

It Is Written

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Present Suffering: Future Glory

By Jim McDonald

Romans 8:18 says, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to usward." With these words, the apostle introduces this section of his epistle. He will speak of the "creation," the "whole creation," and of "ourselves who have the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Romans 8:18-25).

Paul described his afflictions as light in 2 Corinthians 4:17. And were no other circumstances to be considered one would hardly consider them "light" (2 Corinthians 11:23-33). But Paul did not consider his afflictions by themselves; he "factored in" the glory he expected to receive, and by doing this his afflictions were "light, and just for the moment." On the other hand, he expected to receive "an eternal weight of glory."

With that in mind he wrote, "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19). Twice more the apostle references "the creation," not only does the creation wait for the "revealing of the sons of God" (v. 19); the creation "was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it" (v. 20), to the intent that "the creation should also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (v. 21). The creation is mankind: it expects, it waits, it hopes — all mental qualities of mankind, but a special segment of mankind, that part of mankind that is a "new creature in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That this is the creation is evident: The creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God; it hopes to be delivered from mortality into the glory of the children of God. Also joining the creation in this expectation are those who wait for adoption, the redemption of the body (v. 23). These are Christians but who have the "firstfruits of the Spirit," obviously, the apostles.

On the other hand there is the "whole creation which groaneth and travaileth in pain unto now" (v. 22). These are those of mankind who have not the expectation of the "creation". They do not have the revealing of the sons of God, nor of the first fruits of the Spirit who waiteth for the adoption, the redemption of their body. The whole creation simply groans and travail "in pain until now." Those who identify "the whole creation" as the vegetable and animal world find it extremely difficult to prove that the vegetable and animal world "groaneth and travaileth in pain." We understand, of course, animals suffer pain, but that pain is not in expectation of a future resurrection. Christians are part of the "whole creation" and not the same nature as the vegetable and animal world. Christians hope for a glorious, future resurrection.

Yet, while the Christians and apostles (in particular) did suffer, they and Christians now look forward to a time when mortality will be exchanged for immortality; when an inglorious death gives way to a glorious resurrection; and, when weakness is exchanged for power to the time when our natural body becomes a spiritual one.

While we wait for that glorious occasion, the Spirit helps our infirmities. We know not how to pray as we should. Even the apostles felt such inadequacies when beseeching the Lord, "Rabbi, teach us to pray, even as John taught his disciples." The Holy Spirit (through His Word) teaches us. More than that, He (along with our Savior) makes petitions for us "with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). He who searches the heart (i.e. the Holy Spirit) knows "what is the mind of the Spirit." The Spirit searches our hearts, not His own, and He knows what is the "mind of the Spirit." That is, He recognizes those longings and desires in our hearts which conform to those of the Spirit, and expresses those longings for us to our Father.

Someday, our spiritual desires and longings will be realized. Our bodies will be raised and God's children will be given bodies like our Redeemer and we will forever be with the Lord. What a wondrous hope that is!

According To The Rules

By Terry Wane Benton

Paul said that in athletics no one is crowned unless they “compete according to the rules” (II Timothy 2:5). Being “strong in the grace” that is in Christ (II Timothy 2:1) means we are diligent to operate our lives of faith “according to the rules” unless we don’t care if we are ‘disqualified’ from receiving the prize.

Would we call it “legalism” if an athlete tried to make sure he was abiding by the rules? Would we shame the athlete who studied the rulebook to make sure he was abiding by the rules? If all the other athletes were breaking the rules, should you act like it is no big deal? Should you join in the rule-breaking? When the judges look at the rule-breaker and also consider the conscientious rule-keeper, will the rule-breaker get the prize over the rule-keeper? Will the judges rule in favor of the rule breaker because he judges that he cannot reward rule-keepers because they are awful legalists? Should rule keepers be rejected, while rule breakers be rewarded?

Paul knew he could become “disqualified” for the prize unless he disciplined himself to strive for the prize according to the rules. (I Corinthians 9:24-27). See, true grace “teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Titus 2:11f). Grace is not a license to sin (Jude 3-4), and one is not allowed to “continue in sin that grace may abound” (Romans 6:1ff). Grace teaches us to be servants of righteousness. If we do not abide in what grace teaches, we do not receive the blessings of grace or stay qualified for the prize. Do not let modern teachers turn the grace of God into licentiousness. You must abide by the rules of grace. The prize is more than worth the effort to be qualified according to the rules and to stay qualified according to the rules.

THE “HIDDEN” PARTS OF THE BODY

By Heath Rogers

The prophet Elijah was at a low point in his life. He had abandoned his post and run away from Israel. When asked by God why he was away from Israel, the prophet said that the children of Israel had forsaken God's covenant, torn down His altars, and killed His prophets. "I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (I Kings 19:10).

The Lord corrected Elijah's assessment of the circumstances. He was not alone. "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him" (I Kings 19:18). People were standing for the Lord and doing His work.

Sometimes, individual Christians become disappointed by what they perceive as a lack of interest and involvement in the work of the Lord. They are tempted to see themselves as Elijah did - "I am the only one who is trying to do anything. I must be the only one who cares."

While there may be situations in which only one lone Christian is trying to do what is right, for the most part, this assessment simply is not true.

Paul told the Corinthians that the local church is like a human body (I Corinthians 12:12-27). Some parts are seen, while some are "hidden" or "unpresentable" (I Corinthians 12:23). However, all the parts of the body are equally important.

Some things done in service to the Lord are done in the open. We clearly see the efforts of those who preach, lead singing, teach a Bible Class, prepare communion, and welcome visitors to our assemblies. However, we rarely see those who invite their friends and neighbors to the assemblies, visit the sick, cook meals for those recovering, send cards to the bereaved, set good examples before unbelievers, and pray for the church.

Don't dishonor the members of the church by assuming they are doing nothing.