

Conformed to the Image of Christ

(Romans 8:26-30)

This morning we come to one of the most glorious truths of God, in all of scripture, as it pertains to the lives of His children. It is the knowledge, that whatever we may go through, whatever we may endure or encounter in this life...we can do so with the absolute full assurance that God our Father is sovereignly in control of it all, and is in the midst of it all, working it all for “*our good*.”

“²⁸*And **we know**...*” Paul says. This is absolute truth! This is not some, “*self-motivational encouragement*,” this is not some “*positive thinking*” thing, aimed at trying to convince yourself that everything’s going to be ok... But rather, this is matter of fact, this is an absolute reality for every single one of God’s children!

“²⁸*And we know...**that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.***”

Beloved, think about what Paul is saying here... All things, everything we go through, whatever happens, we can rest knowing that there is meaning! There is a purpose to it all! That God our Father is in the midst of it all, and that somehow, even though we may not see it or understand it...somehow He is working it all together for our good! What a promise! How comforting is that?

Now immediately upon saying that...we must be careful here, not to mislead anyone to understand this to mean something it doesn’t. I say that because more often than not, this passage is taken out of context and taught to mean something it’s not, which leads to false hope. Many have taken this to say, that God is going to take all the “bad things” that happens in our lives, and somehow put a “positive spin” on it, and turn it around to good. Kind of a “*He will fix all of our problems*” kind of thing. This is becoming more and more prevalent in our day, with this modern “*Health, wealth and prosperity preaching*”. Where they preach that if you have enough faith, (proven by “partnering with their ministry”...right?) that God will take everything bad in your life and turn it into good.

Well...if life has taught us anything, it has taught us that this is simply not true. God would never make such a promise...because things don’t always turn out good. Sometimes, things go from bad to worse, no matter how much faith you have in God. That’s just a reality of life. So one thing we can be sure of here, is that Paul is not saying this is a promise from God that He will take every bad situation we find ourselves in, every bad circumstance we may encounter...and make it all better. Matter of fact, the “*good*” Paul has in mind here, has “NOTHING” to do with the circumstances themselves. It has nothing to do with our personal comforts, our personal gain. Nor is it the blessings of this life, or the “*good of this world*”...

You say, well what is it? What is this “good” that Paul is referring to here?

Listen closely... **It is the furtherance of God’s will in our lives...the advancement of God’s purposes in our lives...which is that we be conformed to the image of His Son!**

²⁸*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are **the called according to his purpose.*** ²⁹*For whom he did foreknow, he also **did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son,** that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

The promise here to “*work all things together for good*”...is to say that God uses the events that take place in our lives, to serve His purposes, His will in our lives, to shape and mold us into the people He’d have us to be, patterned after the image of His dear Son, Jesus Christ.

Now...to the carnal, earthly minded man, whose heart is set on this world, set on the “good of this world,” that doesn’t mean much. There is no cause for great joy to spring up in him, over a promise such as this. But, to them that “*truly love God*”...to them, that “*are called according to His purpose*”...this brings immense joy. To them there’s not a “greater good” than that! For the “*true, born again child of God,*”

there's nothing more they desire than this. That is the very "*longing of their heart!*" Look with me here in verses 18 and following, I want you to see this.

¹⁸For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, ²¹Because the creature itself also shall be **delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.** ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. ²³And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, **even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.**

Here Paul talks about the effects of "*the fall*" on creation...declaring that not only was man effected by sin from the fall, but the whole creation was impacted as well. In Genesis 3, we read of this truth...

¹⁷And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: **cursed is the ground for thy sake**; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; ¹⁸**Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee**; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; ¹⁹In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Listen, not only was man affected by sin at the fall, but the whole world was affected! Sin tainted everything, everything was corrupted by sin! Well here in Romans eight, Paul declares how that creation itself is "groaning" or "longing in anguish" to be delivered from the "*bondage of corruption*" as he calls it, (SIN)...into the glorious liberty of God. In short, to be set free from sin! That's interesting isn't it? But the main point here is, that of the "*longing of God's children*" to be set free! Look at what he says here again with me...²²For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. ²³And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, **even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.**

Here Paul declares the "*longing*" that God's children have to be delivered from sin!

Paul says we too, along with all of creation, groan within ourselves, longing to be delivered from this "*body of corruption*" as he puts it there, to be delivered from the sin that is in us!

How many of you, can identify with that? How many of you, have this great desire to be free from this sinful body, that hinders you from serving God and loving God, they way you want too? You love God, your desire is for His will, His kingdom, His purposes in your life...but you constantly find yourself falling short of what you so desire to do for Him. You can't love Him the way you want to, you can't serve Him the way you desire to...because of this "sin" that constantly hinders you, and keeps you from serving Him the way you so desire to serve Him.

Listen to me... I am convinced, after twenty five years of studying the bible, that this "*very longing*" this "*very desire*" to be changed...this "*very longing to be set free from this body of corruption*"...to be able to serve God and love God the way we so desire to... I'm convinced that it is those very desires and longings, that is the "*Signature Trademark*" that affirms us to truly be, the children of God. It is that very longing and desires that bears witness of the "*life of God*" within us...the life of Christ, trapped in this earthly, carnal body of sin. I will go so far as to say, that if there is "no such longing in your life, if there is "no such anguish and desire to be set free from this body of sin...to better serve God...then I believe your lost, and yet dead in your sin!

I feel there is some of you here this morning, that identify with what Paul is saying here. This describes you to a tee. You long to serve God, your greatest desire to serve Him faithfully and love Him the way He so richly deserves to be loved...but you find yourself many times being "hindered" from doing that in the fullest sense you would like to. You find yourself constantly getting frustrated with yourself, for not serving Him the way you know you should, and want to. Well, if that describes you, then what Paul says here is indeed, "good news" to your ears! Because here, Paul reveals that God is doing exactly what you so desire, redeeming you, delivering you from this body of corruption. Now will this happen over night? No, but as Paul says here, God is faithful, and day by day, He is working through the events and

circumstances in your life, to deliver you from sin, and to transform you into the very image of His Son! This is a process beloved... as Paul said in his letter to the Philippians, *“Being confident of this very thing, **that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ**...”*

¹²*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³For **it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure**.*

Point is, that God is in the ever ongoing process of working in the lives of His children, transforming their lives, in accordance to His will and His purposes. Listen, I can't stress this enough, because tragically in our day, “Salvation” has been reduced to nothing more than someone “walking an isle” and reciting some prayer or creed, and maybe even getting baptized. Now, I don't want you to misunderstand me, I don't want to completely disregard those things, because for many, that's the way it started, as it was for me. But that's not the end of it...that's just the beginning. I'm terribly afraid that in our day, because of such, many have the idea, that simply because they walked the isle, and were baptized, they they're good. That now that they have “done that,” they can get on with the rest of their life, (still yet living to their own desires, their own will...still living to this world, the here and now)...and that there “Ok”.

Beloved, I need you to hear me, the evidence of genuine salvation, is a “*Changed life*”... The evidence that someone is truly a child of God, is that of the “*Working of God's Spirit*” in that man's life, ever constantly transforming him/here into the image of the Son. This notion, that man can “make a decision,” or be baptized...and yet not be changed...yet, be right with God, be saved...is ridiculous! And not only is it ridiculous, it goes against the clear teachings of scripture!

I want to make a statement, that was made by a man that I dearly love...Johnny Hunt. He made this statement, ***“If there's no change...there's no Christ!”*** That may be the words of a man, but those are absolutely full of truth, because they are derived from the truth of God! When you understand what Paul is saying here, that's exactly what he's saying. Anyone who has been “born of God,” a child of God, those who are “*led by the Spirit*” as Paul puts it in verse 14, *“¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”* Then that means, that the “Spirit of God” dwells in them. And if the Spirit of God dwells in you, He is ever working in that man's life, transforming that man's life, into the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ. That's why I fully concur with Johnny Hunts assessment, that *“If there's no change, there's no Christ.”* The reason so many struggle with such, is because they attribute the change to the work of the individual. They say, well I know he hasn't grown spiritually in Christ since his conversion 20 years ago, and I know that he's not in church like he should be...but that's just because he hasn't applied himself. The problem with that is, that view sees man as being the one over his salvation. Where scripture teaches that God is the author of salvation. God is the one that saves and delivers a man from his sin, and disobedient ways. That is the work of the Holy Spirit in the man's life...not the efforts of the man. That's exactly what Paul is saying here in verse 30...

³⁰*Moreover whom **HE** did predestinate, them **HE** also called: and whom **HE** called, them **HE** also justified: and whom **HE** justified, them **HE** also glorified.*

Notice...salvation, deliverance from sin...is ALL the WORK of the Holy Spirit... I'm going to talk about this more tonight, Lord willing, but for this morning, it simply means, that “If there's no change, there's no Christ!” For it is impossible to be OF God, having the Spirit of God in us, and not be changed!

Paul could not make this any clearer, than by everything he says here in chapter eight... This whole chapter's about the role of God's Spirit in the lives of the believer. It begins by our repenting from the flesh, to walk in the Spirit, 8:1, to being “Led by the Spirit”, 8:14, to the work of the Spirit in our day to day lives, as Paul describes here in verse 26... ²⁶*Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

Paul says the Spirit “*helps our weaknesses*” by interceding on our behalf, before God, praying for us, in accordance to the “*Will of God.*” In other words, He prays for us, asking God for things in our lives, that “*we need*” to draw us closer to God, that we need to do a work in us, to ever advance the purpose and will of God in our lives... which is to change us into the image of Christ! He does this, because as Paul says here, “*we don’t know how to pray.*” Which is absolutely true! It would be interesting to be able to hear, just how much of the prayers that go up to God, are self-centered and self-serving. Prayers that James described in his epistle, as praying wrongly, in that we ask to consume it upon our lust...referring to the desires of the flesh! I wonder how much of the prayers that go up today, are in accordance with God’s will, God’s purposes for our lives? I can tell you how many that is...it is only the prayers that are prayed in the manner in which Jesus taught us...praying, not my will, but your will. That kind of prayer life is one that refuses to trust self, one that rejects the desires of sinful flesh, and longs for God to give him/her only what they need for this life, and to lead them in however He sees fit, giving them what He wants them to have, and what He doesn’t want them to have...and so on.

And beloved, that is exactly what we see here... Paul declares that the “Spirit of God” is always at work in our lives, leading us in the ways of God, the will of God, and the purposes of God. And listen, that is often in ways that we don’t fully understand, ways that we would never likely choose, because it goes against everything we know. You see brethren, this is new territory for us, to serve God’s will and purposes for our life is new to us. We’ve been serving our own will and desires all of our life! But now, we have turned the reigns over to someone else, we no longer seek to be the Lord of our own lives...we now, by faith, give that over to Christ the Lord.

And listen closely, this is the understanding of Romans 8:28... Though we don’t always understand what He is doing, or where He is leading us, or why this thing is happening in our life, etc...Paul says here in verse 28...**YOU CAN TRUST HIM**... Even though you may not see it, even though you may not understand it, even though it may not make sense to you right now...you can trust the Spirits leading in your life in the will of God, because we know the love that God has for us, as manifested in his Son... And knowing what a great love that is, we can rest easy, in all assurance...*knowing that all things work together for good...to them that love God and are called according to His purpose...*

The question I want to ask all of us this morning, based on what we’ve just heard from God’s word...

How is your prayer life?

Whose **WILL** are you living to?

Whose **PURPOSE** are you living to?

If you’re one desire, one ambition, one longing is not to be “like Christ Jesus”...then you need come and have a talk with God this morning, and get some things straight in your life.