

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 8:12-18

Lesson #21

Introduction

We're in Romans chapter 8, and we've finished verses 9-11. Now we're moving into verses 12-18. These last few lessons have served to tightly focus our perception and clarify our understanding of the meaning of being led by the Spirit of God. We now have some specific means by which to define this term and recognize authenticity. These verses gave us some very specific means to evaluate our true situation and know if the Spirit of God was truly resident within us. If His Spirit is within us then we agree with Him about sin and righteousness, and our behaviors begin to mimic His. These next verses move further along this path and present some of the benefits and the obligations of redemption. (Title)

Adoption into the Family of God

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:12-18 (NASB)

Verse 12:

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

At this point Paul takes a turn back from internal beliefs to external behaviors. Previously he's been speaking mostly about attitudes and beliefs, but now he changes emphasis. It sometimes seems difficult to know which is the main point. But this is because the two are inextricably linked together. Our true beliefs will unavoidably demonstrate themselves by what we actually do in our daily practices. Now we've already heard Paul speak of our flesh holding us in bondage to sin, so we immediately acknowledge that the actions we're discussing are our routine practices, our ordinary pattern of life. Nowhere does the scriptures in any way say or even indicate that perfection is possible for any human being living in a flesh and blood body. We will not be totally perfect until we get that new undefiled and immortal body, but the general pattern of our life will be very obvious. Now some are good at putting up a false front in the presence of others, like the multitudes of cultural Christians we have today, but they're only that way when others are around them. Now I acknowledge that we all probably do this at least to some degree. But it isn't always with wrong intent, because each of us is charged with being an example to our brethren, by encouraging them to godliness and virtue, and not set a wrong example of sin tolerance, especially to young believers. (Mat 18:6; Mk 9:42; Lk 17:2)

This verse speaks of our obligation, and says that, that obligation is not to the flesh, because if we are living a life, meaning our general pattern of life and day to day actions are in keeping with the desires of the flesh, then there is only one possible outcome *you must die*; says Paul. Because a continued general pattern of life that's in conformity with the flesh, and approves of the things of the flesh, is proof positive that we do not have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us. Of such ones Paul said elsewhere, *They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.* (Titus 1:16) Since the very first century, while the original Apostles were still alive, the churches were already filling up with those who profess to know God but deny Him by both their internal disagreement with His holy scriptures and their outward lifestyle (general pattern) of disobedience to those scriptures.

Now I want to clarify something here. By the term "pattern of life" we mean all the multitudes of decisions and actions and comments that we each make all day long. Because a Christian is acutely aware of sin, they are much more sensitive to it than unbelievers. Multitudes of things that the unbeliever says and does are just normal things that they think nothing of, but as Christians we would be convicted and ashamed of ourselves if we had said or done that. So, we are very much aware of our failures, where unbelievers don't even thing they were failures. For this reason we often perceive ourselves

critically, and this is exactly right, that's what our conscience and renewed mind is supposed to be doing, but we are not supposed to overlook our successes either. If we do, then we have nothing to be grateful and thankful for when we give worship to God. Do you realize just how many decisions you make every day, and actions you take or don't take precisely because the Spirit of Christ is resident within you? Do you realize just how differently you see things and perceive things than the world sees and perceives them? Every sentence you speak in a conversation, your choice of words and attitudes, is influenced by the change of mindset that came with the gift of the indwelling Spirit. It's become your very nature, so you don't always recognize it, but others do I assure you. Others see the difference more clearly than we do, and again this is as it should be. When we're speaking and behaving in keeping with the teachings of scripture this should be second nature to us, it shouldn't seem unusual to us at all, so we don't even realize that our general pattern of life is very much influenced by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. We just see the failures and they seem large and frequent to us. But our whole pattern of life, even with its failures, is not contrary to scriptures but very much in conformity with them. And others see this very clearly, and that's why they react as they do, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively, but they clearly see the difference and it affects them. On our part lets try to make sure it's our conformities to scriptures that affects them and not our failures. I've said this to be a positive encouragement to us, and not to puff us up or appeal to our pride, which we know is entirely contrary to the attitude of Christ. But a little positive encouragement is very much useful in reinforcing our faith and strengthening our determination to live a lifestyle that's pleasing to our Savior and admirable before men.

Our general pattern of life, though not perfect, is a very good self test as to the authenticity of our faith. Even if we don't see the difference between ourselves and the world so starkly, do others who know us see it? They certainly should. That's why we call it the "pattern" of life, because the Christian has a general pattern of behaviors and worldview that are guided and directed by the word of God. And it's obvious to all who know us and spend any significant time with us. Many people think they're a Christian, but maybe its more meaningful if everyone around us thinks we're a Christian, and not just a religious hypocrite. Our visible pattern of life is what makes the difference, isn't it? And our pattern of life is the means by which we demonstrate our gratitude and love for Jesus Christ. (Jn 14:15)

Now we can see why Paul says that *if you are living according to the flesh, you must die*, because our pattern of life demonstrates the presence or absence of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. If the pattern of our life is contrary to scriptures, then we do not have His Spirit within us, *but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live*. Again Paul is speaking so very clearly that misunderstand his meaning is impossible. The presence of the indwelling Spirit of Christ produces, within a believer, a resultant pattern of putting to death the deeds of the body. This means refusing to allow ourselves to say and do things that are contrary to scriptures and the will of God, to the best of our capacity. And doing this every minute of every day to the point that it establishes a reliable pattern of life and beliefs. Putting it to death means literally not doing it, saying no to the desires of our flesh, and refusing to do them with every ounce of our capability, and immediately confessing and repenting when we fail. But again, do we, the genuine Christians, realize that though a few soldiers of sin manage to evade us, nevertheless we all put to death a whole army of sin every single day as the general pattern of our life? We succeed way more than we fail. That's why other people know we're Christians. And that's what honors Jesus Christ and proves or disproves our love for Him. (1Jn 2:3-6) Those who argue that we can be a Christian and still think and behave the same as before, and still share the world's views, are proven beyond a doubt to be void of the indwelling Spirit of Christ and therefore they do not belong to Him. (Mat 7:21-23; Rom 8:9) Our general pattern of life really does say it all, because it's the visible display of what we believe, and what we believe is the effect of having or not having the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and the indwelling Spirit of Christ is the proof of whether justification by faith has happened or not happened. There is a logical chain of connectivity here and its only effectual if it isn't broken anywhere, and every link is intact. This is the meaning of the next verse:

Verse 14:

14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

The genuine sons of God are only those who are living a general pattern of life that is *being led* by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. And *being led* means being made to agree and comply with the word of God as the general pattern of our life. Otherwise what is *being led* supposed to mean, if it doesn't imply *being made to follow after*. If someone leads it's because others are intended to follow after that leader. Otherwise the leader isn't leading anything, they're just demonstrating. When Paul says those *who are being led*, he must, by necessity, mean that they are following someone

else, and following means doing the same thing and acting the same way as the leader, that's what a follower does, they follow a leader and copy their actions. *Are being led* is in the verb tense that conveys an ongoing continued practice. It doesn't mean we were once led but now we're on our own, it means that the indwelling Spirit of Christ is a constant driving influence acting upon our thoughts and behaviors. He is influencing our speech and behaviors every minute of every day.

One is a son of God if their routine daily thinking and behaviors are being perpetually led by the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and this is what distinguishes us as sons (or daughters) of God, *these are sons of God* says Paul, meaning those who demonstrate, by the pattern of their life, that they are being led by the Spirit of God, continually. Again the clarity of Paul's words is most refreshing. These are eye opening verses, and to benefit from them all we have to do is clearly understand them and then believe what they say, which we will if the Spirit of Christ dwells in us.

Verse 15:

15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

It was easier to understand the intent of this verse in the time when Paul made it. At that time slavery was a matter of fact. Any reasonably prominent household had slaves to help with the work. Slaves had no rights nor citizenship nor protection under the law. If they were fortunate enough to belong to a reasonable owner they could live a meager life of servitude without abuse, but there were no such guarantees and some would have very terrible owners. And perhaps the worse thing was that very little likelihood existed for them to ever escape their place. They would never own anything, they would have only what they were given by their master, and they would leave nothing to their offspring if they were fortunate enough to have any at all. They were always at the whim of their master and had not control over their lives nor expectation of improvement in their lifetime. Fear was a part of their daily lives, as they sought to avoid wrath and please their master.

Now, this is in stark contrast to the sons and daughters of the master. The children were the heirs of everything, especially the firstborn son. They did little or none of the difficult and dirty work, and they partook of all the best that the family had. They were free to come and go as they pleased, and to own whatever they desired, and decide for themselves what they wanted to do. The contrast between the two was a daily reality to them so when someone spoke of slaves and sons they knew exactly what was meant, and the vast difference this represented.

In the preceding verses, Paul has been referring to the redeemed of God as having received a new spirit. That new spirit they now have is made in the likeness of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. In this verse the emphasis of the word spirit is that of the internal attitude and mindset. The new spirit (attitude and mindset) is not one of a slave, that lives in constant fear of retribution, and has no hope of anything better, but rather that of a son who belongs to his father and knows that he is loved by his father and stands to eventually inherit everything that his father has. This particular analogy, this comparison, paints a very clear picture doesn't it? Imagine a person who had lived their whole life as a slave, is suddenly legally adopted by their master into the master's own family, and conveyed all the rights and benefits of a son (or daughter). What an incredible difference this would make in their life and attitude. Concerning our being redeemed from slavery to sin, and rescued from an inescapable future in hell, now instead we are made the children of God, and assured a future of eternal righteousness and unimaginable glory. Of course we cry out "Abba Father" or in today's terms maybe "praise God", but the Greek term implies a sense of close familial endearment that our language lacks.

We should never again think of ourselves as being obligated or enslaved to sin. We have been adopted by God into His own household, forevermore. Whether at our best or at our worst, whether ill or healthy, we are members of the family of God, and as such we are obligated to speak and behave in a manner that honors our Father and our Redeemer. We will have triumphs and we will have failures, but in all of these things of life we are sons of the most high God. For this reason we cannot just willingly practice, as a routine matter of life, sinful behaviors that dishonor our Father and disrespect the enormous price our Savior paid for our redemption and adoption. We cannot intentionally bring dishonor on the family name if we truly value our membership in it. If we remember what it was like to be a slave of sin and Satan, then we value our freedom from that situation far too much to abuse it. And we do not live in constant fear like a slave, but in constant rejoicing like grateful children who are loved and protected and assured a future inheritance beyond our imagination. (1Co

2:9) In a proper relationship children do not live in constant fear their father, they love him and delight in being with him, but they certainly do respectfully fear his chastening wrath, if they deliberately disobey his commands and bring dishonor on the family. And such it is with the adopted children of God. We know Him, we love Him, and we know He loves us, and we're assured that His intentions for us is for eventual good and not for evil, but we still respect Him as our Father and have a healthy protective kind of fear of His chastening if we follow a path of sin and disobedience.

But the overriding point of this verse is to make us clearly understand that our whole relationship to God, and to all others who belong to Him, is that of adopted children who are loved beyond words and are under the protection of His powerful arm. He did not save us to torture us, or punish us, but to glorify us at the side of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. He teaches us and instructs us by life's situations, all of them, so that we will ultimately understand Him and love Him as He loves us.

There are those who see the word spirit, as some kind of mystical force, but the word spirit has a broad range of uses in the scriptures, and to help emphasize which we mean the translators often capitalize the first letter of the word, even though there was no such thing in the original texts. When capitalized it's understood to be referring to something of God himself, His life essence, but when it's not capitalized it's very often speaking simply of our own state of mind, our innate thinking and feeling and affections. In this verse Paul says *but you have received a spirit of adoption*. By this he does not for one second imply that there is some mysterious spirit called the spirit of adoption, and we've received this particular spirit. This is pure mysticism. Paul is simply saying that we have received an attitude and way of thinking that is characteristic of sons as opposed to slaves. He is speaking, in this specific verse, very simply about our state of mind, not some external spiritual creature or entity. Yes, there are angelic creatures, both good and evil, who are often called spirits, but that is not what is being spoken about here. Paul says we have received an attitude and mindset that is representative of sons (family members) as opposed to that of mere unrelated slaves. When we think of God, we perceive Him affectionately as our own Father, (our own Dad) not just a distant powerful creator who owns us and everything else.

The innate fear that permeates all humanity, whether they admit it or not, of having to face a holy God and give an account of themselves and their lives, and face His unimaginable retribution, is replaced with an innate loving affection and family familiarity of a child with their own Dad, that completely replaces this fear of retribution. (1Jn 4:18) Our sins, every single one of them, large and small, have been paid for in full, yes absolutely in full, and the thought of our face to face reunion with our God and our Savior is one of immense joy and rejoicing, whereby we cry out "Abba Father", not one of fear and trembling. The Spirit, capitalized "S" that we have received from God as His new covenant promise, (Eze 36:26-27, 1Co 11:25) has produced a spirit, small "s" in us of joy and adoption that replaces the fear that we once had of facing an angry and distant God who is determined to execute His justice upon us. And this is not something mystical and distant, it's something we're very much aware of within ourselves. Before our adoption (meaning our justification and redemption) we had this deep down fear of one day having to face God, even if we claimed we didn't believe in Him. And we knew that if He was real, and He was as holy and perfect as they say, then we were in trouble deep. But now, having been adopted into His own family, we no longer perceive our God in that manner. Oh yes, we're aware of our continued sins, and that bothers us, as it should, but we no longer perceive our God as a distant and frightening judge, but as close family relation, a loving Father, who cares for us deeply and has secured our total redemption. We may not understand biblical theology as well as we should, and we may not understand God's ways as well as we should, but we most certainly know how we perceive our God, and those who are His, truly His, perceive Him affectionately not fearfully.

Unfortunately there are many who don't know the true and living God, and have conjured up many false gods in their own minds, and their affection and hope and confidence is not in the God of the bible but in one they created themselves in their own carnal minds. So, knowing the true God of the scriptures, by familiarity with those scriptures, is the only way that one can know if their perception is correct and if their god is the true God. Hear me now, One can love and trust a fake god even more easily than they can love and trust the true God. And that love and trust can be totally real, even when the god of that love and trust is not. And this is the case in reality, the sense of being okay with God because you perceive Him as something entirely different than the scriptures represent, which will prove to be a tragic mistake when they meet the real God. And these who have conjured up their own god should not expect any mercy, because the first and foremost thing out of God's mouth concerning His Laws to mankind is that we should love Him only and have no other gods before

Him. Worshiping a false god, or falsely representing the true God, (like the golden calf) is as heinous an offence as a human being can commit against the true and living God. So it behooves every one who says they know God to take the necessary measures to research the scriptures diligently and make absolutely certain that the god they love and trust is the same One that is represented in the holy scriptures. Man has made for himself many idols, and the golden calf is just one example of a whole host of such counterfeits. For instance, if you have a wallet full of counterfeit money that you think is real, then you are just as confident as the one who has real money, until you find out the truth. But it's too late then.

So, while the true children of God have received a spirit of adoption whereby we cry out "Abba Father", Satan has provided a whole world full of counterfeits that cause the untrained to have the same confidence as the children of God, but eventually their error will be exposed and the cost will be horrific. (Mat 7:13-28) So, to sum this up, we do have affectionate feelings for God, and we should have those feelings, but we can't trust feelings alone apart from a full and studied knowledge of the foundational principals that support those feelings. Again I'll say, that one can have just as much confidence and trust and affection in a counterfeit as they do in the genuine, if they think the counterfeit is real. The vast majority of mankind makes no effort whatsoever to train themselves to know and recognize the difference. As long as it makes them feel confident then it's okay with them. This makes spiritual counterfeiting one of the easiest frauds in the world, and the perpetrators are prolific, as are their willing victims. The world says "make me feel good and confident and I'll follow you" and Satan says to himself, terrific, because I'm the founding father of that deception, nobody does it better than me.

Therefore, every true believer must have a renewed feeling of familial love and confidence in God, because they have received His Spirit, and have been adopted into the family of God, but that feeling, in and of itself alone, does not prove an authentic adoption, because there are also counterfeits that produce the very same feelings. It is imperative therefore to the eternal security of every person that thinks they know God, to be able to discern the difference between the true and the counterfeit. And the scriptures alone, not just our feelings, provide that information. Now, moving on to the next verse:

Verse 16:

16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

Now, this verse puts together the two elements of God's Spirit and our renewed human spirit, again in this verse meaning mostly our mindset. This verse says that the Spirit Himself, testifies with our spirit. How does the Spirit Himself testify? When someone gives testimony it means that they tell us something that they know. There is both verbal testimony and there is written testimony that are recognized by law and society. The Spirit Himself testifies to us by the written words of holy scriptures. This is His personal sworn testimony. He testifies with us in as much as what He has said is now what we believe and value and desire. And our favorable reaction, internally, to His testimony is the corroboration that we are truly children of God, because we think and believe and feel and appreciate those same things that God has endorsed, by His written testimony through His Holy Spirit.

We have confidence that our feelings are genuine because we have something to compare them to that tests the authenticity. When our own feelings are in perfect accord with the testimony of God then our feelings are being led by the Spirit of God. And all those who are being led by the Spirit of God, these truly belong to Him, as Paul just finished saying in verse 14. Our internal agreement with the teachings of scriptures tests, and then proves or disproves the authenticity of our feelings and perception of who God is, and our relationship to Him. In the simplest of words, if we agree with Him then we belong to Him, but if we don't agree with Him then we don't belong to Him. I can't think of any place in scriptures that says this more simply, and clearly, and directly than the preceding few verses of this epistle. God's precious gift of saving faith is accompanied with a new heart and a new mind that are in agreement with His own, and His scriptures are the means of validation that He has provided to corroborate that what we have is truly from Him and not a clever counterfeit.

The fact is that we humans all have our own feelings, and emotions, and opinions, and apart from something concrete and unmovable, something authoritative and factual, no one would be able to tell if their views and opinions were right or wrong, all they would have is what they personally believe, but it would always be based on nothing but their own personal feelings. This is what the Word of God provides to humanity. It provides the rock of eternal truth, unchanging and immovable truth,

against which humanity can test and compare all of their own feelings and opinions. It is the single and unique body of absolute certainty, in a world of uncertainty and endless personal opinions. Without this Word, the Spirit Himself would have no means (of absolute certainty) to testify with our spirit that we are children of God. The Word of God is that singularly eternal body of truth against which all testimony, human and divine, either stands or falls. Concerning truth, and the word of God, Jesus prayed: [Father] *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.* John 17:17 (NASB)

Remove the word of God from the equation, and all the counterfeiters have to do is instill confidence into people that what they already personally believe is true and real and effectual. This is a very easy sell, as is evidenced by the myriads of followers all over the earth of these clever counterfeiters. But those who know and believe the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which is the written scriptures, know that on the day of judgement none of these counterfeits will ever pass muster. It is through the recorded testimony of scriptures that the Holy Spirit Himself testifies with our own spirit that we are truly children of God, because those scriptures are that which prove it to be so. So, this verse is about feelings, but not just any feelings, but feelings and beliefs that are consistent with the written personal sworn testimony of the Spirit Himself. In these feelings, tested and proven by comparison to scriptures, we can have absolute confidence. (Next verse)

Verse 17:

17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

This verse simply continues the thought of the preceding, in as much as it addresses those who have tested their faith and found it to conform to scriptures, and therefore have confidence of their adoption as sons and daughters of God Himself. And having arrived at that conclusion, this verse continues to discuss the benefits of that adoption process. Once one is a legal child, a fully accepted family member, then they are eligible for all the benefits that this membership affords. If one is legitimately a child then they are legally heirs to the family possessions. So this verse builds on the prior verse. Every child of God is also an heir of God, and joint heir with Jesus Christ. Now we know that not every heir of a family receives the same benefits, some get more and some get less, but all enjoy the benefits. We are all joint heirs with Jesus Christ but that doesn't in any way imply that we are of equal status as Jesus Christ. A family has a father, a mother, a firstborn, and then other children, and each of these have their position of authority within that family, but nevertheless everyone shares the benefits of everything that the whole family possesses. And such is the declaration of this verse. But we notice that this is another of those conditional verses, meaning that what it says requires some condition to be met for it to be true, and if that condition is not met, then the whole sentence is null and void.

So, first, what's the benefits. Well that we share in everything that God and His Son Jesus Christ own and possess, and in such we are glorified with them, by our direct association to Them. Okay you say, this sounds great, so what's the condition that we have to meet for this to be true? Paul leaves nothing to mystery when he says *if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.* Whooh, slow down, wait a minute, suddenly this takes on a whole new perspective doesn't it? Is that really a genuine condition of family membership? According to Paul, and according to Jesus it surely does seem to be. Jesus himself said the following:

24, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mat 16:24-26)

And then again He said:

26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. 27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Lk 14:25-27)

And again:

33 "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Lk 14:33)

In these reference verses we've heard Jesus discuss a wide range of aspects that are involved in the process of becoming a disciple of Jesus and a true child of God. He covered everything from personal possessions, to family connections, to aspirations and expectations, and in every case He says that we must surrender all of our own possessions if we are to qualify to share with Him in His. And this is a genuine condition, it isn't just a suggestion or recommendation.

Remember, we said that this verse is a conditional verse, and unless the condition is met, the rest is null and void. It's amazing how many people seem to just ignore the condition and claim possession of the benefit, as if that were possible, but the scriptures say that it's not, and I for one believe those scriptures. The whole prosperity gospel that's prolific all over the world is a counterfeit lie, because it claims earthly benefits of a prior covenant which was based on earthly works, with heavenly benefits of the new covenant that is based on faith. The faith of the new covenant says that our treasure is not in this world but in the one to come. (Mat 6:21) It says we will have tribulation in this world, not prosperity, (Jn 16:33) and that we are not to love the world or the things of this world (1Jn 2:15-17), and furthermore because our affections are not for this world, therefore those who are of this world will hate and persecute us. (Jn 15:19) The prosperity gospel is a fictitious counterfeit that uses the attractions of the flesh as lures to those who don't know the truth. You'll notice that 90% of the prosperity gospel is preached out of the Old Testament, because there is a New Covenant that Jesus inaugurated in His own blood, (1Co 11:25) that is entirely different than the Old Covenant, and is heavenly based not earthly based.

The counterfeiters don't like the words *suffer with Him*, and to be perfectly honest I don't particularly like them either, but the verse goes on to say *so that we may also be glorified with Him*. The suffering has a purpose, and it's *so that* we may qualify for a benefit. We may not like it but the problem is that those words are there, and they mean exactly what they sound like they mean, that our glorification with Christ, and sharing in His belongings, involves some kind of sufferings with Him as well. It is what it is. If we choose to ignore the mandatory condition then we can forget about ever getting the benefit, because we've voided the provision. Okay, so we can't get around it, then just what kind of sufferings are we actually talking about here? The next verse clarifies the scope and extent.

Verse 18:

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

From this verse, and those we just quoted from Jesus about discipleship, we can see that the sufferings we're discussing encompass all of those possibilities that life might bring about. From simple struggles with personal sin, to family disruptions over beliefs, to outright physical persecutions and even sometimes horrible deaths. Now, not all of these things will happen to everybody, to each is apportioned his own burden, but the point is that there is nothing that is out of bounds. When Jesus said that we must give up all our possessions it seems clear that He meant not just tangible but aspirations and expectations as well. We may have to abandon our lifelong dream, or learn to live with unfulfilled expectations, or we may have to give up our greatest earthly treasures and loves, as Jesus did on that cross, but whatever it is, it's not out of bounds, and when we sing that song "*I Surrender All*" we have to understand what the "all" really means, or we're just singing pretty words.

To be true to context, most of what Paul has been speaking about in the several verses before this sentence was on the topic of what we believe and what we choose to routinely practice in our daily lives. So it would be inconsistent to think that this isn't a good part of the sufferings being described. But we also know that the sufferings that our Savior, and our Christian predecessors have endured go very far beyond just suffering with the sins of the flesh. Hebrews 11 is a good example of the sufferings that have been endured by those who believe God and proclaim faith in His Name.

And even when we think of these who have been appointed to be martyrs for the name of Jesus Christ, we have this verse where Paul says *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us*. Do we understand what this is intended to convey? That the very worst of possible scenarios on this earth are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us when we see Jesus face to face and share His kingdom. In fact, this is what Jesus will say concerning His experience on the cross, and what the great and heroic martyrs of old, recorded in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* will all say when we meet them face to face, and it's what we ourselves will say, no matter what our present situation or our future holds. Now I thank God for His mercy, that not every believer is called to this extreme kind of suffering, but let's be clear that it isn't because we've earned better, but because God has sovereignly appointed all things, and all situations to serve their own specific purpose in His master creation plan.

We all hear people endlessly asking "How could a loving God allow that to happen" when referring to something tragic. Maybe we ask that if we're sick or afflicted of body or mind, and we think that it's unfair of God to single us out for this

situation. As a nation and a world, we have abandoned the thought of a sovereign God who does as He sees fit to accomplish His purposes, (like Job for instance) but promises that we will all be rightly compensated in the end, even if we don't ever, in this lifetime, know why God has planned it this way. This verse says that no matter what befalls us, if we are the children of God, then the sufferings of this present age will prove to be unworthy of comparison to the eventual glory that will, with absolute certainty, be revealed to us in His due time.

The truth is, if we understand this verse, then it both comforts us and frightens us at the very same time. It comforts us because we're told that nothing that God has planned for us will prove to have been too extreme for what He has provided as reward to those who love Him. But at the same time it reminds us that there is absolutely nothing whatsoever that God cannot ask from us or put us through if it serves His purpose to do so. Now that's frightening. He is God, He is the sovereign king of all creation, and He does exactly as He sees fit with all of His possessions, even human beings, in fact especially human beings. Chapter 9 is going to shock some people with this stark reality.

This verse forces us out of that fairy tale pseudo-Christian dream world of perfect peace and love and prosperity that's replaced much of the gospel message of our time. This is a verse that says straight out that God is sovereign, and He might call upon us to do and accept some really scary things while we're here on this earth, and it's His perfect right to do that if that's what He wants to do. But then it assures us that no matter how horrible it might seem at the time, like the crucifixion of Jesus, the resultant rewards for faithfulness under fire, even perhaps unto death, will prove to be so glorious as to render the sufferings insignificant in comparison, when we see His plan completed. No, this doesn't make the immediate suffering any less terrible, and many of those who are suffering only get relief when their earthly life is done and over, but it does help to know that there is a purpose of God behind all of it, and His ultimate intention for everything is great good to those who love Him. It is this knowledge that feeds and supports the strength and faith to endure to the end and not lose hope.

Because Christians are not taught these principles in their churches, but given prosperity pabulum instead, they are confused and frightened when they see these things happen. They begin to question their faith. But Jesus told His disciples to understand what they were signing onto, and count the cost before they made the commitment. He told them right from the beginning that they should expect the same treatment and fate that He was about to endure. If we know that from the beginning then we aren't confused or disheartened when it comes to pass. And we don't hurl accusations at God for not keeping promises to us of protection and prosperity that He never made in the first place. He promised persecutions and tribulations in this age from the very beginning. (Jn 16:33) The early Christians understood well what their faith might cost them. But to keep up our church attendance we've intentionally turned the gospel upside down, and now we preach a totally inverted gospel that is supposed to promise peace and happiness and self-fulfillment. But there is no such description of the New Testament gospel presented anywhere in the bible.

If you, at the present time are not one of those who are suffering from afflictions or persecutions, then give thanks to God for His tender mercy. But at the same time don't think that you have any guarantee or promise that these things won't come your way. The New Covenant does not promise earthly safety and prosperity, that's a counterfeiters lie, it promises that there is another heaven and another earth (Rev 21:1) where those who are the children of God will live in perfect harmony with God for eternity, and this is where peace and prosperity is found, but in this world Jesus himself told us to expect persecutions. He didn't tell us to want them, or to like them, or to seek them, or to volunteer for them, but He did say to expect them, so if they aren't present right now then rejoice, but know this, they probably will be pretty soon, because Jesus didn't make any wrong predictions.

Allow me to insert something here if I may. There are some very nice Christian groups who are promoting the idea that we can take back our country to a time of higher morality. This takes for granted that there was such a time, but I'm not sure that this can be substantiated for our nation as a whole, despite some admittedly very noble Christian founders. While this is certainly a noble thought, it doesn't seem to fit the biblical model for humanity in particular and for nations in general. Recorded history shows no nations with which I am familiar that were ever restored from decadence to morality by their own choosing. Yes, Jonah convinced the city of Nineveh to partially repent for a short period, but only at the direct threat of total annihilation by God in 40 days. And they still went back to their former ways very quickly. The point is that we have

known prosperity and safety for so long that we just can't imagine anything else, but what we have in this country is an anomaly, not a normality. It not only can change, it probably must change for bible prophecy to unfold as predicted.

Perhaps us preachers should be preaching much more verses like these, and preparing the Christians in this country for the possibility of even further moral decline that will lead to outright persecution of Christians. Certainly I don't want this, but all the signs are pointing in that direction, and while we Christians should resist it, we should also be aware that we probably can't stop it, and be prepared for the possible consequences. We Christians, meaning true Christians not cultural Christians, are a very small minority of the population of this country and our ability to even get true Christians into the race as candidates for public offices is just about gone, and nobody would vote for them if we did get them on the ballot. It's time for Christians to start preparing themselves for what lies ahead, and this verse we just read is a prime example. We're silly if we think we're going to see America stop sinning and embrace the commandments of God, that's just not going to happen, we are a selfish and sin loving nation and we're now openly proud of it. We don't even try to conceal our sins, we flaunt them. Concerning Israel, when they were doing the very same thing, the prophet Isaiah said: *The expression of their faces bears witness against them, And they display their sin like Sodom; they do not even conceal it. Woe to them! For they have brought evil on themselves.* (Isa 3:9) America may or may not have actually been a more moral country at one time, but in my youth we didn't flaunt our sins in the faces of men or God, we at least had the shame to conceal them. Now we thumb our nose at God, and flaunt our sin like Sodom, and for this we will certainly pay the price. And those who publically disagree will suffer.

If we're true Christians then we need preaching that constantly reminds us that our treasure is not of this world but of another. (Mat 6:21) And our mission is not to reform this unbelieving and God hating world, but to be transformed ourselves by the renewing of our minds, so that we ourselves are not conformed to this world. Of course we continue to preach the gospel for the salvation of the chosen, so that we may pluck a few out of the fire, but trying to bring morality to unbelievers is something like trying to bail out the Titanic with a mop bucket, it's perhaps a noble gesture, and you might have some immeasurable impact, but you certainly won't prevent the inevitable.

Conclusion:

In summary let me say that I sincerely hope that our great nation will reconsider its direction and repent of our evil ways, but everything that I know about the holy scriptures suggests that this is not what's likely to happen, in fact just the opposite. (2Tim 3:1-5; 2Pet 3:3-7)

So what do we Christians do, and what should we really expect as the time draws near? First, we believe the true promises of God, those which speak of the future, those that speak of His love for His children and our eternal security in the kingdom of God after this present age has run its course, but in the meantime, before that day comes about, here are some words from Jesus and from Paul that we can close with, quoting first from Jesus:

22 "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Mat 10:22) *13 "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.* (Mat 24:13) And our verse from Paul *18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* My dear brothers and sisters, learn what it means to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and then everything that you need for life will be provided when needed. (Mat 6:33) To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
09/16/12