

Notes on Romans 8 : 26 - 30
'Living the *life* of the Spirit filled with Goodness'

Do you remember what it was like to wake up on Christmas morning amazed that the stocking that had been empty the night before was now filled with presents? As children we would try and guess as many of these gifts by feel as possible or when our children were little we loved to sit watching them as they opened their presents and some of their favourites were the odd ones; such as a tin of spam, a mini can of coke or the cereal variety boxes. Are you equally amazed at these verses? They are as filled as any stocking is with God's goodness and as we unwrap them can you guess what I am going to say?

My two favourite descriptions of Father Christmas are by Charles Dickens in 'A Christmas Carol' and by CS Lewis in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. For Dickens Father Christmas is an immense figure dressed in a green robe where abundance is the order of the day. Whereas for Lewis, Father Christmas represents how the Lion has begun to undo the power of the Witch, where it was always winter but never Christmas. With our modern descriptions of Father Christmas his goodness is only ever earned whereas God is not only extravagantly and abundantly good, he is also extraordinarily gracious too. In times of suffering, of when we are in the desert, God's goodness means he is up to his neck with us too.

To live the *life* of the Holy Spirit is not just for when we feel strong, or capable, but it is even more so when we feel weak and least able. It is when we groan at what we see around us and know we can do nothing is when God in his goodness intrudes by his Spirit and groans in and alongside and for us. It is when it all feels just too much and we cannot cope. It is when it all feels too hard and we don't know how we can every carry on. It is when we just groan and we discover that God is always there at the point of our deepest need and answers our unexpressed and our inexpressible prayers.

To live the *life* of the Holy Spirit is not because we are able to solve all things instead, as verse 28 tells us, it is God who works through all things because of his love for us. Translations, such as the AV, which start with 'all things' put the emphasis in the wrong place. It is God, because he has searched our hearts and for the sake of his Covenant purposes, who works all things for good and he works this good for all who love him. We also detect in the background the language of redemptive suffering and Messianic woes which dignify us in the midst of this suffering and are part of what it means to love and follow Jesus.

To live the *life* of the Holy Spirit is for us all to know what it means to be Predestined, Called, Justified and Glorified. All of these celebrate and are ways for us to know the extravagance of God's goodness in our lives. To be Predestined is to know that our identity and our destiny are assured. God will not fail at our time of resurrection to make us to be like Jesus in all things. The furnace of affliction does not rob us of our future; instead it is the training ground where we learn how we

are to live in the image of Jesus. When we are Called, or Elected, the emphasis is not on salvation as such but on our purpose as those who are God's fellow workers. In verse 28 the emphasis is on God's covenant purposes and these purposes define our vocation as those who are part of the People of God. This vocation is to bless the world in as extravagant a manner as we know God's goodness in our lives. To be Justified is to rejoice in the status we have now in the present and which we will hear in the future when God will declare us 'Not Guilty'. As the judge he will declare that the sentence has been cleared, the chains are to be taken off and our record made clean. To be Glorified is to know that God has triumphed over the enemy, and that new creation is both now in and among us and yet one we look forward to too. Our discipleship, based on faith, hope and love, is one we live not only in the good times of life but even more in the times of trial and tribulation when we trust even deeper in God's goodness to us.

I have just finished one of the oldest books I have. It's a biography about an astonishing man called Billy Bray who was a Cornish tin miner who just couldn't help but shout out again and again and again how good God was to him. He lived a truly glory and good filled life. Living this good life is centred in our confidence in God Paul so joyfully describes in verses 28 and 30. But this good life is not me centred but God and neighbour focussed that we may do good to all we meet – and this sounds like Good News to me.

Questions on Romans 8 : 26 - 30
'Living the *life* of the Spirit filled with Goodness'

- 1 What amazes you most about these verses?
- 2 What does God's goodness, as described in these verses mean to you?
- 3 What does it mean to live the *life* of the Spirit when you feel weak and least able? Why is the Spirit groaning in us here a sign of God's goodness?
- 4 Why is any translation of verse 28 wrong when it starts with 'all things'? What should the translation start with and why?
- 5 How does verse 28 include our sufferings and sorrows?
- 6 Which of the four parts of verse 30 do you struggle with? Do you think they are all expressions of God's goodness?
- 7 Do these verses give you confidence before God and in your life? How is our life to be God and neighbour focussed?