

WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: FACTOR THREE

We Reap What Christ Sowed – The Cross/Chapter Three: Life’s Futility

In light of how much suffering God’s people have experienced throughout the history of the Church, how does reaping what Christ sowed deal with the enigma of life’s futility? An overview of Romans 8:18-39 provides significant insight into an issue that has confused and frustrated many sincere Christians. First, we must be aware of the preceding context in verses 1-17. There, the apostle Paul speaks of the incredible privilege of being a Christian. He gives us a description of the Christian life, lived out in the power of the Holy Spirit, which is overwhelmingly positive and victorious. He speaks of our “no condemnation” status before God in 8:1 and the basis for daily victory over sin in 8:2-4. The specific manner in which we can be involved in the abundant life is stated in 8:5-13; resulting in a supernatural and spiritual intimacy with God that is described in 8:14-16. Paul’s waxing eloquence in regard to our life in Christ culminates in v17, where he mentions our glorious future as heirs of God because we are joint heirs with His Son.

If Romans 8 ended in the middle of v17, you might almost be persuaded that the preachers of today’s health/wealth gospel are right. But the chapter doesn’t end there. As it continues, a dramatic shift of emphasis takes place in v17 itself. Paul implies that along with the privilege, there is a “problem” involved with being a Christian: “. . . *if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*” Then, beginning in v18 and expanding throughout the rest of Romans 8, Paul explains how the problem of life’s futility has been dealt with by means of the person and work of Christ, for the here and now, as well as the hereafter. He does so in a manner that is thoroughly consistent with the New Covenant emphasis of having “heaven in one’s heart,” even when we are encountering the very opposite of “heaven on earth.”

Notice how Paul starts his discourse in v18. He compares and contrasts the “sufferings of this present time” with the “glory that is to be revealed to us.” In other words, he wants us to know with certainty that our Savior has provided a complete and permanent solution to the difficult and problematic nature of our current life on earth. At the same time, it is just as certain from what he says in this verse, that the solution will not be experienced fully here and now. Its full impact is reserved for the hereafter. In the meantime, this present existence for the Christian, as well as all of the created order, will be characterized by a suffering which produces groaning (8:22-23). Yet such hardships are tempered and even overruled by a sense of hope (8:24-25). Why? God’s promise regarding the future involves “the redemption of the body.” When that promise is fulfilled, the harsh reality of our earthly existence will cease and “the sufferings of this present time” will become a permanent part of the past.

God’s solution to the problem of life’s futility has a present tense emphasis as well, indicated by Paul in 8:26-39. By means of the Spirit’s intercession (8:26-27), we can receive comfort and wisdom in dealing with the difficulties of life; knowing that God is in control and at work for our ultimate good; conforming us to the image of our Savior (8:28-30). Many Christians fail to recognize the significance of v30: that those whom God has justified will also be glorified. We are perfectly secure in our salvation. God’s unbreakable chain of redemption, expressed in v30, unconditionally guarantees it. The conclusion of Romans 8, in vv.30-39, beautifully confirms to us the previous verses. Being a Christian doesn’t carry with it an exemption from adversity (8:35-36). Yet, no matter how challenging our lives may become, absolutely nothing or no one will EVER separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:37-39).