

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 8:19-25

Lesson #22

Introduction

We're continuing progressively through the book of Romans. Last week we finished chapter 8, verses 12-18. If you've been following these lessons, then you're very much aware of the progressive nature of this epistle. To understand everything Paul's conveying it was necessary to begin at the beginning of his letter and read carefully and thoroughly, following along with every thought, because each thought builds on the preceding, and lays the foundation for the next. To study Romans any way but progressively, from beginning to end, is to undermine the whole principle and forfeit the immense clarity and benefit that it offers. However, if one takes the time and the effort to carefully study through Romans, they will gain an understanding of both the big overall picture of God's sovereign plan, as well as the small details through which He accomplishes it.

This epistle gives us one of the best descriptions in the New Testament of God's perspective towards, and His intentions for humanity, and the level of His direct involvement and control over His creation. Christians once understood and recognized these facts, but like everything in this creation, this understanding has eroded and decayed so badly over time, that it's now barely even recognizable today. And vast numbers of those who do recognize it openly resist it, usually because they've been raised on a whole other set of principles and they don't want to change what they've become familiar with, even if it might be wrong. So the question becomes - how valuable is the truth to you? Is it worth reexamining everything you thought you knew about God and His sovereign plans? These words are going to apply more and more as we progress through the next one and a half chapters. But as for now, concerning our suffering with Christ, and our eventually being glorified with Him, I've titled this lesson:

The Redemption of Our Body

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.

19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly 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 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Romans 8:16-25 (NASB)

Verse 19:

19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

This is an interesting sentence. It's easy enough to understand the words, but just exactly what do those words mean? What does Paul mean by *the anxious longing of the creation*? How can the creation, implying everything God has made, anxiously long for something? We can understand how angels might long for something, and how humans might long for something. We might even consider that some higher animals might possibly be able to long for something, but the whole creation, what does Paul mean by this? Is he implying that stars and planets and asteroids and trees and mountains are all anxiously longing for something? I hope we know that that isn't his intended meaning. But then he must mean something by this use of words, so what does he mean? The logical conclusion is that Paul is using this language to convey the thought that the whole creation is directly involved in the loss of innocence incurred by Adam and Eve, and will be directly involved in that process of the final redemption of the sons of God. The damage that sin does, once introduced into existence, is not confined to just Adam and Eve, or even to their immediate surrounding, but extends to the animals, the vegetation and even the planets and solar system, and yes even to the whole creation of God as the next verses say.

But, before we read them lets look at the last half of this verse. We all know that the end of this age is signified by the visible return of Jesus Christ, and for this all who believe in Him are eagerly waiting. But notice that in this verse the anxious longing of the creation is said to be for the revealing of the sons (plural) of God. Of course we all await the return of Jesus Christ in His glorified state, but this verse speaks of the revealing of a mystery that has been kept by God since before creation. It speaks of the revealing of the human creatures that God chose to set His eternal love upon and bring to eternal glory with His own Son. He wrote each and every name in a book called the Book of Life before the universe was ever created. (Eph 1:4; 1Pe 1:1-2; Rev 13:8, 17:8) God the Father both selected and loved His chosen and elect before He ever created the universe, and He wrote every name in His Book of Life. It is these which this verse speaks about. Those whose names have been in that book from before creation, and are eventually, through much efforts and planning on the part of God, made ready for their unveiling as the bride of Christ and the children of God. (Rev 19:6-8)

There's no shortage of wannabee's, or claim to be's, and not just among Christians but among every religion of the world; but a day has been assigned when the true children of God will be revealed for all to see, and the imposters will be separated out. On that day the whole creation will be restored to its perfect state, and sin and all who love it will be forever separated from the children of God. (Rev 21 & 22) For now, no one really knows who the true children are and who are the imposters, because there's only outward indicators and nothing absolutely conclusive. It's not like the children of God glow in the dark, or walk two feet off the ground; we do live differently from the rest, but not perfectly, and many seem to live just as righteously as the children, so until God reveals them, they remain a mystery. I remember when I read something from C.H. Spurgeon where he said that the number of the elect was established before creation and nothing anyone could do would be able to change that number by as much as one. As an Arminian at the time I didn't know what to do with this statement. It contradicted everything I thought I knew about our whole purpose while here on earth.

As an Arminian I thought that the Book of Life started out empty, and our mission was to get as many names put into it as possible before time ran out. We called this the great commission. Our concept was that everything happening today was for the purpose of establishing who would eventually be the children of God. But the bible simply teaches otherwise. We are not here making those determinations, but rather we are here implementing the means by which those predeterminations are accomplished to obtain the desired results ordained by God from eternity past. Spurgeon was exactly right, the name of every child of God has been written in the Book of Life from before creation, on this the scriptures are indisputably clear. Time and situations is the means of implementation of the plan of God to produce that which He has already predetermined. And there is a time when it will be complete, and God will reveal His children to all the universe, in their state of glory. None of this is being determined now, it is simply being performed and accomplished now, in keeping with the predetermined plan of God. And the whole universe anxiously awaits the completion of the process and the revealing of the finished product, the children of God. Now, this moves us into the next verses:

Verses 20-21:

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

This whole creation as we see and perceive it, was immune to the laws of thermodynamics prior to the entrance of sin. The principle that we're so familiar with of aging and deterioration did not exist. Not for humans and not for animals and not even for physical matter, meaning atoms and molecules and planets and solar systems. Everything that is, everything that occupies space and exists in our tangible universe, is winding down and decaying and dying because sin has entered into this tangible creation of God. For this reason, Paul says that *the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God*. By which he means that the last step of our redemption, the last step of our adoption, is also the step that will affect all of creation, and heal the universal wounds of sin on all created matter.

The last half of the sentence says that the longing of the creation is *for the revealing of the sons of God*. Again we might have a question as to just what revealing is being referenced? After all, the children of God aren't hiding ourselves, at least not for the most part, so what revealing is Paul talking about? The context here is the revealing of the Son of God himself in all His glory and majesty, along with His eternal companions whom He has redeemed, these are the sons of God, in their final completed and glorified state of being. This is the finished work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. New spirits and new bodies for the children of God, completely sinless and pure and undefiled, forever.

This is what God is waiting to reveal to all creation when His plan has fully run its course and all things have accomplished their intended purposes. When the predestined children of God are finally and fully ready, the whole created universe will be transformed by the power of God into a place appropriate for them to live and inhabit. The whole 21st chapter of Revelation speaks specifically of this time and of this place.

This creation that we inhabit didn't ask to be included in the futility of our sin, but it had no choice. But the hope that we have for it (meaning the creation) is directly linked to the hope that we have for the humanity that caused that futility in the first place. God has created the concept of time so that everything He has planned can be worked out progressively and orderly, through a predetermined set of means and sequence of events that He has preplanned from before He ever created any of it. He will display that final result only when the proper time is come for that public display, and this is what we ourselves, and the whole creation of God anxiously and eagerly await. Paul isn't speaking of just revealing who the real Christians are, thought that is a part of it, but more specifically what they will be when God has finished His redemptive and transforming work in and upon them. That time when we will have been fully transformed into the image of His Son, so that Jesus will be the firstborn of a whole family of righteous and glorious children (Rm 8:29) who love and worship God in spirit and in truth. (Jn 4:23) For this the whole creation anxiously awaits. The next verse continues this thought:

Verse 22:

22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

By this time we realize that Paul is speaking of the creation as if it were a person and could think and feel like people. This is figurative language but it fits the situation perfectly and conveys the thought that's intended. The whole creation is suffering the damages of deterioration and aging. But all of this is intended by God, and is part of the predetermined process and means that He has planned to bring all things to completion. When we see things age and die, our prized possessions wear out and break, we're reminded of the ultimate and inescapable consequences of sin. We see and deal with it every day of our lives. This is part of God's plan for our education and maturity. It shapes our thinking and our goals and motivations. God has, and still is, showing us that anything and everything that is touched by sin is ruined and cursed. And that includes both the living and the non-living things of creation. Not only our own bodies but all our possessions as well. Sin ruins everything. This is the meaning of the groans and sufferings being referenced in this verse. We ourselves, and our hopes for a remedy are all wrapped up in that hope that we have for the final revealing of God's plan for His chosen, where He eradicates sin, both externally and even more importantly, internally from His children, and provides the final step of adoption, the redemption of our bodies, and along with that the redemption of the created universe from the damages of sin. And the next verse speaks of this:

Verse 23:

23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

The universe shows the evidences of deterioration, the groaning, and we ourselves also show the same evidence of deterioration, and have the same groaning over the futility of life and expectations in a creation that is infested by sin and cursed to inescapable degradation and eventual death. Where sin exists there is no hope of a happy ending or even a safe day to day existence.

This verse puts together two phrases that are in effect the same event. They each represent a different aspect, but their cause is one and the same. Paul says *waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body*. Now someone might ask, wait a minute, in verses 15 - 17 we've already been told of our adoption into the family of God. And yes, this is absolutely right, but like so many things of the scriptures God has a process and sequence of events by which He operates. If we remember God told Adam and Eve that on the day that they disobeyed His command to abstain from eating from the fruit of a certain tree, that they would surely die. So what happened when they did that? Well firstly their spirit did die, immediately on that day, but like so many things of God, there was more to it than that. Their bodies didn't die on that day, Adam lived for 930 years before he died, but he did die, just as God had said. God used time and progressive deterioration as His means to implement the second half of His pronounced curse. So, Adam and Eve did die as God had said, but they did so in the way and manner and time period that God had planned.

And likewise is God's plan of redemption a two part process. Mankind died a spiritual death and a bodily death because of sin, and we experience a spiritual regeneration and bodily redemption as a result of God's redemption. And just like Adam and Eve, there is a time difference between the two. If we have received His gift of saving faith (Eph 2:8-9) then we have been spiritually redeemed and made alive again in our invisible component, our inner man. But we are still eagerly awaiting the second and final step in that process, the redemption of our physical bodies. This hasn't happened yet, and that's why it's called being saved "in hope." The hope is for that final portion that we haven't yet seen. And the word hope here does not imply that we aren't sure, but that we are eagerly hopeful of a quick arrival and glorious fulfillment.

Also, the word hope expresses what we earnestly desire and yearn for, that time when we're removed from our organic attachment to a sinful flesh and redeposited into a glorious new body that is undefiled, and imperishable, and totally immune to temptation and sin. (1Co 15:50-58; 1Thes 4:13-18; Phi 3:20-21; 1Jn 3:2-3) I wish I could read and carefully pursue each of these reference verses, but that would take far too long and distract us from our current study. So, we'll have leave that for another time.

Much of the emphasis of this verse seems to be on the aspect of hope in an unseen expectation. And much of the world laughs at our beliefs because they consider it "pie in the sky." In fact that's a common phrase for critics of Christianity. But to those who have already received the first half of the promise, the regenerated spirit and renewed mind, even though it's invisible, these are just as real as anything we can touch. So to us, it isn't pie in the sky, it's simply the remaining visible portion of that which we've already received, and of which we are absolutely certain. This is what Paul means when he says that we ourselves have the first fruits of the Spirit. Those first fruits being our spiritual redemption and rebirth whereby we get an actual taste of what that final and complete redemption will be like. Of that time when we can fully live and experience that which we can now only partially experience and attain while still in our old fallen bodies. But what we've already received has shown us how much we desire the final completion, and this is our eager and earnest hope. Again, the final step in our adoption as sons is the redemption of our bodies. Only then will we be ready to stand in the presence of God, and only then will we need a redeemed creation in which to live.

Verses 24-25:

24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Paul opens this verse with the words *For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope*. The logical intent is that we have been saved with a future hope that no one living on this earth has ever seen. And that's Paul's point. If we had seen it then it wouldn't be hope, it would be sight. We hope for that which we have only heard about in the scriptures, and we believe in that which we've never seen with our own eyes. If it weren't for the experiential aspect of our spiritual regeneration we would be without any real and tangible evidence. And so it is with those who are following false gods. But as we've said already, one can believe in and even love and fear a false god as easily as the real One. So hope is a very genuine part of spiritual belief, for the true and for the false. Look at what some people are doing in the world today because they believe in and fear a god that isn't real. So Paul's words that we are saved in hope is very true. We have our hope firmly seated in the authenticity of the holy scriptures that we trust and believe are the true and genuine words of God, the true and living God. But the fact is that we can't prove that our God is real and others are false with anything that we have on this earth.

Our Savior understood this well as He illustrated in the incident of the apostle Thomas who would not believe that Jesus had really been resurrected until he actually saw and touched Jesus with his own hand. After which: *28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said* to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."* (Jn 20:28-29) And the Apostle Peter addresses this same issue at the close of his ministry where he writes: *8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.* (1Pe 1:8-9) Both we ourselves, and the Lord also recognize the level of trust that we are placing in His words and His promises. We are literally staking our eternal destiny on His truthfulness and authenticity. He is our hope for redemption and our hope of glory. (Col 1:27) We recognize Him and no other, because *"... there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

So then, one might logically ask why we're so sure that Jesus is the Christ, the prophesied Messiah? How can we be so sure with only the evidence that we have? These can be perfectly legitimate questions, in fact we might have asked them ourselves before we became believers. The truth is there is literally mountains of evidence in the form of written manuscripts, but what we sometimes want is something we can see and touch, like Thomas. But all the written evidence is only useful if we have something else, and that something else is an intangible commodity called "faith" and also called "belief." The written evidence is primarily the holy scriptures, but there are also very many other documents and records, but again the whole thing rests not upon whether or not there is sufficient evidence, there is many times more than enough of that, the real issue rests on whether or not we truly believe that evidence.

And this is what is not within our own control. We can examine the evidence, we can hear the words of scripture proclaimed and explained, but in the end it's all about whether or not our mind believes it, whether or not our mind is persuaded and convinced. And this is not under our own control. We can hear the facts, we can examine the evidence, but in the end our heart has a mind of its own, as the old saying goes. By this we mean that our heart believes what it will and rejects what it will, and we don't have any conscious mental control over that. We are observers only in that arena. Everyone actually knows this already, but we still proclaim that we are free to believe or not believe whatever we choose. But free in what sense? Yes we are free of coercion from external influences, but we are not free to actually choose what our heart and mind believes when it sees or hears something. How many times have we said, or heard someone else say, that they really want to believe something but they can't say that they actually do? Well, if we can choose what we believe then why don't they just choose to do so? Because we all know that our heart and mind doesn't work like that. We are free to choose our actions, but we are not in control of what our mind believes, that doesn't happen at a level that we consciously control. Our only involvement with that is our response, we have no influence by which we can simply choose to change what we believe. I'm not saying that we can never change our minds, we do that all the time, but again when we do that it's not because we simply chose to do so, but because our mind has done so on its own, and we are aware that it happened. Our innate will is like read only memory in a computer. We can read it but we can't change it.

Now I've said all that to make the point that this unseen hope that we Christians hold is coming from a place in our heart and mind that we didn't just choose by our own force of will. Our hope is based on a firm and unshakeable faith, meaning belief that the holy scriptures are true and authentic. And that faith, that belief as we've demonstrated, isn't something that we just arbitrarily chose to accept. The new covenant promise was that God himself would put His Spirit into us, and inscribe His laws and statutes into our minds, whereby we would both believe them and agree with them.

This is why the Christian believes the scriptures, and why we persevere in the faith without losing hope. Not because we're strong willed, but because we've received that precious gift of saving faith, which is the same thing as His Spirit being placed within us. We don't choose to believe and then get the Spirit, we get the Spirit by which we are made able to believe. The modern gospel really tries to teach that we first make a choice with our minds that we quite literally are not capable of making, and then we get His Spirit. This is the popular gospel today, but it is not the gospel of the bible, nor that of the apostles or the early church. The point that I'm making is that our hope has a foundation that's not human but divine. Our hope is based on a work performed externally upon us by the Holy Spirit, that then internally changes us accordingly. Afterwards we really do believe the words and promises of God, and we do it because we want to and because we agree with all that He is and all that He says. Then we really do believe, and we are not under coercion because we want from the depths of our hearts to believe, but we got to this point not by and act of our own will but by an act of God's will. Belief is a gift of God that empowers a resultant choice by man. (Eph 2:8) Once received it is what we want, so it is never done in opposition to our own will, but rather through the transforming of our will whereby we do voluntarily believe, and do desire to do so. God uses means to accomplish His will, and in the salvation of souls He uses His Spirit as the agent of transformation to bring His chosen into voluntary conformity with His own thinking. So we say that faith begins as a gift of God, but then immediately upon receipt becomes the voluntary choice of the human recipient. God's gift of salvation includes with it the necessary means of implementation, which is belief, also called saving faith. (Eph 2:8-10)

Because of this, the Christian's hope is not like any other hope the world has to offer. But unfortunately there are some very persuasive counterfeits, some so persuasive that people will brutally kill themselves and others because they think

that in doing so they are serving God, (Jn 16:2) and this is sad and tragic, both for them and for their victims, but we do not see the followers of Jesus Christ behaving in this manner, because this is not His way, and it is not the way that He has commanded for His followers. Since the implementation of the New Covenant, any people, or religious group who now, or in the past behaves like that, and harms or kills others, demonstrates by their actions that their profession to know God is totally bogus. (Tit 1:16) And all those who follow any such god are following a false god and not the true and living God of the bible. Yes, the true God did order Israel to kill the people who were in the lands which He had given to Israel. This is true, it can't be denied. That was under the former covenant called the covenant of the Law. And it was harsh. But then, afterwards, He provided a new covenant, which we call the covenant of grace, one that has been extended to all the peoples of the earth, and since that time the rules of that new covenant apply, and violence against our neighbors over religious beliefs is condemned and forbidden. At the end of this new covenant age, God will make the judgements and execute the sentences on the guilty, but we ourselves are told to leave that work entirely to Jesus Christ, because He's rightly earned that authority.

Now, this brings us to the last part of this verse that says: *But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.* This part can rightly be referenced back to the preceding verse that said: *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.* The outward and visible exercise of our hope is the enduring of the sufferings of this world, no matter what they might be. When I listen to the words that I just spoke I realize that this is certainly more easily said than accomplished. And I do not for one moment imply that I or anyone else can live up to the goal like our Savior did. We strive imperfectly to persevere, we fight to endure without changing course, against whatever we must to attain this blessed hope for which we eagerly await. Our destination is also our goal, which is the righteousness of God, as publically displayed in the life of Jesus Christ. For this we persevere, for this we endure all hardships, and for this we eagerly hope.

But, perseverance, and enduring of hardships are terms that we in this part of the world have just about removed from the gospel message. If we went back to teaching these biblical principles I suspect that we would literally empty our churches. Empty them of the vast multitudes of cultural Christians that fill them up under this modern day self-centered and self-fulfillment teaching that's been adopted. I truly believe that 90% of those who attend modern day churches are not there to offer their heartfelt worship to God but to get whatever they think they can from Him. They're protecting their place at the food trough, and their ticket to the pearly gates of heaven, figuratively speaking. There is probably a word for perseverance in every language of the world, but how it's perceived and what it actually means in relation to day to day life would vary greatly. In North America it would mean one thing, in South America another, and in the Middle East and areas of Africa something else entirely. But the goal of the believer, wherever they may live is constant, and this is to become conformed to the image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As much as possible in this world and then in completion in the age to come. This is what persevering means, it means we strive through life's various obstacles and temptations to become Christlike in every way, (Eph 4:13) and eagerly waiting for the completion of that process, which is the redemption of our bodies.

In order to persevere one certainly should know what it is they persevere for, otherwise what does persevering mean? Persevering means first and foremost, having a known goal that is honorable and righteous and desirable, and then not being dissuaded or distracted from the pursuit of that goal no matter what the difficulties. The context of this verse is the final step of our adoption into the family of God, which is also called the redemption of our body, and for this known and righteous and honorable goal we persevere through life's hardships and temptations as we eagerly await the fulfillment of it. Our focus is fixed on the goal, not on the obstacles, our desire and our mission is the attainment of that goal, not on the avoidance of difficulties along the path of attainment. (Mat 6:33-34) In this world we will have tribulations said Jesus (Jn 16:33) but we must not let these things force us off our course of pursuit of our primary goal, being transformation to Christlikeness, which is the Father's ultimate intention for those whom He predestined from before creation for this very purpose. (Rm 8:29)

No one is going to persevere through hardships, and endure sufferings that they could avoid unless they have a very clear and compelling reason to do so. This is what Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has provided in these verses, he has presented the reason, the goal, and once understood that goal can be evaluated as to its worth. And what is the

value of being snatched out of the family of Satan, destined for eternal hell, and adopted into the family of God and promised full transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ and eternal life in glory? When considered in that light one can clearly see that there is nothing in this whole created universe more valuable than this, and likewise nothing that can possibly happen to us that's too terrible to endure to attain it. Remember the words of Jesus when He said: *"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* (Mat 10:28) I have no doubt that this verse was among those that were well known and considered by the great and honorable martyrs of the past. My dear brethren, I fear that these and similar verses may become ones that we in our time become familiar with again much too soon. Historically, those who value righteousness have always had a measure of compassion towards those who embrace sin. We like to say that we love the sinner but we hate the sin. Personally, I don't know if this is a valid distinction, but the phrase is popular in our denomination, and we understand the meaning.

But the point is, those who embrace righteousness are much more compassionate and forgiving towards sinners than sinners are toward those who endorse righteousness. There is a very pronounced disgust and animosity, and even outright hatred surfacing in our society today towards those who still advocate biblically based morality. Now I'm sure it has always been there, but it has officially come out of hiding and is publically showing itself, especially in the news and education and entertainment industries. And unfortunately also in the congress and in the laws being adopted. We are adopting laws that clearly fly in the face of our previously held and valued traditions, and what God has forbidden in His holy scriptures.

There is almost no restraint being put on the animus of general society toward Jesus Christ and all those who follow Him. (Mat 24:9) Our national public television programs (supposedly regulated by the FCC) now openly curse God with the most vile and vulgar of language and mock everything that He's commanded. Fifty years ago there were surely plenty of people who felt this way, but they would not have dared to openly speak it, because society would not have tolerated it. But today every depiction in movies and television of Christians portrays us as hypocrites and sinister deviates, and it applies the term Christian to every right wing radical group imaginable. People who think the name "Jesus" is a cuss word are being called "Christians" by the news media for the express purpose of deception and denigration of that Name. I can't think of even one program on national television that portrays Christians accurately and favorably. The bottom line, there is no fear of God whatsoever before our eyes. (Rm 3:18) And taking pot shots at God, and especially Jesus Christ and His followers has become a popular sport in the national media, and the general public not only tolerates it, they seem to encourage it. So one has to ask, when it's become socially acceptable to publically mock God and dishonor Jesus Christ, how long will it be before the attitude turns into actions, and is applied to all those who proclaim His Name and advocate His righteousness? Probably not very long, probably not very long at all I'm afraid.

So, now we've recreated something like the context that existed for Christians during the time when Paul wrote these verses we're reading and studying. The general public had once embraced the teaching of Jesus, like seen on the day of Pentecost and immediately following when Luke wrote:

44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47) But by the time that Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans the attitude of the general public had changed significantly, and unimaginable persecutions were brewing, and beginning to erupt. Just like the life of Jesus, where in the beginning of His ministry great multitudes came out to hear Him speak and witness His miraculous healings and other works, but the more He spoke of sin and repentance the less the public wanted to hear Him. Finally they sided with the religious opposers and shouted for His crucifixion.

And so it would seem to be with all societies, including our own. For a while, a short while, the benefits and virtues of righteousness might be valued, but sinful humanity will not allow itself be restrained by such values for very long. And for this reason Jesus warned His disciples and also us, His followers, that if we wish to proclaim His Name, and live by His teachings, then we must expect resistance and persecutions from an unbelieving general population. The degree and severity will vary from place to place and from time to time, but the precept continues on.

Now that we have the biblical context established we can rightly understand verse 18 and following as our Lord's call to faithfulness under fire. He tells us to persevere all things through a faith that is protected by God (1Pet 1:5) and helps us with this by reminding that we have been saved in hope of our eventual final adoption into the family of God and the receipt of an eternal and undefiled body that matches His own. We will have an eternity with our Lord and our God, and for this we persevere and endure whatever He has prescribed as His chosen means of maturity and perfection. Our hope is not based on this world or the things of this world, but on our conformity to Christlikeness and our final adoption and reunion with Him in His perfect and eternal kingdom, where righteousness will be valued, and desired, and possessed by all. No more temptation, no more sin. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
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