

God's Purpose in Our Lives is to Conform Us to the Image of Christ

Romans 8:19-30

Romans 8:19-30 - *“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. ²³ Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us^[a] with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”*

Background Notes

There's a lot of truth packed into these 12 verses, isn't there? God is in control of everything, He has a wonderful purpose for everything, and nothing can thwart God's purpose! Although it may seem like things are out of control in this universe, on this earth, or sometimes in our lives, **nothing** is out of God's control. There are no “maverick molecules” in this universe, and there are no “chance events” in our lives! You don't have to worry about an asteroid colliding with earth and wiping everything out. If that happens, God planned it. God is in control.

God is working out His glorious plan and purpose for the universe, and God is working out His glorious plan and purpose for your life as well. I don't know about you, but I find this passage in Romans 8 to be very comforting and encouraging.

Doctrinal Points

1. The creation groans, awaiting the revealing of the sons of God.

In verse 22 we read, *“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”* What does “the whole creation groans” mean? Let's read Psalm 19:1 *“The heavens declare the glory of God...”* God's creation

was glorious and perfect (Genesis 1:31). But look around. There's disease, there's decay, there's death, even violent death, there's natural disaster. The Second Law of Thermodynamics is at work -- the universe is becoming more disordered, and dying a slow death.

But it wasn't always that way. Verse 20: "*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope...*" Notice that it was God who allowed His own perfect creation to be "subjected to futility." Why? Romans 5:12 gives the answer: "*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...*" Death and dying entered this world because of man's sin. The trees didn't sin. Elephants didn't sin. Cows didn't sin. **Man sinned.** God allowed the results of man's sin to affect the rest of creation, so all of creation groans at the present time.

But it won't be that way forever – praise the Lord! Verse 21: "*because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God...*" When will this be? Answer: "*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God*" (v19). The idea in this verse is that creation is standing on its tiptoes in anticipation! The labor and the birth pangs have already begun "*For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*" Verse 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.*" Ultimately **all** things are subjected to Him. What a great day that will be! But right now the creation groans, awaiting the revealing of the sons of God.

2. The Christian groans, awaiting the redemption of the body.

Verse 23: "*Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.*" Here we have a second groaning: we ourselves groan. Why do we groan, eagerly awaiting the redemption of the body? Is it because we're getting old, or we're sick, or we don't have the energy that we used to enjoy? Is it because we can no longer play sports the way we did in our younger days? Is it because we're "all aches and pains" now, and we can't even see the ball that's thrown to us? Is it because of heart problems or loss of memory? Well, all of these things are part of the groaning, because they can all be traced back to the effects of sin. But the main idea is that we groan because of our sinful human natures that we still have, even as believers. Even though we have the "first fruits of the Spirit" (v23), the promise of what's to come, right now we groan because of indwelling sin.

How many can identify with "groaning" because of sin? Well, guess what? There's coming a time when you won't have to groan because of indwelling sin! We look forward to the "redemption of our bodies." In glory, we will have bodies that are not subject to sin or the effects of sin. We won't even have to worry about having bad thoughts about that brother or sister whom you don't get along with -- you will automatically love them! There will be no more groaning in any way.

This is a “sure hope,” as verses 24-25 indicate. That’s when the “adoption process” of becoming mature sons and daughters in the family of God will be complete. But right now the Christian groans, awaiting the redemption of the body.

3. The Comforter groans, awaiting the reality of God's purpose.

Verse 26: *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”* Notice, by the way, in verse 26 it’s the Spirit **Himself**, not **itself**. The Holy Spirit is a **person** of the triune Godhead. The Holy Spirit is God.

Here is the third groaning in this section of Romans 8: The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that can’t be uttered. Notice that we have two intercessors praying for us. In verse 34 we read that the Lord Jesus, who even now is at the right hand of God, makes intercession for us in verse 26 we see that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us. So we have one intercessor in heaven, and one intercessor in us! Do you think that those prayers are answered? Of course they are -- especially since they are according to the will of God (v27). The triune God is for us!

What is the primary focus of this spirit’s groanings? Answer: verse 26 says, *“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.”* Is the “weakness” mentioned here referring to our aches and pains or times of sickness? Probably not. The word here is really singular – “our weakness or our infirmity” and probably refers again to our sinful nature. That’s the real root of our problem.

Because of indwelling sin, we don’t pray as we ought to. We don’t even know what we ought to pray for (v26)! Sometimes we may even pray outside of the will of God. I have heard Christians even pray against one another, or ask for things that are clearly out of the will of God. How wonderful it is to know that the Holy Spirit within us is praying for us the right way. Notice that His groanings are beyond our expression in speech, but they’re real and effective with God because they are in line with God’s ultimate purpose for our lives – to make us holy and perfect. And that will become a reality in the future. In the words of a hymn:

*And is it so! I shall be like Thy Son?
Is this the grace that He for me has won?
Father of glory—thought beyond all thought--
In glory, to His own blest likeness brought!*

The Comforter groans, awaiting the reality of God’s purpose.

Practical Application

Don't forget Romans 8:29-30.

We often quote Romans 8:28, but often we forget about verses 29 and 30! Romans 8:28 says, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”* Notice that it does **not** say “all things are good.” All things that come into our lives are **not** good! But God, in His sovereign ways, can work together everything that happens in our lives for our ultimate good – even car accidents, or stock market crashes, or serious illness. **God can work it all together for good.**

But what is the “good” mentioned in Romans 8:28? Is it good health? Is it fame and fortune? No, the answer is in verses 29-30: *“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”* The “good” of Romans 8:28 is for believers to be conformed to the image of God’s own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God’s good purpose for us is to become more like Christ and to complement His glory as His brethren.

That’s God’s ultimate purpose for every believer. We were foreknown and predestined for that very purpose (v29). We were called by God and justified in line with that purpose (v3). And eventually we will be glorified according to that purpose (v30).

What a wonderful chain of redemption! If you’re a believer, God is working all things toward that good goal in your life. This is the “good” of Romans 8:28. So don’t forget Romans 8:29-30.