

ROMANS 8:26-30

CERTAINTIES: ALL THINGS! REALLY? ALL THINGS?

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”¹

If you have been a Christian longer than a year, you will likely have heard some dear soul intone the promise found in this passage from the Apostle’s Letter to Roman Christians. Paul wrote, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” [ROMANS 8:28]. Usually, we hear a truncated form of the promise, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.”

If some well-meaning individual has cited this verse to you at a time of trial, you may have questioned whether this could be true. In fact, you may have silently questioned the Lord, “All things? Really? All things?” Perhaps we would benefit from exploring this concept, correcting some of the misinformation that circulates among the saints by seeking understanding of what is actually said.

One of the characteristics noted of contemporary Christendom in the West is that we have “sacrificed the permanent on the altar of the temporary.” In our rush for immediate fulfilment of our desires, we have lost the concept described as delayed gratification. We have ceased to set worthy goals, either personally or corporately. As individuals and as a culture, we have exchanged independence for entitlement. Evidence of this transition is seen in the fact that the personal saving rate for the United States has dropped to around three percent, the lowest it has been for a number of years.² Canada has only a slightly higher rate of personal savings, registering at 4.60 percent.³

How well I remember a personal friend, a denominational leader, who refused to set aside moneys for his own retirement. His comment to me was, “Why should I? The government will take care of me.” I fear he was not the exception. That attitude is witnessed among many churches who look to the denomination first whenever they face a challenge, rather than committing themselves to prayer and seeking the face of the Master.

Anticipating that we must provide for ourselves is overwhelmed by our desire to have immediate gratification. Young couples assume they must have a new home, fully furnished waiting for them when they leave college. Young students assume it is their right to run up huge debts to earn degrees in fields that qualify them to get a minimum salary job at a fast-food restaurant. Young people assume they should be able to purchase a new vehicle as soon as they enter their final year of secondary school.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² US Personal Saving Rate: 3.10% for Sep 2017, https://ycharts.com/indicators/personal_saving_rate, accessed 1 November 2017

³ <https://tradingeconomics.com/canada/personal-savings>, accessed 1 November 2017

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Tragically, the same attitude has too often infiltrated the churches of our nation. People coming into the Faith are prone to assume that they have a right of freedom from adversity, an assumption that is too often fed from the pulpit. Too many Christians feel that God should be available to ensure that they never face opposition or that they are never subjected to a sermon that hurts their feelings. God, the Father, is transformed into a sort of celestial grandfather who does what he can to make life comfortable for the self-centred soul. The Son of God becomes a distant entity who anticipates the call of the saint so that life proceeds smoothly. The Spirit of God is reduced to a force meant to ensure the pleasure of each Christian. The individual is placed at the centre of his or her universe; everything is arranged for their individual pleasure.

The reality is that bad things happen to good people. However, that is not the end of the story. Christians suffer—some suffer to the point of death. If that was all there was to the story, there would be scant reason to even consider becoming a Christian. Likewise, if Christians were somehow divinely protected from experiencing opposition, injury or pain, everyone would choose to be a Christian. There is far more to the life we now live. There is far more to the struggles Christians have now. We hear the Spirit of God encouraging the people of God, assuring them that He knows what is going on and that He intercedes for them, working for their benefit in every instance.

WHAT IN THE WORLD IS THE SPIRIT DOING? “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” [**ROMANS 8:26, 27**].

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness.” Now, that grabs my attention! Weakness marks my path through this darkened world. I’m susceptible to succumbing to temptation, beset by enemies of the Faith wherever I turn and very much aware that I am a sinful being. The Spirit of God has a lot of work to do if I am to succeed in this pilgrim walk. I suspect that I’m not speaking only for myself. I imagine that each of us feels inadequate for standing firm.

Note that the verse begins with the word “likewise” in my translation. In many translations, the Greek is translated by the English phrase, “In the same way.”⁴ In the same way as what? The answer to this question will take us back to what precedes the text. Earlier, we saw that creation has been groaning [see **ROMANS 8:19-22**].⁵ Similarly, we believers are groaning as well [see **ROMANS 8:23-25**]. In the same way, the Spirit groans on our behalf. As is true with the Son of God, the Holy Spirit takes upon Himself the problem of evil.

Chuck Swindoll writes, “When I am tempted to think that God is cruel to leave us in our suffering, I remember that He, too, moans with ‘groanings too deep for words.’ When I see a mother sobbing over the dead body of her child, I know the Holy Spirit suffers her anguish too. When I see a man kiss the cold cheek of his bride and give her body to the care of a mortician, I know the Holy Spirit feels his desperate ache. He is the Spirit of the Creator, who made these bodies to reflect His glory, not suffer disease, disaster, death, and decay. He loves us even more than we love ourselves, and therefore He groans with us.”⁶

⁴ See, e.g., **NASB, CSB, NET BIBLE**

⁵ This passage was considered in an earlier message (Michael Stark, “Certainties: What We Learn from Creation’s Groaning,” (sermon), October 22, 2017, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Romans-08.18-25-What-We-Learn-from-Creations-Groanings.pdf>)

⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, **Insights on Romans, Swindoll’s New Testament Insights** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2010) 169–171

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The focus of Paul's teaching is that the Spirit of God is helping the people of God. Thinking of what the Spirit of God may be doing, we need to ask, "in relation to whom?" If we are speaking of the work of God's Spirit relative to outsiders, we have the words of Christ. "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" [JOHN 16:7-11]. God's Spirit is convicting the world—those who are outside of Christ. He is convicting of sin, of righteousness and of judgement.

The Spirit of God is working in the life of the child of God to instruct them. Jesus also spoke of this work of the Spirit of God in the life of believers. "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" [JOHN 14:16, 17]. So, the Helper—the Spirit of God, takes up residence in the life of believers—individually and corporately.

It becomes evident that a primary reason the Spirit of God is with the people of God is so that He can instruct them. Jesus promised, "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" [JOHN 14:26].

Soon after saying these things, Jesus informed His disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" [JOHN 16:13-15].

The Spirit's instruction is provided as required, and it is effective and powerful. Jesus said, "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" [LUKE 12:11, 12]. When the Spirit of God energises the child of God, that Christ follower will testify powerfully concerning Christ. "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness" [JOHN 15:26, 27].

The Spirit of God is equipping the assemblies of the Lord to serve as Christ commands. Listen to this straight-forward teaching that has been often distorted among churches in this day. In the congregation of the faithful, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills" [1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11]. Rather than focusing on the variety of gifts, note that it is the Spirit who gives each Christian gift(s); and these gifts are given as He determines and not according to our desires. Each Christian is divinely gifted and a divine gift.

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One activity of God's Spirit that is often overlooked is ensuring freedom among God's people. Paul has written, "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" [2 CORINTHIANS 3:17, 18]. As the Spirit of God works in the congregation of the faithful, God's people discover freedom and in the freedom brought through the Spirit they catch a glimpse of the glory of God at work among His people. We speak of the "unity of the Spirit" [see EPHESIANS 4:1-7], but this is nothing less than the freedom given when God's people are working in harmony with the Spirit of God. At this time, we witness the glory of God among us.

Now, in the text before us, we see a ministry that the Spirit performs—a ministry that while vital, nevertheless escapes our notice. We groan, longing for adoption as sons, yearning for the redemption of our bodies. As we groan with longing, the Spirit of God likewise groans for us. The Spirit enters into our longing, assisting us by praying for that which we yearn for and don't even recognise. The closer I come to home, the greater is my longing. I love my family, my church, the people of God, and yet there is a growing dissatisfaction with the world in which I am now confined. Perhaps I'm not able to clearly articulate this longing, but it is nevertheless real. Though I am unable to verbalise the deep longing and the groans that accompany this longing, the Spirit of God makes my true desires known before the throne of the Father. God, who searches the heart, is fully aware of what in the mind of the Spirit. God has placed this longing in my heart, and the Spirit keeps it before God's throne.

We want to be in the presence of the Living God. We want to call out to Him. Every Christian wants to be in full communion with the Father. We want to pray, interceding for friends and family members, knowing that they have needs that only God can meet. So, we want to pray. We want to truly rest in the presence of the Father, enjoying being in His presence. Yet, few of us know what it is to "pray without ceasing" [see 1 THESSALONIANS 5:17]. We witness the Master saying that we "ought always to pray and not lose heart" [see LUKE 18:1], but we seldom come near to achieving such a prayer life. The Word of God is replete with admonitions to pray.

The Master instructed His followers, "Stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" [LUKE 21:36]. How is that working out for you? If, like me, you struggle to pray for strength to escape the trials that are coming, the verse seems to rise up to accuse.

Paul wrote frequently of the need to pray. To the Christians in Rome, the Apostle wrote, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" [ROMANS 12:12]. In the Ephesian Encyclical, he taught us, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" [EPHESIANS 6:16-18]. To the Colossian saints, Paul wrote, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" [COLOSSIANS 4:2]. Such admonitions seem to condemn us. Yet, the text for this day is a source of rich encouragement.

I don't say the text gives permission to become slothful in our prayer life; rather, the text encourages us to realise that God knows our weakness and has provided One who takes our place when we fail to achieve the standard we want to reach. The Spirit of God intercedes for us; God, Himself, is offering up necessary petitions on our behalf. And, because He is God who knows all things, what is needful is assured of being presented before the throne of God. That which is offered is assured of being granted because the Spirit asks according to the will of God.

Let me examine this ministry to the saints from another angle. Each of us has no doubt had the experience of not knowing what the will of God for our life was in some specific area. We know in broad terms that the Father wills our sanctification, especially that we avoid sexual immorality [see **1 THESSALONIANS 4:3**]. We can be certain that the will of God for each Christian is that the child of God should cultivate a life reflecting gratitude [see **1 THESSALONIANS 5:18**]. We know that the will of God is that His people should do good [see **1 PETER 2:15**]. However, we each have faced challenges when it seemed as if we didn't know which path to take, which decision would be the best, what words we should speak. This is especially the case during times that test the one who seeks to serve Christ. The text provides comfort for such times. When we cannot say which is the best path, or we struggle to make the right decision or to speak the proper words, God's Spirit intercedes for us, ensuring that the will of the Father is accomplished in our life. Even when we make the wrong request, the Spirit of God interprets our request, translating it to ensure that that the right request is presented, the request that the Father can answer!

IS THERE AN ADVANTAGE IN BEING A CHRISTIAN? “The Spirit helps us in our weakness... The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words... The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” [**ROMANS 8:26a, 27b**]. Jesus identified the Spirit of God as “the Helper” [see **JOHN 14:26; 15:26; 16:7**]. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is given to believers in order to ensure that the Christian has with him or her One who anticipates our needs. The Christian is never alone; the Spirit of Christ is always with the Christian to ensure that God's will is known, and He is working to make that divine will effective in the life of each Christian.

Let's admit a sobering truth—we are saved in weakness. We are not saved because we have some aspect that commends us to God. We are not saved because we are able to make ourselves desirable to God. We are saved in weakness. Recall the well-known passage that speaks of our condition: “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [**ROMANS 5:6-8**]. It was in our weakness that Christ redeemed us.

This idea of weakness is iterated when the Apostle writes of our condition at the time of salvation. “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” [**EPHESIANS 2:1-7**].

Weakness is a relative condition. If you compare yourself to someone who is bedridden with some debilitating disease, you likely would not be considered weak. Compared to someone who is twenty-five and engaged in competitive weight lifting, you may not fare quite as well. Compared to a Nobel prize winner, your intellect may not be considered particularly strong. Similarly, when matched to some poor soul who is injured in mind and emotion, you may appear brilliant. The point is that the concept of strength or weakness is relative—it depends on what we are comparing and to whom. Compared to the infinite God, each of us is weak both in strength, in might, in intellect and in righteousness.

The Apostle Paul emphasise our weakness—weakness inherent to mortal life—when our life is compared with the Living God. The Apostle has written, “The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” [1 CORINTHIANS 1:25]. Paul reveled in his weakness because it magnified God’s strength. To these Corinthian Christians he wrote, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:30]. The reason he could boast in his weakness was because of Christ’s statement given to encourage him. The Lord told the Apostle, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:9]. Paul would continue, “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” [2 CORINTHIANS 12:10].

In these verses, the Apostle has developed a theology based on our weakness, weakness which the Master voluntarily took upon Himself when He “emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” [see PHILIPPIANS 2:7]. The Apostle has written, “This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them—since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 13:1-4].

What is essential for us to see is that the Holy Spirit guards us, keeping us from succumbing to our weakness. We know we are prone to sin. What we don’t always realise is that when we do choose to sin, the Spirit of God is provoked to jealousy. James, the brother of our Lord, writes, “Do you think the scripture means nothing when it says, ‘The spirit that God caused to live within us has an envious yearning’” [JAMES 4:5 NET BIBLE]?

The Holy Spirit longs for us as followers of the Master to be godly and holy; He yearns for us to reflect the glory of the Living God. He does not surrender us to our own devices. And no wonder this should be the case. You may recall that Paul wrote, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body” [1 CORINTHIANS 6:19, 20].

Despite our weakness, God’s Spirit works to shepherd us toward glory. We are admonished, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” [EPHESIANS 4:30]. In that encyclical, Paul continues, making it obvious that Christians grieve the Spirit of God whenever we foster bitterness, when we harbour wrath, anger, clamour and slander, or when we allow ourselves to be consumed with malice. If we will avoid grieving the Holy Spirit of God, we will work to be kind to one another, tender-hearted and forgiving. As we permit the Spirit of God to work in our lives, dishonourable aspects, both those that are named and other aspects that are unnamed, will be pushed out of our life and the honourable aspects that the Apostle has named will be increasingly evident.

Actually, far more than just those positive character traits that are named will be increasingly evident in the life of a believer as the Spirit of God works in the life of that child of God. The Spirit of God is working in the life of the child of God to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit. Recall the words of the Apostle to the saints in Galatia. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” [GALATIANS 5:22-24].

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Then, we are cautioned, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” [GALATIANS 5:25]. One great advantage of being a Christian is that the Spirit of God is always working in our life. He is guarding us against despair when the world seems to have gone crazy. He is protecting us from succumbing to our own desires. He is compelling us to remain focused on the goal of pleasing Christ the Lord. He becomes our strength and keeps us from being overwhelmed by the world in which we now live.

GOD DIRECTS THE LIFE OF HIS CHILD. “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” [ROMANS 8:28-30].

Whenever we read this promise of God, our tendency is to redefine “good” to suit our own imaginations. We read the words and we imagine that it should refer to an immediate benefit. However, we need to recall where this particular chapter has been in order to identify what the Apostle meant when he wrote of what is “good.” Read again those earlier verse beginning with the eighteenth verse. “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” [ROMANS 8:18-25].

It is impossible to read this and not understand that the Apostle is writing to people who have more than a passing acquaintance with suffering. He is contrasting our present trial with what will be revealed. We live among professing saints who imagine they have already achieved glory. Such people would be disappointed if Christ were to come because the things that give meaning to their lives would cease to exist! When Paul writes, “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” [ROMANS 8:28], it should be apparent that “all things” must include “the sufferings of this present time.” These are sufferings arising because of our Faith in the Risen Son of God. Moreover, the “good” for which these trials are working is “the glory that is to be revealed to us” [ROMANS 8:18].

We must not forget that the Faith was born in the midst of a hostile world. The early years of the Faith were marked by opposition, trial and deprivation. An unknown writer penned a letter to Hebrew Christians who had been scattered throughout the world. He called on them to look back, remembering how things had been in their recent past. He wrote, “Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” [HEBREWS 10:32-34]. Their world had been marked by “a hard struggle,” sufferings, public reproach and affliction. Some had been imprisoned; many had suffered deprivation and loss of earthly possessions. They had paid a high price to follow the Master.

Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, had written to encourage those first followers of the Master. In his first letter, Peter wrote, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And

‘If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’

“Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” [1 PETER 4:12-19]. Life as a follower of the Christ in these early days was fraught with danger. The lot of the first Christians was described by suffering and loss.

Paul’s words of encouragement to the Christians in Philippi sound enigmatic to western Christians in this day. You will recall that the Apostle wrote, “It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have” [PHILIPPIANS 1:29, 30]. Remember, Paul was writing from a prison cell when he penned these words. He had been sent to Rome in chains because of the testimony concerning Christ.

All this talk about suffering, about trials, about opposition makes many believers uneasy. We don’t want to hear of such things. Oh, we occasionally read about fellow Christians in some distant land who are suffering because they confess Christ as Master, but what they experience doesn’t really affect us. We hurriedly scan a news account before rushing on to really important stuff—whether the federal finance minister would sell off family stocks, whether it is proper to saddle the federal environment minister with a demeaning name, the furor arising from the latest speech by the Governor General of Canada, the latest tweet from the President of the United States or what features are included with the iPhone X.

Contemporary Christians living in the western world have enjoyed a pleasant environment for some decades; we have grown complacent, imagining that the denizens of this fallen world are friends of the Faith. We grew relaxed about our place in the world. Consequently, the world has compromised the faithful, infiltrating the churches and sapping the energies of God’s people. We must never forget that the world is opposed to Christ and to His righteousness. Consequently, those who are identified with the world are not friends of the Faith. How harsh the words of James sound to modern ears: “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” [JAMES 4:4].

Religious freedom is an item in the news. The prevailing view of our culture is that religious views must affirm cultural morality. It is okay for a church to teach biblical truth so long as adherents don’t permit those truths to dictate how they live. If contemporary culture says that we must not defend life in the womb, then we dare not speak against the sin of intrauterine sacrifice of the unborn. If modern culture redefines marriage, we must accept society’s view as regnant rather than promoting the biblical view. If obscenity is exalted as entertainment, we must not be prudish. Religious freedom must accommodate society’s views.

Pressure is a constant companion in the Christian life. If we will stand firm, we can anticipate that the world will not be thrilled with our refusal to bow at the altar of Caesar. The result of positioning ourselves against the world will, of necessity, invite retaliation from the world. This is when the teaching provided by the text begins to bring comfort. “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” [**ROMANS 8:28-30**].

God’s investment of His Spirit in the life of the people of God has as the goal conformity to the image of God’s Son. We have not arrived, but we are on the journey. I know no mortal who can be said to be truly Christlike. However, I can say with confidence that each Christian has this reality at the end of this earthly journey. The “all things” are truly “all things,” including sufferings in this present life. The good anticipated is that each Christian will be “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son.” We may be assured that is true since each Christian is “called according to His purpose.” And God’s purpose in calling is so that Jesus “might be the firstborn among many brothers,”

The process of transformation was initiated with the new birth. It continues throughout this life until it is complete at the return of Christ the Lord. The completion for the child of God is that each one shall be glorified. The foreknowledge, predestination and calling have already occurred for the Christian. I note that the Apostle puts the declaration and glorification in the past tense as a sign of confidence that nothing will alter God’s program for those He has foreknown, predestined and called. The future is as secure as the past for the child of God.

To ensure that we have this right, to ensure that we don’t fall into a trap of imagining that Paul is not looking at the sufferings through which the child of God must pass, he will continue by looking at the life a Christian must anticipate when he writes, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’”

[**ROMANS 8:31-36**]

“Suffering? Trial? Opposition? Pressure? That’s not much of an inducement to be a Christian, Preacher. Maybe you should talk about Heaven, about the glory that will be ours!” The end of the matter is essential, I concede; however, we must pass through this life to reach that other shore. From earliest days, the message Paul delivered was one of encouragement that only “through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God” [see **ACTS 14:22b**]. I would be remiss in my duty as a servant of the Most High God if I failed to warn those who would follow the Master that they must face hard challenges. In the same vein, I would be remiss if I did not point to the end of the matter. Even now, we who follow the Christ are being changed into His image.

ROMANS 8:26-30

CERTAINTIES: ALL THINGS? REALLY?

John has written, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” [1 JOHN 3:2, 3a].

Paul sought to encourage a congregation of saints who were experiencing extreme pain because of the Faith when he wrote, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-12].

To the child of God, I say, “Stay the course. God is working through every trial to reveal His glory in you. Don’t quit. Don’t allow yourself to become discouraged.” To the one who has yet to enter into this life that leads to glory, Christ does not promise that you will avoid animosity and opposition—quite the opposite. If you choose to become a Christian, you will be hated by all for His Name’s sake [see LUKE 21:17]. The encouragement you will receive is to “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 2:3].

With the Apostle, I can confidently assert, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” [PHILIPPIANS 1:6].

This is our invitation to all who will receive it: come, join us in this journey to glory. Put your faith in Christ today. Amen.