



Office of the President
3015 Ave K NW
Winter Haven FL 33881
863.299.4084

PRESIDENT'S LETTER - August - September 2008

For many, the eighth chapter of Romans is the pinnacle of comfort and hope amidst the hopes and fears of what are called the "realities" of life. The question of why suffering happens in this world has perplexed human beings who try to figure out the meaning of life. Some people question the existence of God when they see what appears to be random and senseless suffering in this world. Many are driven to their knees by their personal suffering. The Greek philosophers had two diametrically opposed answers. The Stoics said, "Stuff happens, tough it out." The Epicureans said "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die." Neither of these answers is particularly helpful in the real world of suffering. As a pastor, it is remarkable that you the answer for yourself and for your people. That answer is found in the world of the gospel of Jesus Christ as outlined in Paul's letter to the Romans.

The eighth chapter takes us back to the first four chapters of Romans which lay out in systematic fashion how a person is saved. The law of God reveals that there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The gospel of God reveals that there is no difference, for all are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The miracle of the gospel is that God loved us and provided a righteousness for us outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ. Because of this alien righteousness, God declares us righteous in His holy sight. So the Apostle begins with the affirmation, (Romans 8:1) "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

God hears our cries out of the depths not because we deserve to be heard, but because we are His dear children. For if God would keep track of our sins, no one could come to Him. God has made you His holy child through the working of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:14) "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have been adopted into the family of God. Remember that we are children of God by faith and heirs, therefore, of everlasting life. In the realities of the sufferings of this age, the Holy Spirit assures us that we are children of God. The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For even though we don't know what we should pray for according to the will of God, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words.

The Holy Spirit also reminds us that we will be glorified with Jesus, Who suffered for us. (Romans 8:18) "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Sin has subjected the very creation of God to futility. Sin has also subjected our bodies to the bondage of sin. We realize in our physical bodies the realities of the sufferings of this present time. We wait for a better time when we will experience the redemption of our bodies in the resurrection. In this hope, we are saved.

What about all of the sufferings of this present age that ravage God's creation and our physical bodies? The certainty of the gospel does not rest on our experiences but on

our faith. (Romans 8:28) "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." There is a purpose in the face of the random, uncertainties of our existence. God knew us before we were born and predestined us in Christ to be His dear children. God has called us, justified us, and glorified us. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Heavenly Father knowing about it. God is able to work out all "these things" for our eternal good and our salvation.

But "these things" keep crowding into our lives. "What then shall we say to these things?" You can fill in the blanks as you list the things that assault your body and soul. The answer is simple and yet powerful, (Romans 8:31) "If God is for us, who can be against us?" But how can we sinful beings expect God to be on our side. The answer is found in Jesus. The gospel would have us stop looking at ourselves and the reality of our suffering, and instead lift up our eyes and look to the cross. If God did not spare His own dear Son, but gave Him up for us (and God did this - John 3:16), how will God not also with Jesus graciously give us all things? From the perspective of the cross, we also know that all things work together for our good.

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

Who shall condemn us?

Who shall separate us from the love Christ has for us?

(Romans 8:35-39) "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Sometimes, things seem to pile up in our lives, and we don't know where to turn. Read Paul's letter to the Romans to relight your spiritual fires. Learn to depend upon God in every circumstance of life. One of our most meaningful hymns (TLH # 528 "If God Himself Be For Me") was written by Paul Gerhardt after his faith was purified and strengthened in the fires of affliction and suffering. Sing or read (if you are musically challenged) all fifteen verses.

This I believe, yea, rather, Of this I make my boast,
That God is my dear Father, The Friend who loves me most,
And that, whate'er betide me, My Savior is at hand
Thro' stormy seas to guide me And bring me safe to land.

I build on this foundation, That Jesus and His blood
Alone are my salvation, The true, eternal good.
Without Him all that pleases Is valueless on earth;
The gifts I owe to Jesus Alone my love are worth.

May the God of all comfort, comfort you in your sufferings so that you may comfort others.

John Schierenbeck