a fervent desire for this to happen and a peaceful faith that He can accomplish it. Ask Him to show you how you can cooperate with this purpose. Memorize 8:29.

Your response

13. Reread 8:17-39. What one truth from this passage would you like to take to heart and apply this week?

Optional

Application: Do your circumstances tempt you to doubt God's love or control in your life? If so, choose verses from 8:28-39 to memorize, meditate on, and pray about. Ask God to enable this passage to change your attitude. How can your actions and words reflect these truths about God?

For Further Study:

Outline 8:1-39. The subtitles in lessons 11 and 12 may help you.

14. How would you like this truth to affect your attitudes and actions? What action can you take to help accomplish this by the Spirit's power?

15. Summarize 8:1-39.

16. You have now finished the second main section of Paul's explanation of the gospel. If you are not already working on an outline, use this space to outline 6:1-8:39. Think of a title for the whole section, then divide the section into logical units and give them titles.

17. Write down any questions you have about 8:17-39.

For the group

Warm-up. Ask, “What do you hope for? How certain are you of that hope?” Many people think hope is like wishing for something that is almost too good to be true. In Greek, hope is confidence in a certainty.

Questions. It might be helpful to make three lists showing what the Father, the Son, and the Spirit each does in our lives. Romans 8 tells us a great deal about the Trinity. In your worship time, praise the Triune God for the things you have listed.

Predestination is a major issue for many people. You may want to postpone any discussion of it until lesson 13, 14, or 15 since Paul unfolds his teaching on predestination more fully in 9:1–11:36. Some books on this subject are: Martin Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*, John Calvin’s *Institutes* (the chapter on predestination), and Stephen Charnock’s *The Being and Attributes of God* (chapters on God’s wisdom and knowledge).

Focus on the nature of God in 8:28-39. What are His goals for us? How can we be certain that He will accomplish them? How does the passage reflect God’s love, faithfulness, power, and so forth? How do these guarantees affect our lives? In your worship time, praise God for His attributes as revealed in 8:28-39.

Application. Briefly report on the results of your applications during the last couple of weeks. Can you see God at work in your lives? If not, don't despair; it often takes time for fruit to become visible. Plan to pray for each other now or at the end of your meeting.

Worship. Thank God for the hope He promises and guarantees to you. Praise Him for His purposes to conform you to Jesus and glorify you. Praise His unfailing love and His faithfulness to keep His promises. Thank the Spirit who intercedes for you.

1. C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 196; Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 1717.
2. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1947 [1864]), 280–281; Barker, 1718.
3. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 177; Cranfield, 205; John Stott, *Men Made New: An Exposition of Romans 5–8* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966), 101; Hodge, 284.
4. Stuart Olyott, *The Gospel as It Really Is: Paul's Epistle to the Romans Simply Explained* (Hertfordshire, England: Evangelical Press, 1979), 80.
5. Barker, 1718.
6. Bruce, 178.