

# BaptistWay: God is for us

October 16, 2015

• *The BaptistWay lesson for Nov. 1 focuses on Romans 8:18-39.*

This passage begins with reference to “our present sufferings” (v. 1), which should remind us Romans is a letter written to people with their own experiences. At the end of the chapter, he will ask: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (v. 35).

Here the Apostle Paul gives us a window to these trying times for the Roman Christians. It is true the early church did endure suffering, not only in Rome, but throughout the known world. For many Christians, living faithfully meant dying for Christ. Along these lines, perhaps we might think of our brothers and sisters in Christ experiencing similar hardships even now. If we do so, Paul reminds us patient faithfulness is the Christ-like path to walk. We ought to pray we all would live in this manner.

## **Three are groaning**

In this passage, three parties are described as groaning—creation itself (v. 22), believers (v. 23) and the Spirit of God (v. 26). These groans point to the wider scope of Christ’s work. Let us discuss each in reverse order. The Spirit intercedes for us, helping us pray, even if groans are all that emerge (v. 27). Believers groan as they wait for the fullness of salvation. And even creation, cursed at Adam and Eve’s sin (Genesis 3:17-18), groans for its own restoration with humanity, that it “will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (v. 21).

Creation’s groaning is described as similar to “the pains of childbirth,” and indeed, something new is coming—God’s new world of justice and peace.

Sometimes, we speak of salvation as a wholly spiritual thing, where one seeks to escape the physical world and our physical bodies. However, Paul is clear redemption is a bodily reality as well, one that includes the whole created order as well as our own bodies (v. 22-23). God seeks to renew all creation as part of Christ's redemptive work.

Verse 28 states, "In all things God works for the good of those who love him." Several verses later, Paul writes, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (v. 31). Occasionally, this sentiment is used to declare God always is on our side, regardless of the cause. Sports teams sometimes use Romans 8:31 as encouragement before play begins, as though God has a favorite team in any particular matchup. More significantly, countries have claimed God exclusively supported their cause—especially in war. For instance, during both World Wars, German soldiers had uniform items inscribed with the phrase "Gott Mit Uns," or "God with us." The connection to Romans 8:31 is hard to miss.

### **Blessings and judgment**

While we may be quick to critique these German soldiers for making such a bold claim, regardless of which side one supports, no country ever should see God as its uncritical backer. God can certainly shower blessings on any and all nations as he sees fit. Yet, God simultaneously can bring judgment on any and all nations. So, rather than seeing Romans 8:31 as a declaration God is on our side, we as the church should make every effort to ensure we are on God's side.

Being on God's side requires attention to covenant. Indeed, one New Testament scholar has described the phrase "those who love him" as a reference to the *Shema*, a call to faith found in the Old Testament: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). We also should note Jesus names this as the greatest commandment

(Matthew 22:37). Therefore, loving God with all of who we are—heart, soul and strength—becomes our part of covenant faithfulness, rather than viewing God as a cosmic gumball machine or a supporter with a blank check. We show such love of God by living faithfully. Once again, God's righteousness gives rise to ours, ultimately resulting in our sharing in God's glory (v. 30).

### **No condemnation**

Romans 8:34 echoes the chapter's opening statement: "Who then is the one who condemns? No one." Those in Christ Jesus receive no condemnation for sin. Like the woman caught in adultery, our accusers are nowhere to be found (John 8:9-11), and Jesus does not condemn us either. Likewise, we should follow the example of the woman, who was told, "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11). With no condemnation, we are truly free to live with the people of God as the people of God.

This chapter ends with a beautiful paragraph stating nothing can separate us from the love of God. This is an answer to the question asked earlier in the passage: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v. 35). The answer is powerful, moving and complete: "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation" (8:38-39).

The love of God, which cosmically binds together all creation, envelops the church as well, drawing us toward intimate union with the Triune God. This stands as a doxological claim that may have been part of an early Christian confession or litany, reminding the Roman Christians—and us—"the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" overcomes all (v. 39). God's covenant faithfulness knows no boundaries. Thanks be to God.