

Romans 8:16-19 **The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.** ¹⁷ **Now if we are children, then we are heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.** ¹⁸ **I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.** ¹⁹ **The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.**

Dear Family Members and Co-Heirs of Eternal Life:

Some of us still remember an old TV show from the 70s called *All in the Family*. The father of the family's name was Archie Bunker. He was the prince of malapropisms. He'd say things like, *"That's like looking for a needle in a hayride."* His wife, Edith, daughter, Gloria, and son-in-law, Mike all made for a very strange family. But through all their political differences and personality problems, they remained a family. As the apostle Peter once said, **"Love covers over a multitude of sins"** (1 Pt. 4:8). In other words, when you really love someone, you find ways to get along, work through problems, and remain one.

Now think how God has made us, with all our problems and sins, members of his family. What did it take to do that? Love. It took the love of the Father to send us his Son. It took the love of Jesus to humble himself even to die on the cross and suffer even hell. It took the love of the Holy Spirit to create faith in our grubby, stubborn hearts and keep us in that faith each day. Romans 8 tells us about that work as we see that **The Spirit Makes Us All in the Family**. (1) Co-heirs with Christ, (2) Co-sufferers with Christ, and (3) Co-expectors of Glory.

1

Being part of the family of God brings with it spectacular blessings. If the Holy Spirit had not brought us to faith in Christ we would all be *creatures* of God but not *children* of God. There's a big difference between the two! God provides physical sustenance for all his creatures on earth, but only his children are members of his eternal family who receive his eternal blessings. Paul said, **"You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus"** (Gal. 3:26).

That makes Jesus our brother. And if Jesus is our brother, we are co-heirs with him, in line to inherit all the blessings our brother, the Son of God, enjoys: unending life, perfect peace, the vast storehouse of all of heaven's treasures. This wonderful truth moves us to say with John: **"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God"** (1 Jn 3:1).

2

Knowing that heaven is our family home, our inheritance, gives us strength to face the challenges of life on earth today. Paul says, **"Now if we are children, then we are heirs...co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings."** Suffering is the challenging part of our faith. Paul isn't saying that our sufferings make us more acceptable to God or more deserving of salvation. Heaven is a completely free gift.

But suffering serves a purpose. The psalmist says, **"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word"** (Psalm 119:67). The author of the letter to the Hebrews reminds us that earthly challenges **"produce a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it"** (Hebrews 12:11). During times of difficulty, like this health emergency, there is no doubt that we are being challenged in our faith. But now is not the time to *lose* our faith, but rather to *use* our faith. We are fleeing to God's Word more. We are praying more. We are appreciating the bountiful blessings we have more and taking them for granted less.

I found this anonymous quote in my file: **"God's business here on earth is to populate heaven with men, women, and children who are like his Son. Suffering is tough, but through it we can re-**

member that God came to earth to bring people to glory and to accomplish this ‘through sufferings.’ We suffer, but Christ suffered for us all.”

The truth is, some of the most compassionate, kind, caring, giving, loving Christians I know are those who have been refined by the fires of trial and tribulation in their lives. They are the first to reach out to others in time of need. They understand what others are going through and instead of sitting on their hands when others are in need, they put love into action. That describes so many of you!

So Paul is saying, *“Since you are Christ’s brothers and sisters, please understand that suffering comes with the territory.”*

3

But Paul isn’t without feelings. He himself suffered more than most people will ever have to suffer during their lifetimes. So he puts it into perspective: ***“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*** The Greek word for ***“comparing”*** can be used for putting two things on a scale and comparing their weight.

On the one side, put your troubles and trials. On the other side, put the treasures of heaven and an eternity with Jesus. He says, *“It’s no contest. It’s not even worth comparing the two.”* Or, as he put it in another letter (2 Corinthians), ***“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all”*** (2 Cor. 4:17).

Then Paul uses an expression that fills us with wonder: ***“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.”*** He uses picture language to help us see how the whole world is just holding its breath waiting for Jesus to come back with all his angels on the Last Day. He says everything waits ***“in eager expectation”*** -- like a child stretching out his neck to look down the street to see if the parade is coming, or like a soldier’s wife looking up eagerly at a troop carrier ship at the return of her husband.

Do we wait for Jesus like that? Instead of dreading what’s happening today, we can always look forward to tomorrow. Because of a Father’s love, a Son’s sacrifice, and the Spirit’s power, we **know** what tomorrow will bring. Paul says it: ***“Glory!”*** For whom? For you and all believers! Because of Jesus, our Brother, we are ***“All in the Family!”***

Amen.