

January 26/27, 2013

The Gospel Story: Hope

Romans 8:18-39

Pastor Bryan Clark

So do you think, as a Christian, you have two natures? You often hear people refer to their new nature in Christ, but they also refer to their sinful nature. Do you have two natures? I would suggest to you, this is not an insignificant question. If you believe you have two natures of equal power, both contesting for your allegiance, you have locked yourself into the struggle of Romans chapter 7, which is why I believe Paul is so adamant, when he gets to chapter 8 and he says, "You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit." You can't be in both. I believe that is a statement of nature—you can't have two natures. Nature is your core; it's your essence; it defines what flows out of you naturally. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians he said, "You were darkness, not you were *in* darkness; you *were* darkness. But now you are light. You can't be both darkness and light at the same time. You have been fully and radically changed. You're not *in Adam*; you're *in Christ*. That's a statement of your nature.

It might be helpful to know: even though we throw around this terminology *sinful nature*, it doesn't show up in the book of Romans. It shows up in the NIV but that's a translation of the Greek word *flesh*. As a matter of fact, it doesn't show up in the New Testament. It doesn't show up in the Bible. That's part of what's confusing; it's not biblical terminology. I have a new nature in Christ. I still have the flesh. At one time I was in the flesh—when I was in Adam. That's a statement of my nature. But the day I trusted Christ as Savior, I died to that marriage and remarried into Christ. I am in Christ. Do I still have a flesh? Yes, it's the part of me that was married to Adam. I have certain habits; I have certain thought patterns; I have certain coping skills that defined my life in Adam, that carry over into my marriage in Christ. But the flesh is not in charge; the flesh is not my boss; the flesh is not my nature. I have been radically set free! There is no reason for me to walk according to the flesh.

I am a new creation in Christ. Therefore, now the spirit of God lives in me. He's decided to move in. I have the fullness of the power of the Father and the Son and the Spirit in me to give me what I need. I have now been made a child of God. I enter into the presence of God but not in fear. There's no condemnation to those who are in Christ. I enter and cry out, "Abba, Father, Daddy!" Because it's a place of love, it's a place of safety; it's a place of celebration. I've been made a son of God, which means I've been made a legal heir of the family fortune. And the oldest son—Christ Himself—has signed off that I am a co-heir with Christ, that He will share His eternal inheritance with me as His child. I have been completely and fully changed in Christ. I have been justified and, because I have been justified, there is a guarantee that I will be glorified. What does that mean? That's what we want to talk about today. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Romans, Chapter 8. We pick it up in verse 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. (*NASB, Romans 8:18)

There's no question there's struggle; there's **suffering**. To be *in Christ* in a world that is dominated by those *in Adam* means struggle—this is a sin-cursed world. But the struggle is nothing compared to the **glory** to come. At the end of that verse the phrase **revealed to us** is a bit of a tricky phrase in the Greek language. **To us** doesn't quite capture it. Some would suggest maybe it should be *for us*.

The idea is this: if you read I Peter chapter 1, what you find out is that those who were *in Christ*—you already have a glory reserved for you in heaven. It's already done; it's already there; it's just waiting for you. And there will come this moment when we reach the crescendo, the end of the gospel story, as our salvation is fulfilled, then that glory will be revealed, not *to us*—like we're at a fireworks display as a spectator—but *for us*. We enter into it; we live in it; we experience it; it's ours forever! And what a glorious day that will be!

Starting in verse 19 he begins to unpack the fullness of this. Now perhaps the best way to understand the discussion to follow is to think of it like this: Imagine that you're climbing up a mountain and the mountain is covered with trees and with brush and with stuff, so that you can barely see the sky. You certainly can't see the beauty around you. You're just kind of in this cave of trees and cover. You know it's beautiful. You know the view is spectacular, but you can't quite see it. So you keep working your way up and eventually you clear the tree line. You get to the top of the mountain and the view is absolutely breathtaking! It was there—you just couldn't see it! But now you see it and it is spectacular! Romans 8 is perhaps the greatest chapter in the Bible for clearing the tree line and getting the fullest picture of the gospel story. All along the way we get little bits of theology but it's hard to see the big picture. Romans 8 opens it up and says: this is the deal; this is the gospel story; this is what we can expect. And it starts by talking about creation and Paul personifies creation as if creation is a person longing for this day.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly (*For what?*) for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, (vs. 19-20a)

First of all, clearly creation would be defined by all God has made, outside of people made in His image, because what he's describing here is creation that was subjected to bondage and slavery—not by its own choice but because of somebody else's choice. We as people made the choice. We live in the slavery and bondage of sin because we chose that path. But the moment we chose that path, all creation was subjected to the curse, to the bondage, to the futility of that. So, because of our sin, everything that God made was affected by that. What the text says is that creation longs for the glorious day when that glory that's reserved in heaven for you actually is brought into play. And in that moment when you're fully glorified, when the gospel story reaches its crescendo, and you reach the fulfillment of your salvation, that's the signal to all creation to be set free, to be released! The curse is over—and even creation becomes everything God intended for it to be. As a matter of fact, the language used is the language that would be used of someone stretching their neck—looking, anticipating someone coming around the corner or over the hill. It's the idea that all creation—the trees, the mountains, the oceans, the stars—they're all watching; they're all waiting because they know that the moment the **sons of God** are brought into the fullness of the glory, that's the sign! And all creation is set free and it will be magnificent! He says **...in hope**, and reminding ourselves, hope in the Bible is never, "I hope this happens". It's always a guarantee, but yet future.

...in hope 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. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, (*The Spirit is a down payment; the Spirit is a guarantee, a seal.*) even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, (*This is the fulfillment, this is the whole point!*) but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Vs. 20b-25)

Paul says that **all creation groans** under the futility, under the curse, under the bondage of sin. It groans and longs for the day when it will be set free. He uses a familiar biblical imagery of a woman in childbirth. There's great pain in childbirth but it's going to be followed by great joy, by the celebration. The pain is worth it because out comes a child! And it's the beauty of that that makes the pain tolerable. All creation feels the pain of sin—longing for the day when we as sons of God enter into our glory. That's the signal; it all will be set free.

Now I happen to be a person that connects with God through creation. I love the outdoors; I think it's spectacular. So it makes me wonder: if this is bondage, if this is futility, if this is a cursed creation, what will the redeemed creation look like? It's staggering! The best way to compare is to think about your own human body. This is far from what God intended. My body is affected by the curse of sin. It's breaking down; it's losing energy; it's far from what God intended it to be. But one day it will be resurrected; it will be redeemed! It will be brought into the fullness of what God intended. And I think—what a spectacular change! The degree of change from this body to my eternal body is probably accurate to the degree of change from creation as it is today, to the spectacular creation that is yet to come! It's staggering what God has in mind!

The text reminds us that **we groan**; it reminds us that **creation groans**. There's this feeling that the world isn't right. This isn't the way it was supposed to be; this wasn't God's dream; this wasn't God's vision. But one day it's all going to be made right. Now this is very important theology because he reminds us that when this body finally dies and gets put in a grave, it will disintegrate. But that's not the end of the story. The Bible's very clear on it's theology of resurrection. It's not that my spirit goes to be with Jesus and then He gives me a new body and I just float around the clouds. The promise is this body—the one that's put in the grave—is resurrected. It's changed; it goes from being mortal to immortal. It reaches the fullness of its glory as God intended. In this body, change is redeemed back as God's declaration of victory. But in that moment, all creation will be redeemed back. That's the signal for all creation to be set free—no more bondage, no more sin, no more futility. The theology is not that when I die: good riddance to the body and I'll float around in the heavenlies as a spirit. The theology is not that God gives me a new body and starts over. And the theology is not that I get out of this sin-cursed earth and God destroys it and starts over. That's bad theology. That theology would be: Satan wins round one but God will win round two. Romans 8 is very clear that for both my body and all creation there is a statement being made that I'm not scrapping it and starting over. I'm redeeming it; I purchased it back; I'm going to make it right; I'm going to take everything that sin has tainted and cursed and destroyed and I'm going to bring it back to life. I'm going to make it the way I intended and it's God's ultimate declaration at the end of the day, "I win!" Fully, completely, totally! Satan wins nothing! I win as King of kings and Lord of lords. It's a spectacular statement of God's ultimate victory!

Now there are some very interesting implications to this. For example—I'm getting a little bit speculative here. Do you think that little Fife, the family dog that died a few years ago, will be included in God's ultimate redemption? I would suggest to you, yes! Fife died, not because of Fife's sin, frankly because of *your* sin. The creation around us suffers the futility of our choice to sin and our rebellion, and because of that, creation has died. But part of God's statement of ultimate victory is: creation will be set free; it will be redeemed; it will be resurrected; life will be breathed back into what sin has killed—as God's declaration of victory! At some point you have to deal with the animals on the ark. What is the deal with that? And don't tell me, "Well, that's just so that the animals could repopulate after the flood." That was no problem for God. God created the entire universe with a spoken word. He could have easily said, "Noah, build a row boat," and after he landed on the mount, could have snapped His fingers and repopulated the world with animals. Certainly the animals on the ark are some sort of a redemptive picture. Why else would they be

there? The whole point of the ark is a picture of God's salvation. It's a metaphor and, included in that, is creation. Certainly that is saying that God redeems all creation back as His declaration of victory and, in that moment, it will be spectacular—what the book of Revelation calls the *New Heaven* and the *New Earth*—our home forever. Verse 26:

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Vs. 26-27)

Now there are some who would read into this text, kind of the contemporary definition of the gift of tongues. But it's helpful to understand: that has nothing to do with the discussion. As a matter of fact, to read that into this would be to bring something out of nowhere that really has nothing to do with this discussion. What he is saying is that in this world it'll be hard, so how do we persevere? With the hope of the gospel—knowing what's to come, the glory to come. But in the meantime we're not left alone; we have the indwelling Spirit of God who has moved in to live with us, to help us. The Greek word for **help** means to actually *lift up and carry the burden*. God is not a God who stands on the sidelines and yells, "Hey, suck it up!" Rather He enters in. He lives in me in order that He might help carry the load. As a matter of fact the text says that **all creation groans**. It says that *we groan*. Now in this paragraph it says *the spirit groans*. Sometimes life just gets hard and it gets confusing and it's God's way of saying, "I'm right in the middle of it and the Spirit groans right with you and the Spirit picks up the burden and helps you carry it to guarantee that you're going to make it to the finish line." God will bring all of His power to you to make sure you get to the finish line with Him. **He who searches the heart**, meaning God searches your heart, knows your pain. The Spirit **intercedes**; the Spirit **groans**. You groan; the Spirit communicates to the Father and the Father's in there with you! It's a beautiful picture of God's commitment to get you through it and to get you to the finish line.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Vs. 28)

The text does not say all things *are* good. But **God causes all things to work together for good**. In other words: to accomplish His ultimate purpose, working towards this grand day of glory that is to come. Now when it says **to those who love God**, it's not saying *if* you love God enough, *if* you perform well enough, this is for you. To love God is to define **those who are called according to His purpose**, which is every believer, which He now defines.

For those whom He foreknew... (Vs. 29a)

To **foreknow** doesn't just mean *to know ahead of time*, as if God randomly picked names out of a phonebook. It doesn't mean that He bought a five thousand-seat stadium and randomly distributed tickets. It's a very personal term. As a matter of fact the term *know* there is the same word that's used to describe sexual relations between a husband and a wife. It's saying God *knew* you from eternity past. He knew you; He called you by name and He said, "I want you; I want you to be my child; I want to spend forever with you." He **foreknew** you, and those whom He foreknew,

He also predestined... (Vs. 29b)

The word **predestined** means *to predetermine for a purpose*—that God called you, that God foreknew you; He predestined you for a purpose. What's the purpose?

...to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He, Jesus, would be the first born among many brethren. (Vs. 29c)

So Jesus is the prototype. He's the first fruit of what we are to become. And so the text says that when He foreknew you He predetermined you for this purpose. He wanted you to be His child, to enter into this glory. That's the fulfillment of our salvation!

...and these whom He predestined, He also called; (vs. 30a)

Literally *called out*. There's no question that the book of Romans denies the idea of a universal salvation. As a matter of fact it's very clear: they're those that He **foreknew**, those He **predestined**, those He **called out**, those whom He **justified** to be His children.

...and those whom He called, He also justified; (declared to be righteous, clothed in the righteousness of God) **and those whom He justified, He also glorified.** (vs. 30b)

...which is the fulfillment, which is the promise that you're going to get to the finish line. Everything in that list except **glorified** is already done if you've trusted Christ as Savior. Somehow in the mystery of God, in ways we cannot explain, He foreknew you and He said, "I want to spend forever with you. I want you to be My child." He predetermined that you would be conformed to the image of His Son. He's called you out. He's justified you. He's declared you to be righteous with the righteousness of God. And those whom He's justified, He glorified. Everything's done except glorified. But interestingly enough, the promise of glorification is so certain that he records the verb in past-tense terms. In other words it's already done in the mind of God; it's already reserved in heaven. There's no chance if He's justified you, that He won't glorify you. There's no chance you aren't going to make it to the finish line. He promises: He's put His Spirit within you. He's going to carry the load; He's going to groan with you; He's going to walk with you. But this you can take to the bank. He's going to get you to the finish line and that magnificent day when you enter into the fullness of your salvation and all creation is set free and you experience God's glory forever. So he says in verse 31:

What then shall we say to these things? (Vs. 31a)

What does he mean by **these things**? I think he's talking about everything he's talked about in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8—chapters that have dealt with the security of the believer. That after all these things—in other words, if God foreknew you, if God predestined you, if God called you out, if God justified you—why would you possibly think He's going to biff it before He glorifies you? Why would you think somehow, now He'd let you down? We had this in chapter 5. If God has already done the hard part—He gave up His Son; His Son gave up His life; His Son rose from the dead; He conquered sin and death; He's justified you—if He has done the hard part, why would He fail you now? If as His enemy, He made you His friend, why would you think now, as His child, He's not going to get you to the finish line? Which raises the question: **If God is for you, who can stand against you?** That's a powerful question. *If God is for you, who can stand against you?*
Answer: Obviously, no one!

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Vs. 31b-34)

What he's saying is that God already gave His Son; He already did the hard part; He already paid the price. He already conquered sin and death. He died; He rose again; He justifies. If God has already done that, what would make you think He would fail you now? *Who is going to bring a charge against you?* If God is the judge and the judge declares you to be righteous with the righteousness of God forever, who's going to bring a charge against you? Who's going to override that? And if Jesus Christ, seated **at the right hand of God**, operating as the prosecuting attorney, is the same one who died for you, is the same one who intercedes for you, is the same one who says to the Father, "This one's righteous," who's going to prosecute you? Who's going to condemn you? Who's going to bring a charge against you? Paul is saying, "How can you be more secure than that?"

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Vs. 35-39)

This is the magnificent crescendo at the end of eight fabulous chapters. This is the *Gospel Story*. This is the crescendo; this is the fulfillment. If God is for us, who can be against us? What could possibly separate us from the love of God? There is no one; there is no life circumstance; there is no thing; there is nothing that will separate us from the love of God. Therefore he says, "You are overwhelmingly a conqueror—not by the skin of your teeth, not in a really close game. It's a rout; it's domination." Because you are in Christ, you **overwhelmingly conquer**.

For some reason, a couple of weeks ago I found myself just kind of thinking about my elementary school days—good old days at Prescott Elementary—a wonderful school. And I remembered every day at recess and at lunch, out on the playground it was always the same drill. There was a group of students that would gather to play some sport; it was always a sport. Two captains would be chosen and then they would begin the painful process of selecting teams. There were always the best athletes that were always chosen first—everybody wanted them—and everybody knew who they were. Then you'd get kind of the middlers—not great, not bad. But then there were always those kids that nobody wanted. They weren't good athletes; they were a liability; nobody wanted them on the team. And I think about that: day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year they're reminded three times a day, "We don't want you. We don't want you on the team; you're not good; you don't fit in—you don't belong!" There were always those too that weren't even *that good*. They were always by themselves, off in the corner. Every recess, every lunch they were always in the corners all by themselves. I just thought to myself: what does that do to a person's mind if day after day and week after week the message is pounded into your head, "We don't want you; you don't belong; you don't fit here; we don't want you on our team," and how that cultivates how someone believes in themselves and thinks about themselves—and the damage that must do! I understand that's the way it works in this world.

But Romans chapter 8 is the promise: it doesn't work that way in God's economy. There's no one who doesn't make the team. There's no one who doesn't fit; there's no one who doesn't belong; there's no one who's left by the roadside; there's no one who doesn't get to the finish line. God has

promised, “You're My children; you all belong; I love you and I promise I will get you to the finish line and it will be spectacular!

Over our study of the book of Romans we've often referred to the metaphor of looking in a mirror and wrestling with the question, "What do you see when you look in the mirror?" I want to change the metaphor this morning to a nametag. Every single one of you, when you walked in the doors this morning was wearing a nametag. Now I don't mean you were wearing a literal piece of paper, but you were wearing a nametag. It's the name that you have come to believe is your name. The world bombards you with its messages and suggests all kinds of names that define you—and that becomes the name on your nametag. “Hello, my name is shame.” “Hello, my name is guilt.” “Hello, my name is failure.” “Hello, my name is loser.” “Hello, my name is disappointed.” “Hello, my name is struggler.” “Hello, my name is sinner.” “Hello, my name is outcast.” We all wear the nametags that have defined us for a lifetime. But when you go to Romans chapter 8, God offers you a new name. Your new name is *conqueror*—**overwhelmingly conqueror!** Because you are in Christ, you are a champion! I suppose, over my lifetime, lots of people have suggested lots of names to go on my nametag—and at times it's easy to start to believe in those. But when I go to Romans chapter 8, I get a new nametag and I'm telling you that, as my statement of faith, this is the nametag that I choose to wear. This is my name. Because I am in Christ, I am a conqueror! I am a champion! (clapping) And no matter what the world calls me, this is my name. And because this is my name, I am going to believe in Christ I am a champion and I choose to live as a champion. Sin is not my boss; sin is not in charge. The flesh is not my nature; the flesh is not in charge. I choose not to walk according to the flesh. I choose to live my life as a champion because God says, “That's my name!”

This morning when you walked in, you should have received a nametag just like this one. I would suggest to you, as your statement of faith, regardless of what nametag you wore coming in and how the world has defined you; no matter what you've done; no matter what's been done to you; no matter the struggles of your life, if you have trusted Christ as Savior, I would suggest—in faith and in boldness—you take that nametag off and you put this one on and you say, “Regardless what the world calls me, this is my name. I'm a champion—and I'm going to choose to live that way! And just in case no one's told you this, this morning, I want to make sure I tell you, “Because you are in Christ, I think you're awesome! Because you're a champion!! (clapping)

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that because of what Jesus has done, this room is filled with conquerors. But I'm going to guess most, when they walked through the door, didn't think of themselves that way. Lord, there are lots of names that get put on our nametags but this is the one you choose for us. And if you are for us, Lord, who can be against us? Who can say otherwise? Lord, I pray that we, by faith and with boldness, would wear this nametag and we would choose to believe that we are champions, that we might live that way as a testimony to our salvation and Your power in us. Lord, this we ask in Jesus' name.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
Copyright 2013 – Bryan Clark. All rights reserved.

The Gospel Story: Hope

A Study of Romans

Romans 8:18-39

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Do you believe as a Christian you have two natures at war with each other? Why or why not? Does it really matter what you believe about this question?

2. Do you think it's true that if you believe you will always struggle in your Christian life then you will always struggle? Can our behavior ever rise above what we believe to be true? Why or why not?

Bible Study

1. Review Romans 8:9-12. What is true of every believer?

2. Read Romans 8:18-25. What is the fullness of the Gospel story? Does redemption extend beyond just our ticket to heaven? Compare Revelation 21:1-4.

3. In your own words, what lies ahead for you as one who is "in Christ"?

4. Read Romans 8:26,27. What does the indwelling Spirit do for us when we find ourselves groaning under the load of the struggles of this world?

