

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

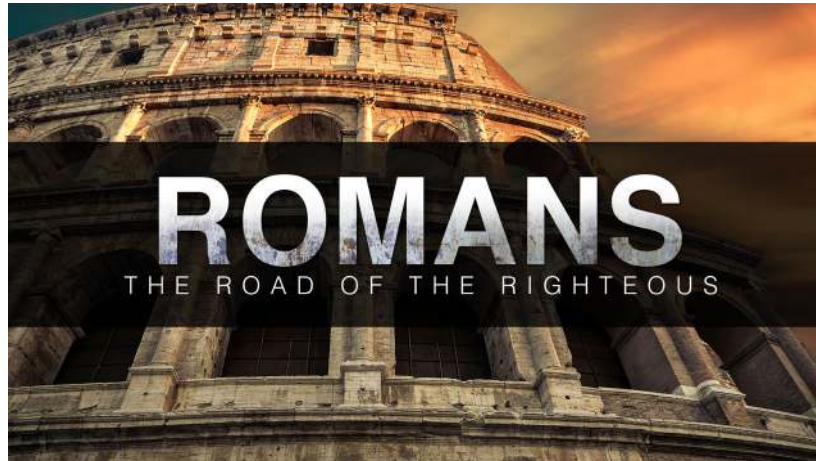
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 8:19

Written By

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During a time of great political and spiritual darkness in Israel, a time when God's people rejected him and opted for worshipping anything and anyone other than Him, when murder of political opponents, lying, drunkenness, greed, exploitation of the poor, and false teaching ran amuck, God raised one man to be His powerful, penetrating voice of absolute truth. His name? Elijah. To study his life is to become acquainted with how God shapes and prepares a saint to engage the wickedness of their day. To study his life is to grasp what it means to be a disciple, a cross-bearer for Jesus Christ, in a day of abject, flourishing national and personal evil. To study his life is to learn what it is like and how you must react as you engage the wicked world, the power of the flesh, and the devices of the Devil. To study his life is to understand that when you stand for God, He stands with you for empowerment and encouragement for the task of being His light is trying.

After Elijah magnificently and victoriously, with the living God's power, took on the 450 prophets of Baal atop Mount Carmel, overlooking the Valley of Armageddon (1 Kings 18), he did something most shocking. He, of all people fled from the wrath King Ahab's wicked wife, Jezebel (1 Kings 19). First, he got as far from her as he could by heading due south to Beersheba (1 Kings



19:3). Leaving his trusted servant here, the prophet then headed a day's walk southward into the barrenness of the desert (1 Kings 19:4). Here he, the once powerful man of prayer and truth, wallowed in self-pity while asking God to just take his life (1 Kings 19:4). Ever been broken and shattered after fighting the world, the flesh, and the Devil? Ever felt like giving up? Elijah did.

Eventually, he walked some fifty more miles due south to Mount Sinai, the place where Moses had encountered God and received the Law. Here, while holed up in a dark, dank cave, he encountered the living God. No. He wasn't in a strong, gale-force wind. No. He was not in a powerful, cave compromising earthquake. No. He wasn't in a massive fire which appeared out of nowhere (1 Kings 19:11-12a). Yes, He, the Almighty, spoke in the gentle, quiet voice whipping around the walls of the cave. God had one question for his troubled, once valiant prophet: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:13). God didn't pounce on His emotionally unstable saint. Conversely, in an almost imperceptible whisper He simply asked Elijah for a little personal clarification as to why he was in this cave so far from home, so far removed from the object of his prophetic mission. After his chosen vessel shared the depth of his self-pity one more time (v. 14), God then challenged him to consider He still had a job to do back in Israel. Even though it looked like he was down for the count, he was not tapped out. God had sovereign plans to still use him in a powerful fashion, so he needed to be encouraged and emboldened to head back into the spiritual fray, knowing that the sovereign Lord's plan would not be thwarted.

Right now, you might relate to Elijah. You've had many spiritual victories as you've battled the world, the flesh, and the Devil, but your last spiritual victory has been followed by a heavy dose of self-pity, uncertainty, and a truck load or two of absolute fear. So, what have you done? You've fled to your own version of Beersheba. You've headed off into the wilderness to hide. And now you've wound up in a cave of sorts, hiding in the darkness like a scared child.

The same Lord who lovingly spoke to Elijah is the same Lord who speaks to you. Gently He comes to you in Romans 8:18-30 and quietly speaks to you from Paul's pen. What does His voice say as it bounces off the walls of the cave?

Stay Hopeful In The Fight With The Flesh (Rom. 8:18-30)

How can God say this? Because, as with Elijah, God has the proper perspective of what is really going on down here as His saints engage evil, and, furthermore, He knows where history is headed and how the story of mankind ultimately plays out. More precisely, as Paul, an Elijah-type servant of God, teaches us occasional cave dwellers there are three reasons why hope, not fear, should fill our hearts and minds in the spiritual fray.

Reason #1: Trials Lead To Triumph (Rom. 8:18)

As Paul teaches, all the trials we encounter as we are cross-bearers for Christ in a carnal age pale into insignificant with what awaits us when our faith becomes sight.

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.

When you compare what we face now as we live in bodies which are still afflicted by the desires of the sinful flesh, with what it will be like with marvelous bodies fitted for the glory of heaven, there is absolutely NO COMPARISON. Paul knew this truth firsthand for God gave him a preview of that glory when He saved him on the road to Damascus (Act 9). On another occasion, God took

his embattled servant and transported him directly into His holy presence, or the third heaven (1 Cor. 12:1-2). What he saw and heard was so beyond human words, Paul didn't even articulate clear thoughts about it. The glory was simply too mind-numbing and jaw-dropping to even attempt a description. Indeed, one sight of what lies ahead for the saint in God's presence will, by definition, make the fight with the flesh seem beyond insignificant. Does this not instill hope into your spiritual body as you are hunkered down in a cave of sorts? Indeed.

A second reason for daily hope is written upon the faded parchment of verses 20 through 22:

Reason #2: Cosmic Degradation Leads To Cosmic Transformation (Rom. 8:19-22)

Paul's words here are bathed in teaching from the Old Testament prophets. They prophesied of radical changes to the earth which will occur during the messianic kingdom of the Messiah.

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.

Nature is personified here as one who awaits the "revealing of the sons of God." The Greek word for "anxious longing," *apokaradokia* (ἀποκαραδοκία), is made intensive by the wedding of the preposition *apo* to the noun. Literally, the word picture here is of the cosmos standing expectantly on its tip toes waiting for the final glorification of the saints. And our culture thinks the New Green Deal will actually be the answer the cosmos is waiting for. Right.

Why is the cosmos waiting for the final public revelation believers in Christ, who are currently, like Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, not seen in the magnificent glory they will bear when they all stand in His spectacular and blinding presence? Verses 20 through 23 supply the much needed answer.

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.

Man's fall and divine judgment became the world's fall and divine judgment. The passive verb, viz., *was subjected*, *hypotasso* (ὑποτάσσω), underscores the fact that the cosmos was the recipient of law of entropy which entered the cosmos when man rebelled against God's commandment. Entropy, which is also known as the Second Law of Thermodynamics, "is a fancy way of saying that nature tends to bring all things to disorder. That is, with time, things naturally fall apart."¹ Entropy reminds us that decay, disease, and disarray are simply the order and structure of the complex cosmos. Buy a new car and it will eventually rust. Plant a new lawn and weeds will be a

¹Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 77.

perpetual problem. Put on new siding and mold will ultimately appear in those shady areas. Pour a new concrete driveway and the cement will break down and crack. Plant lovely laurels in your backyard and fungi will attack them. Buy a Coach purse at the outlet and no matter how much you treat the leather, it will dry, crack, and breakdown. Why? Because of the inexorable power of the Law of Entropy.

Where did this law come from? It came from the judgmental hand of God when Adam and Eve rebelled against his command to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Who can forget the essence of God's curse against the earth because of man's flagrant sin?

¹⁷ And unto Adam he said, because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; ¹⁸ Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; (Gen. 3).

This has the Law of Entropy written all over it. Man's sin subjected the once highly fruitful and disease and decay-free earth to the vanity of entropy. No matter what chemicals man produces, no matter what steps he takes to stave off corruption in all things, corruption is divinely built into the warp and woof of the cosmic system. So, go head, put a new roof on your home and within time, the elements will break it down, forcing you, or some future homeowner, to buy another roof. Plant roses in your yard this spring and get ready for a battle with aphids, black spot, ants, and a whole host of various diseases which love to diminish the beauty of your plants. I'm not being pessimistic, just realistic.

Prior the man's fall, the earth was Paradise in every sense of the word. There was no death and decay. No rose had a thorn. No one ever heard of a milkweed or of a thistle. Artichoke plants didn't have needle-like spines. Spotted spurge and goat heads were unheard of. Mosquitos didn't draw blood from victims. Squirrels didn't peel the bark off of trees to build nests, and thereby cause the branch in question to be prone to decay. Things like leaf rust, fire blight, powdery mildew, canker fungi, tree borers, brown spot, Pythium blight, red thread, summer patch, and not to overlook avalanches, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, typhoons, drought, forest fires, mudslides and, yes, humidity, were meaningless words because they never occurred. They were unknown until man sinned. At that precise moment Paradise became cursed.

By means of personification, Paul speaks of how the cosmos groans now, awaiting its freedom from this slavish futility. It wants to return to its perfect Paradise state, but it cannot. It wants to fully fulfill its created function without interruption, but it is prohibited by God's divine curse, which, in turn, is wedded to man's flagrant sin in the Garden. No wonder creation groans, as it were. Right now, creation groans in the icy grip of winter, but the buds on your roses and the presence of bulbs breaking through the frozen soil illustrate that Spring is almost here when the cosmos will show us its beauty. Yet we all know that Autumn will arrive, resulting in the fading glory of plants we so enjoyed in the spring and summer. And, once again, winter, like a fierce foe will bring the wonder and beauty of the world to a screeching halt. Again, no wonder the cosmos groans.

But, mark this well, the creation does not groan without hope. Far from it. God built hope even into the cosmos, as it were. Again, reflect on Paul's words:

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.

Decay and destruction are diametrically opposed to the wonderful and vast character of God. The current corruption, therefore, is, in Paul's inspired mind, something akin to a woman traveling in pain during childbirth. Sure, the pain is indescribable, but it culminates in the wonder of a child. For the cosmos, the child will be its freedom when the Lord's saints are freed. When will this occur? I believe it occurs in two stages.

One, it will occur at the end of the tribulation when Jesus arrives at His glorious Second Coming to establish His long-awaited messianic rule from the throne of David. Charles Ryrie's *The Basis of Premillennial Faith*, and Charles Feinberg's *Millennialism: The Two Views*, provide the detailed biblical evidence and argumentation that Christ's will return to earth to erect the long-awaited Davidic empire. The covenants of God (Abrahamic Covenant, Gen. 12; Palestinian Covenant, Deut. 30; Davidic Covenant, 2 Sam. 7; and the New Covenant, Jer. 30-31) demand and promise to be literally fulfilled. All throughout the Old Testament the prophets foretell a time when the Davidic Messiah reigns from Jerusalem over a rejuvenated earth (Isa. 2; 11; Jer. 23:1-8; Dan. 2 & 7; Amos 9:13-15; Zech. 12-14).

What will this period be like? To name a few things: The curse will be minimized, resulting in animals losing their venom, ferocity, and fear of mankind (Isa. 11:6-9; 35:9; 65:25). Length of life will be extended (Isa. 65:20). The barren deserts of the earth will bloom with vibrant and colorful flowers (Isa. 35:1). Water will be present where it did not exist before (Isa. 35:6-7). Solar light will be increased, which will result in more prolific plant growth and production (Isa. 4:5; 30:26; 60:19-20; Amos. 9:13-14). Topographical changes will occur in the earth (Zech. 14:10). When all of this occurs during the millennial reign of Christ (Rev. 20), the curse of from the Garden will be curtailed to allow the cosmos to fulfill its intended design and purpose without the current vanity minimizing its ability (Joel 3:16-18). Jesus, of course, will be ruling and reigning from David's throne in Jerusalem (Isa. 2; 9).

Two, at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ, John tells us the Devil be released from the bottomless pit on last time to deceive the nations. His insurrection against God, which will be played out through the political progressives who will be born to Christian parents who actually lived through the tribulation, will be met with divine fire (Rev. 20:7-10). After this judgment, John gives us this chronological prophetic word:

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21).

This is probably a parallel passage of what Peter prophesied in his second and last letter:

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3).

At this time, God, who is holy, will use divine and cosmic fire (a supernova?) to vaporize the earth and cosmos as we know it in order to cleanse it of the ravages of sin. In its place He will then,

with the word of His mouth, create a new stellar cosmos and a new earth for His saints to enjoy. At this time, the heavenly Jerusalem will descend and hover above the new earth. Truly, when this occurs the Paradise we lost will be the Paradise we gained.

And what about the creation? It will groan no more because it will be free from the curse of sin thereby enabling it to be everything the Creator made it to be for mankind. All of this, of course, is why we should not feel defeated and fearful in this age, for one-day cosmic degradation will lead to cosmic transformation.

A third reason we should come out of the cave is because of what Jesus, our Savior and Lord, will do for us

Reason #3: Personal Consternation Leads to Personal Transformation (Rom. 8:23-25).

Paul's words here are so easy to identify with if you are a Christian:

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.

We, who have the Spirit of God given to us at the moment of salvation (Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Cor. 12:13), have a taste of what lies ahead for us in God's presence, whether that is in the messianic kingdom or in God's eternal kingdom, viz., heaven. The Spirit's presence in our lives is the first installment of our salvation our assurance that our final adoption in glory will be fully realized. Paul, who had, as I've said, seen/tasted of the glory of God's presence, describes it well in 2 Corinthians 5:

¹ For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: ³ If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. ⁴ For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. ⁵ Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. ⁶ Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁷ (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) ⁸ We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (2 Cor. 5).

Mark well how vastly and radically different the earthly body is from the heavenly one. According to Paul, it is the difference between an old, tattered tent and a magnificent, marbled temple. There will be no comparison. It will be the same "you," but "you" will be altogether improved beyond comprehension. Paul addresses this concept in his first letter to the Corinthians:

³⁷ And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*: ³⁸ But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. ³⁹ All flesh is not the same flesh:

but *there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.* ⁴⁰ *There are* also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the *glory* of the terrestrial is another. ⁴¹ *There is one* glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for *one* star differeth from *another* star in glory. ⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: ⁴³ It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. (1 Cor. 15).

A daffodil bulb doesn't look anything like the beautiful flower which comes from it, but it is, in fact, genetically related. Likewise, your heavenly body, which you will be given at the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18), or at the end of the Tribulation (Matt. 24), will be as vastly different as the daffodil bulb is from the flower, but it will still be you. Further, the flesh of animals and fish merely remind us that since there are various types of flesh here, there will a different and magnificent flesh in your heavenly home after your resurrection. Also, as one star shines brighter than another, we know that our bodies will glow with different intensities as we stand constantly exposed to the holiness and glory of God (Matt. 13:32). Moreover, the physical body is in a constant state of muscular degeneration. If you don't believe me, then just wait awhile. The massive chest from weightlifting will wind up around your waistline. The toned muscles you enjoy in your youth, will become soft and less powerful. The body which Jesus will give you, however, will pulsate with raw power. It can run, climb, jump, and do most anything without limitations and without worry of every getting tired and worn out. At this time we'll all be triathletes who place first, and we'll all be able to enjoy these new bodies in an environment called Paradise. What could be better?

In the meantime, what do we do? We groan. Why do we groan? We groan because we see how decay and disease take a toll on our earthly bodies. We groan because we are frustrated in our desire to please God by the power of our sinful flesh. We groan because we daily see the terrible impact of sin on lives around us. We groan because we can't believe how easily people abandon truth for outright lies. We groan as politicians are more concerned about maintaining their power than maintaining their people. We groan at how readily leaders exploit our laws or the sake of political gain. We groan because we watch loved ones slip away because of the unrelenting nature of disease. We groan because we can't believe how quickly and easily we walk away from Jesus when we thought we were doing so well. We groan because it simply looks like evil is progressing, at will, while righteousness is seemingly powerless to prevail.

Yet, we do not groan as those who have no hope. No. We groan with hope, hope of what lies ahead. We know the King is coming to establish His kingdom. We know that the meek shall inherit the earth, not the wicked. We know that the Devil and his minions will be put in their eternal place. We know that this earthly home will be replaced by a heavenly home beyond description. We know that we will be reunited with loved ones who loved Christ but have gone on before us. We know that every knee and every tongue will one day confess Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the heavenly Father

Because we know all of this while we walk by sight, we have the ability to be hopeful . . . hopeful even if circumstances have forced us to move into a cave of self-pity. In fact, we of all people should daily "rejoice in hope," for we know how the story of our lives and world ends and the final chapter is, well, simply astonishing.

So, come out of the cave of despair as you fight the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Come out and listen carefully for I think you'll hear the still, small voice of Jesus reciting the words of Romans 8:18-25 in your ears:

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.