

GROANING FOR GLORY: ANOTHER LOOK AT THE SPIRIT'S INTERCESSION IN ROMANS 8:26–27

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Abstract: *After establishing the centrality of the glory motif in Romans, this article argues that the groaning which characterizes the Holy Spirit's intercession in Rom 8:26 is a groaning for the glory of the sons of God to be realized. Paul shows in Romans that the Spirit is both the guarantor of future glory and the agent who brings about the glorification of believers. A contextual reading of Rom 5:3–5 and 8:26–27, two passages in which Paul closely correlates the Spirit with future glory, shows that the present, transforming work of the Spirit in believers' lives, especially through trials and afflictions, both validates their hope of glory and is a precursor to their full share in the glory of God. The Holy Spirit uses the "all things" (Rom 8:28) that believers face in order to conform them to the image of God's Son and bring them to their full share in glory, and this is the substance of the Spirit's groaning and intercession on their behalf.*

Key words: *glory, Spirit, groaning, intercession, afflictions, image, conformity, new creation, Romans*

Rich themes abound in Romans 8, a perennial favorite within the Pauline corpus: no condemnation in Christ; adoption as sons of God; glory through suffering; God's providential working of all things for the good of believers, just to name a few. And then there is the Spirit's groaning and intercession on behalf of believers found in Rom 8:26–27. We appeal to it when we are at a loss about what to pray for: "The Spirit knows and is praying in our stead." It's easy to treat this as something of an aside, a free-floating piece of encouragement, not necessarily connected to the flow of Paul's argument, but nice for those times of confusion and uncertainty. But is there more going on in these verses?

Careful attention to the context of Romans 8, and to Paul's argument in the letter as a whole, reveal that in Rom 8:26–27, Paul is not giving general encouragement for times when we are at a loss in prayer, though that can certainly be an application. These verses are tightly bound to the argument of Rom 8:17–30, as well as to the glory theme that is a central motif of the letter. The Spirit's groaning is, I will argue, a groaning for the full glory of the sons of God to be realized, a glory the Spirit both longs for and works to bring about in believers.

I. THE GLORY MOTIF IN ROMANS

Paul uses δόξα ("glory") frequently in his letters with reference to the glory of God, the glory of Christ, and the eschatological glory in which believers will partic-

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ipate. Specifically in Romans, *δόξα* and its cognates occur 22 times, creating a *leitmotif* that forms a consistent thread through the main section of the letter.¹

“Glory” is at the heart of Paul’s gospel as he presents it in Romans and gives shape to several important theological concepts. Sin, for example, is described with reference to glory. Paul’s indictment on humanity given in the opening chapter is that they did not *glorify* God (1:21). Instead, they “exchanged the *glory* of the incorruptible God” for idols (1:23). The result of this “exchange of glory” is that humanity, created to glorify God, instead became filled with “all manner of unrighteousness” (1:29). This culminates in Paul’s statement in Rom 3:23 that “all have sinned and fall short of the *glory* of God.” In other words, we have failed to live in a way that reflects the nature and character of God (i.e. his glory) in our lives, the very purpose for which we, as image-bearers, were created.²

Just as sin is explained with reference to glory, Paul also presents redemption in Christ in relation to glory. Because believers have been justified by faith (5:1), they once more have “hope of the *glory* of God” (5:2). In Romans 8, Paul says the ultimate end awaiting believers is future glory. Believers will be *glorified* with Jesus (8:17); *glory* will be revealed in them (8:18); creation is longing for “the freedom of the *glory* of the children of God” (8:21); and the ultimate end of salvation—being predestined, called, and justified—is that believers will be *glorified* (8:30). Similarly, Paul says in Rom 9:23 that God’s purpose in election is “to make known the riches of his *glory* for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for *glory*.” For Paul, then, future glory is a central feature of our redemption in Christ.

The reason *δόξα* is so prominent for Paul in relation to sin and redemption, I have argued elsewhere, is that glory occupies a central place in Paul’s redemptive historical framework.³ Paul conceives of glory as the revelation of God’s nature and character in all of creation *to* and *through* image-bearers who share in and reflect his glory. This glory, intended for humanity, of which all have fallen short (3:23), is being restored in Christ. Believers once more have “hope of the glory of God” (5:2) and will be “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (8:29), which is another way of saying that they will be “glorified” (cf. 8:30).⁴ Thus glory becomes an eschatolog-

¹ James Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word, 1988), 533–34, defines this *leitmotif* as “the glory of God” which “man was made to share in, which he ‘exchanged’ and lost (1:23; 3:23), but which will always be the goal of the good man (2:7, 10), a goal made into a realistic hope by Christ’s resurrection (5:2; 6:4).”

² On Rom 3:23 as referring to our loss of image-bearing glory, see Dane Ortlund, “What Does It Mean to Fall Short of the Glory of God? Romans 3:23 in Biblical-Theological Perspective,” *WTJ* 80 (2018): 121–40; Mikko Sivonen, “The Glory Motif in Paul: A Narrative Approach to the Vindication of the Glory of God through Christ” (Ph.D. diss., University of Helsinki, 2018), 60–63, 73–78.

³ See Donald L. Berry, *Glory in Romans and the Unified Purpose of God in Redemptive History* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).

⁴ The structure of Paul’s argument in Rom 8:29–30 supports seeing conformity to the image of Christ and glorification as two ways of speaking about the same reality. Both are given as the ultimate end for which believers were predestined by God, showing that conformity to the image of God’s Son and glorification are not two realities, but one. On this, see the recent study by Haley Goranson Jacob, *Conformed to the Image of His Son: Reconsidering Paul’s Theology of Glory in Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 229–30.

ical hope and expectation for believers, a realization of God's purpose for Adam and for Israel to see and to show forth the glory of God.⁵ God's glory shared with humanity is a significant aspect of Paul's gospel as he presents it in Romans, and the hope of eschatological glory is the central theme of Romans 5–8.

But how is this glory to be realized? And, to keep in view our present inquiry, what, if anything, does this have to do with the Spirit's groaning and intercession in Rom 8:26–27? To answer these questions, it is necessary to see how Paul correlates the role of the Holy Spirit and the glorification of believers in Romans.

II. THE SPIRIT OF GLORY IN ROMANS

Thirty-one times Paul refers to the Spirit in Romans, more than any of his other letters except 1 Corinthians.⁶ Twenty of these references come in Romans 8 alone, clearly an important chapter for understanding the Spirit's role as Paul sets it forth in Romans. It is not accidental that the Spirit is so prominent in a section of the letter that has the future glory of believers as its central theme. Peter refers to the Spirit as "the Spirit of glory" (1 Pet 4:14), but Paul, I think, shows us most clearly just what this means.

For Paul, the Holy Spirit fulfills the promises of the new covenant and is the agent of new creation. Just as God's aim in creation was to reveal his glory to and through human image bearers, so also the Spirit, as the agent of new creation, works in believers to bring them into their intended share in God's glory. Specifically, Paul shows in Romans that the Spirit is the *guarantor* of future glory and the *agent* who brings about this glorification in believers. Seeing this is the key to rightly understanding the Spirit's groaning and intercession in Rom 8:26–27. To get at this, we will do a brief survey of the Spirit's role as it relates to glory in Romans 5–8. We will then look more closely at two key passages where Paul explicitly links the Spirit to glorification, Rom 5:2–5 and 8:26–30, passages which in many ways parallel one another and, when read together, shed mutual light on Paul's meaning in both.

Romans 5–8 is a distinct unit in Paul's letter to the Romans. The opening (5:1–11) and conclusion (8:18–35) of this section form an *inclusio* of sorts, with several key words recurring.⁷ Among these are "glory" (5:2; 8:18, 21, 30 [glorify]) and

⁵ One important, though often neglected, aspect of the believer's glorification is their role of dominion over creation. God entrusted humanity, created in his image, with a representative role as his vicegerents over creation (cf. Gen 1:26–28). Though forfeited in the fall, Paul shows that in Christ, who is the new Adam, this dominion has been realized and is being restored to his new humanity. See Berry, *Glory in Romans*, 147–53; Jacob, *Conformed to the Image of His Son*, 103–4; 120–21; contra Carey C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 225–26, who argues against seeing any relationship between Adam and glory in Paul's writings.

⁶ If we interpret Rom 1:9 and 12:11 as references to the Holy Spirit rather than the human spirit, the count moves to thirty-three. See Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 484–86, 611–13.

⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 469, notes a "ring" composition in which 8:18–39 picks up 5:1–11, and 8:1–17 picks up 5:12–21.

“Spirit” (5:5; 8:23, 26 [2x], 27 [2x]).⁸ Both Rom 5:1–11 and 8:18–35 are about present suffering contrasted with future glory. The theme of the “hope of sharing in God’s glory” (cf. 5:2 and 8:18, 30) brackets all of chapters 5–8, so that assurance of glory is the overarching theme in this section of the letter.⁹ Paul encourages believers to endure present afflictions, knowing that for those united to Christ by the Spirit, his story—suffering then glory—becomes their own. Sharing in Christ’s suffering is, in fact, the pathway to sharing in his glory.

The Spirit has a key role with regard to this future glory. In Rom 5:5, Paul says believers’ hope—which in context refers to their “hope of the glory of God” (5:2)—does not put them to shame “because God’s love has been poured into our hearts *through the Holy Spirit* who has been given to us.” In other words, the present work of the Holy Spirit enables believers to “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (5:2) and gives them assurance that this hope will not ultimately disappoint (5:5). Their attainment of future glory is guaranteed by the presence and work of the Spirit now.¹⁰

However, the Spirit is not just the guarantee of future glory but also the agent of that glorification. We see this in Rom 7:6, for example, where Paul contrasts the present work of the Spirit in believers with life “in the flesh” and “under law.” Believers, Paul says, serve in the “newness of the Spirit,” characterized by bearing fruit for God (7:4), whereas life under the law only bore fruit for death (7:5). Echoes of the early Genesis narratives are present here.¹¹ God commissioned humanity, created in his image, to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28), but instead their disobedience led to the fruit of death, a story replayed in Israel’s history as well.¹² But in Rom 7:4–6 (and continuing into chapter 8), Paul presents the Spirit’s work as fulfilling the OT promises of a new covenant and of bringing about the new creation.¹³ According to Paul, those who are joined to Christ no longer live in the old era of the law, characterized by the power of the flesh, sin, and death. Rather, they live in the new covenant era in which the promise of the Spirit, working in believers to produce righteousness (Ezek 36:27) and give life (Ezek 37:14), has become a

⁸ Others include: justify (5:1, 9; 8:30 (2x), 33); hope (5:2, 4, 5; 8:20, 24 (4x), 25); affliction (5:3 (2x); 8:35); perseverance (5:3, 4; 8:25); save (5:9, 10; 8:24); and love (5:5, 8; 8:35, 39).

⁹ So Moo, *Romans*, 293.

¹⁰ The Spirit’s role as the “guarantee” of future glory is seen elsewhere in Paul, especially in 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5 and Eph 1:13–14, each of which speak of the Spirit as the ἀρραβών (“pledge, down payment”), guaranteeing a future inheritance to come.

¹¹ See Berry, *Glory in Romans*, 97–98; Christopher Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (BINS 96; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 44–59.

¹² In Romans, Paul casts the effects of the law in Adamic terms, subsuming Israel’s history with Adam’s. We see this throughout Romans 7, as well as in Rom 1:18–25. See Berry, *Glory in Romans*, 28–32, 96–105.

¹³ The Spirit’s role in relation to the new covenant and new creation are intimately connected. In Ezekiel 36:35, the renewal of God’s people causes the land to be like the Garden of Eden. And the resurrection of Israel through God’s Spirit in Ezekiel 37 recalls Gen 2:7, when God created Adam and caused his breath of life to enter him. See John W. Yates, *Spirit and Creation in Paul* (WUNT 251; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 31–35.

reality.¹⁴ This new covenant, new creation work of the Spirit results in a restoration of human beings to what God intended—those who share in his divine life and reflect his character in their lives. In other words, the Spirit is the agent who brings about a present transformation in believers which will culminate in their full conformity to the image of Christ—their consummated share in his glory—as Paul shows in Romans 8.¹⁵

As we come to Romans 8, Paul's focus on the Spirit's work, alongside believers' share in Jesus's resurrection life and glory, comes to a crescendo. The possession and indwelling of the Spirit, Paul says, is the sign that one belongs to Christ (8:9). And those who belong to Christ are no longer in the flesh. Rather, their lives are marked by "walking according to the Spirit" (8:4), "living according to the Spirit" (8:5), and "the mindset of the Spirit" (8:6). The indwelling Spirit produces newness of life now (cf. 6:4), and also assurance that believers will partake in the future resurrection, when the mortality of their bodies will be overcome (8:11; cf. 7:24).¹⁶

The Spirit who "is life" (8:10) is the *guarantor* that believers will partake in the future resurrection: "If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, . . . [God] will also give life to your mortal bodies" (8:11a). And the Spirit is the *agent* through whom this future resurrection will take place: "[God] will also give life to your mortal bodies *through his Spirit* who dwells in you," (8:11b).¹⁷ Whereas Paul previously attributed the agency of Jesus's resurrection to "the glory of the Father" (6:4), here, in 8:11, the Spirit is the agent, both of Jesus's resurrection and of the future resurrection of believers. Again, we see the close correlation of the Spirit and glory for Paul. Paul conceives of God's glory in 6:4, and elsewhere in Romans, as the very life of God—and all that characterizes it—imparted by the Spirit.¹⁸

Similarly, Paul says in Rom 8:13 that those who *by the Spirit* put to death the deeds of the body "will live"—a reference to the eschatological resurrection of believers, accomplished by the Spirit (cf. 8:11).¹⁹ The Holy Spirit, as the "Spirit of

¹⁴ Both "righteousness" and "life" are key themes in Romans 5–8. In Romans, as elsewhere in Paul's writings, the righteousness required by the law is now fulfilled by those who walk according to the Spirit (8:4), leading to eschatological life. See Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 474.

¹⁵ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 591, helpfully explains that "the role of the Spirit was to be the eschatological life-giver, enabling people to enter into the resurrection life of the new creation." Because "image" and "glory," for Paul, relate to his understanding of God's original purpose for humanity in creation—a purpose now restored through Christ and consummated in the future resurrection of believers—it is not surprising that the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in passages where Paul collocates "image" and "glory," including Romans 5 and 8, Philippians 3, and 2 Corinthians 3–4.

¹⁶ Moo, *Romans*, 493.

¹⁷ So Beale, *NT Biblical Theology*, 258–59; N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 245. Contra Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 808–9, who rightly argues that the Spirit is the *guarantor* of our resurrection, but then, based on a textual variant, argues against seeing the Spirit as the *agent* of our resurrection as well.

¹⁸ On this, particularly in Rom 6:4, see Berry, *Glory in Romans*, 90–93.

¹⁹ Paul also links the Spirit with life in 8:6, "The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." Moo, *Romans*, 488, notes that "life" and "peace" in 8:6 denote a state of freedom from "the law of sin and death" that begins for the believer in this life, albeit in less than its final definitive forms. Both 8:11 and 13

adoption,” produces in believers the very “Abba” cry of the Son (8:15), bearing witness with their own spirit that they are children of God (8:16). And, as Paul says, “if children, then heirs”—sharing in Christ’s own inheritance, an inheritance which Paul correlates with future glory: “co-heirs with Christ, . . . co-glorified with him” (8:17). Again Paul shows that the possession of the Spirit *now* is the guarantee of *future* glory.

Finally, in Rom 8:23, Paul says that believers have the “firstfruits (*ἀπαρχήν*) of the Spirit.” The Spirit, as in Rom 5:2–5, serves as the assurance that the hoped-for glory will not end without harvest. The Spirit is the pledge of blessings still to come, blessings Paul defines as “adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (8:23b). Adoption, spoken of previously in 8:15, is here used in an ultimate, eschatological sense. In Christ, believers have already been adopted and have become sons of God (8:15). But there is a fuller sense of adoption that awaits believers when their bodies will be raised and they will experience their full redemption (8:23). This “adoption” is another way of referring to what Paul calls “the freedom of the *glory* of the children of God” (8:21). Creation eagerly awaits this glory, intended for humanity and forfeited in the Fall (1:23; 3:23), to be restored.²⁰ This restoration, already inaugurated, will be consummated when the fullness of redemption occurs in the resurrection. Creation longs for this restoration of humanity’s glory (8:21), as do believers (8:23).²¹ And the Spirit, who is the “firstfruits” (8:23)—the guarantor that this glory will be attained—also longs for and actively works to bring about the realization of this glory, as Paul will show in Rom 8:26–27.

III. THE SPIRIT AND GLORY IN ROMANS 5:2–5

Now that we have looked at the glory motif in Romans and have seen how closely connected the Spirit is to the glorification of believers, it remains to examine the two passages in Romans where the Spirit is most closely and directly collocated with glory: 5:2–5 and 8:26–30. Our primary question of inquiry—What is the nature of the Spirit’s groaning and intercession on behalf of believers?²—comes from the later passage. But the relationship between the Holy Spirit and eschatological glory in Rom 5:2–5 informs the nature of the Spirit’s intercession and groaning in Romans 8.

appear to point to the “final definitive form” of this life that becomes a reality at the resurrection, as Rom 8:18–25 shows.

²⁰ This “exchange of glory” in Rom 1:23 includes both a change in humanity’s object of worship as well as a loss of their divinely intended share in glory. When humanity exchanged God’s glory, the entire created order, which God had subjected to humanity’s image-bearing, God-like dominion, was now subjected to futility. See Berry, *Glory in Romans*, 16–32.

²¹ The destiny of all of creation, Paul shows, is linked to humanity’s destiny, both in present bondage and also in future freedom. This connection stems from the role God intended for humans, as his image-bearers, to have in ruling over creation as representatives of God’s wise and loving kingship. Their forfeiture of God’s kingship over them and of their share in his glory plunged both humanity and all of creation into bondage and futility. In Christ, though, humanity will experience the freedom that comes from the restoration of God’s glory in them, a freedom which will liberate all of creation as well. This is the essence of Paul’s argument in Rom 8:19–23.

In 5:2, Paul says that believers “boast in hope of the glory of God.” Because they have been justified by faith in Christ, believers currently enjoy peace with God, and they once more have hope of obtaining the very glory in which God always intended for them to share (5:1–2). But Paul also says that believers “boast in afflictions” (5:3). Why? Paul’s reason is that present afflictions “produce perseverance, and perseverance tested character, and tested character hope” (5:3–4). In the words of John Murray, afflictions “subserve the interests of hope.”²² Afflictions themselves become tools used to produce a greater assurance that the hoped-for glory will in fact be realized.

How is it that afflictions produce this certainty of future glory? Paul’s point seems to be that they do this by “initiat[ing] a sanctifying process that ends in hope.”²³ Present transformation results in a hope of future glory. This is because our future glory entails, as we see in Romans 8 and elsewhere, a full conformity to the very image of Christ—a sharing in the life and character and nature of God for which we were originally created as God’s image bearers. Though our full share in this glory will not be realized until “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (8:23), the sanctifying process of transformation and of sharing in the life and character of God has begun now. And it is the Spirit who is behind this process, both in his present work and in its future consummation.

Thus, at the end of the progression in 5:3–4, Paul gives the reason why this sanctifying process generates a certain hope of glory: “*because* the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” It is crucial, I think, to see this work of the Spirit “pouring God’s love into our hearts” not as something separate from or additional to the sanctifying chain of 5:3–4, but as the very same work. The way God’s love, poured into hearts by the Spirit, is experienced, is through the Spirit’s sanctifying work, as he uses afflictions to transform believers into Christlikeness. Two lines of evidence lead me to this conclusion: (1) the terminology Paul uses in 5:3–5; and (2) the nature of God’s love being poured into believers’ hearts (5:5).

1. *Paul’s terminology in Rom 5:3–5.* The terminology Paul uses in Rom 5:3–4 recalls earlier sections of the letter. For example, the Spirit’s work in human hearts, seen in Rom 5:5 (“God’s love ... poured into our hearts by the Spirit”), was an important theme in Romans 2. There Paul argues that the Spirit fulfils the new covenant promises of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36–37, writing God’s law on human hearts and producing obedience from the heart (cf. Rom 2:15, 29).²⁴ This Spirit-work is God’s remedy for the “hard and impenitent hearts” (2:5) that come to characterize humanity following their exchange of God’s glory for idols (1:23). In response to their exchange of his glory, God handed humanity over “in the lusts of their heart” (1:24a) to impurity and all manner of unrighteousness (1:24b, 29). The Spirit, by inwardly transforming human hearts, overcomes this hardness: “circumci-

²² John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 164.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ See Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 813: “Paul understood the gift of the Spirit in terms of the new covenant promise of Jer 31:31–34, as it had come to be read in light of Ezek 36:36–37:14.”

sion is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not the letter” (2:29). In other words, the Spirit stands behind the process of heart transformation seen in Romans 2. And this is the same process of transformation that Paul speaks of in Romans 5.

Paul’s inclusion of “perseverance” and “character” in the sanctifying chain of 5:3–4 is significant, I think, because both are reflective of this new covenant work of the Spirit seen in Romans 2, and both relate to the glory God intended for humanity but which they forfeited through their disobedience. In Rom 2:7, Paul says that “perseverance in good works” characterizes new covenant believers: “those who through perseverance in good works seek for glory.”²⁵ Garlington captures the sense of Paul’s statement, saying that this “perseverance in good works” speaks of “the modality of man’s quest to be all that he was intended to be in the original design of the creation.”²⁶ A persistent pursuit of that for which we were created—seeing God and sharing in his divine life and character and nature—is what it means to “seek for glory” (2:7). But how does such perseverance in the quest for glory come to characterize believers? Paul tells us in Romans 5 that such perseverance—a mark of those who seek for and will ultimately obtain glory (2:7)—comes through afflictions. This is the reason why believers “boast in afflictions” (5:3). Afflictions serve the interests of future glory by producing in believers the perseverance necessary to the obtaining of that glory.²⁷

“Tested character” (*δοκιμήν*, 5:4), which results from this perseverance, recalls Rom 1:28, where, using the verbal form of *δοκιμή*, Paul says humanity “tested and found God unworthy” (*οὐκ ἔδοκίμασαν τὸν θεόν*) of being retained in their knowledge (1:28a). As a result, God handed them over to a “tested and disapproved” (*ἀδόκιμον*) mind, resulting in improper behavior (1:28b). Now, though, God, by his Spirit, is reversing all of this, producing in believers a “tested and approved character” through their perseverance in the trials and afflictions they face.²⁸ They stand the test, as it were, showing that a genuine, Spirit-wrought work

²⁵ On Rom 2:7 as a reflection of new covenant obedience—a connection Paul makes explicit in Rom 2:15 and 2:29—see Wright, *The Letter to the Romans* (NIB 10; Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 441–50; Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 211–18; Berry, *Glory in Romans*, 41–44.

²⁶ D. B. Garlington, “The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans, Part II: The Obedience of Faith and Judgment by Works,” *WTJ* 53 (1991): 58.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Garlington goes so far as to say that this perseverance through testing defines in large measure what is intended by “the obedience of faith” (*ὑπακοήν πίστεως*, Rom 1:5; 16:26) that issues in eschatological justification. It is important to see that for Paul, perseverance in good works flows out of faith, as is evidenced in the example Paul gives of Abraham in Romans 4, where the language of hope first occurs in Romans. Paul says of Abraham, “In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ . . . No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (4:18–21, ESV). This faith-rooted, hope-driven perseverance—steadfastly trusting in God and believing his promises in the midst of difficult circumstances—is precisely what Paul is describing in 5:3.

²⁸ So also Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988), 265, who says that Paul seems to have “formulated this process as the reverse of human decline into depravity, denounced in 1:21–32.” Paul returns to this idea in 12:2. Just as their “testing and disapproving” of the knowledge of God led to a disapproved mind and to improper living (1:28), so now the process of transformation in believers and

of grace has occurred, and this Spirit-produced character will culminate in glory—full conformity to the very image of Christ.

This new covenant work of the Spirit, already seen in Romans 2, lies behind the process described in Rom 5:3–5.²⁹ Afflictions do not universally lead to perseverance and tested character. Afflictions can also produce hardness against God and expose the hollowness of one's faith. The difference for believers lies in the new covenant work of the Spirit, who unites believers to Christ in his death and in his resurrection so that they walk in newness of life (6:4), and are enabled to "bear fruit for God" (7:4–6).³⁰ This present, transforming work is a precursor to the believers' full share in God's life and character and nature to come, and so it produces hope—specifically, "hope of the glory of God" (5:2, 4–5).³¹

2. *God's love poured into hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).* For believers, their "hope of the glory of God" (5:2) is certified by their experience of God's love poured into their hearts by the Spirit: "hope does not put us to shame, *because* God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."³² But just what does Paul have in mind by this experience of God's love poured out into hearts through the Spirit?

The phrase "the love of God" (ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ, 5:5) can be read as a subjective genitive, "God's love [for us]," or as an objective genitive, "[our] love for God." Support for the subjective genitive reading is supplied by the following verses, where the demonstration of God's love is the focus: "God shows his love for us" (5:8). God's love for his people is also a theme to which Paul returns in 8:35–39. In 8:39, the very same phrase, τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ, is almost certainly a subjective genitive: "nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from *the love of God* in Christ Jesus our Lord." For these reasons, I am inclined toward understanding "the love of God" as God's love for his people.

Those who adopt this reading tend to understand "the love of God" as both an objective reality demonstrated in the cross and also—and this is the sense usually emphasized—a subjective reality experienced in the heart of believers. In other

the formation of tested character (δοκιμὴν, 5:4) take place particularly in the mind (Rom 12:2a). As believers' minds are renewed, they are able to test and approve (δοκιμάζειν) God's will (12:2b). Whereas a disapproved (ἀδόκιμον) mind led to doing what is improper (1:28), a renewed mind that approves (δοκιμάζειν) of God's will leads to lives shaped by "what is good, acceptable, and perfect" (12:2c)—i.e. to lives that display his glory.

²⁹ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (trans. Scott Hafemann; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 80, also links the role of the Spirit in 5:5 with the promise from Ezek 36:26ff, though he understands the genitive construction "love of God" as an objective genitive and sees the new covenant work of the Spirit as enabling believers to return the love God bestows upon them. I argue for a different understanding of the genitive construction (see below).

³⁰ The "newness of the Spirit" contrasted with the "oldness of the written code" in 7:6 recalls the Spirit-letter contrast of 2:29 and shows that Paul is once more presenting the Spirit as the one who fulfills and accomplishes the new covenant promises.

³¹ Cf. Dunn, *Romans*, 1:265, who says that "when suffering is experienced not as a contradiction to faith or occasion to renounce God, but as a strengthening of patience and maturing of character, it stimulates hope in the grace that is having such an effect."

³² In Rom 15:13, the Spirit is again closely correlated with hope: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

words, the Spirit is the *means* by which the love of God is poured out in our hearts. It is the Spirit who, in an experiential sense, communicates the love of God to believers, which certifies their hope. This is true enough of the work of the Spirit. But I think it misses the point Paul intends to make.

Rather than seeing the Spirit's role as enabling us to feel and experience the love of God, it seems to me that the giving of the Spirit is the *manner* in which the love of God has been poured out. He is the substance of God's love, not merely the means by which that love is communicated to us. The Spirit *is* the love-gift. Two lines of reasoning lead me to this conclusion.

First, Paul's use of ἐκχέω ("to pour out") recalls the use of the same verb by the prophets with regard to the eschatological "pouring out" of the Spirit (cf. Joel 2:28–29; Zech 12:10). Second, to see the giving of the Spirit as the manner in which God has loved his people fits better with Rom 5:3–5 and with the role of the Spirit seen previously in Romans. The reason that the "hope of glory" produced by the transforming process of 5:3–4 will not put to shame is precisely because the one at work in believers, producing this perseverance and tested character through afflictions, is the promised Spirit of the new covenant. Thus, as believers endure afflictions and find the genuineness of their faith affirmed and their character developed, they can know that this is the result of the new covenant Spirit at work in them. This is evidence that they are loved by God and have become his new covenant people. Paul will develop this further in Romans 8, showing that the "Spirit of adoption" bears witness to believers that they are children of God and works in them a familial resemblance to God (cf. 8:4–5, 29). As the "firstfruits" (8:23), the Spirit provides assurance and hope of the full adoption to come, when believers will share in the resurrection glory of Jesus.³³

I conclude, then, that the way God's love has been poured out into the hearts of believers is through the giving of the Spirit, who transforms believers and produces hope through their afflictions. Believers experience God's love by the Spirit's sanctifying work in their lives, using afflictions to produce perseverance and character, drawing their lives into greater Christlikeness. This transforming work gives assurance that one is indeed a beloved child of God. And this assurance leads to hope—hope of their full adoption, their full share in the glory of Christ (8:15–17, 23–25). "In this hope (of the glory of God) we were saved" (8:24). Thus, believers "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (15:13)—a power experienced in the Spirit's present, transforming work, which is a down payment of the full transformation into glory to come.

For those who have been justified in Christ and so are children of God, perseverance through trials produces a character that validates the hope they have in God's future glory. Because they are presently undergoing a process of moral transformation by which God's character and nature are being imprinted on their lives through afflictions, believers can be certain that the grace which is producing such

³³ The thought is similar to that expressed in 1 John 3:1: God's love has been lavished on believers in their being called children of God, which, in turn, gives assurance of a future hope of being like Jesus.

an effect will see them through to their full share in God's glory.³⁴ In 8:35, Paul returns to the theme of God's love in relation to affliction that we see in 5:5. "Affliction" (θλιψις) heads the list of things which Paul says can never separate believers from "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:39). More than that, according to 5:3–5, afflictions themselves serve as a means through which the new covenant work of the Spirit occurs and the hope of God's glory abounds. If God's Spirit is genuinely at work in believers now, then they will certainly obtain the full inheritance—they will be glorified, recreated in the Son's image to share in his glory.³⁵

IV. THE SPIRIT AND GLORY IN ROM 8:26–30

We are now in a position to examine Rom 8:26–27 to see how these verses about the Spirit's groaning and intercession fit within Paul's argument in Romans 8, as well as in the letter as a whole. Assurance of glory is the overarching theme of Romans 5–8, and as Paul's argument in this section of the letter reaches its summit in 8:17–30, he provides some of the clearest vistas into the nature of eschatological glory. The Spirit's role of intercession (8:26–27) and the close correlation of conformity to the image of God's Son with glorification (8:29–30) provide the final touches to Paul's portrait of future glory in Romans 5–8.

Paul makes evident in 8:17–30 that there is an interconnectedness between creation, the children of God, and the Spirit. It is by the Spirit that God's children walk in newness of life (6:4; 7:6; 8:4) as he inwardly imprints God's character and nature on their hearts, a preview of the full glory to come at their resurrection. Believers eagerly await this glorification, longing for the redemption of their bodies (8:23). And creation, too, longs for this Spirit-produced glorification that sets believers free from their bondage to corruption, because "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (8:21) means freedom for the creation over which the children of God were intended to rule as God's representatives (8:19–22).

One of the ways Paul expresses the close relationship between creation, believers, and the Spirit is through his use of "groaning" (συστενάζω/στεναγμός). Creation *groans* (συστενάζει, 8:22); the children of God, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, *groan* (στενάζομεν, 8:23); and the Spirit himself also "intercedes *with groanings*" (ὑπερεντυγχάνει στεναγμοῖς, 8:26). Through this threefold "groaning" that develops in the passage, Paul drives toward his conclusion: "these he also glorified" (8:30). The train of thought can be easily lost on readers, especially because both 8:26–27 and 8:28 have too often been abstracted from their context, transplanted

³⁴ So also Schreiner, *Romans*, 264, who says that "moral transformation constitutes evidence that one has really been changed by God," and it is this process that "assures believers that the hope of future glory is not an illusion."

³⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 1:264–65, says, "The whole process produces hope because for Paul it is itself the process of salvation, the process whereby God recreates humanity in his own image—what he refers to elsewhere as the wasting away of the visible man which is the necessary complement to the renewal of the hidden man (2 Cor 4:16)."

from the soil of Romans 8 from which they grow, so that their organic connection to Paul's argument is severed.

In 8:17, Paul has returned to the theme of the hope of glory, which he introduced in 5:2. Glory dominates the argument from 8:17 all the way through to 8:30. Believers, whose present experience is characterized by suffering and weakness, will one day be fellow heirs of the cosmos with the Messiah, sharing in his very glory.³⁶ All of the groaning, waiting, longing, hoping, and interceding of 8:19–27 have this one object as their focus—the glory of the children of God (8:21). This is why creation groans (8:22). It is why believers groan (8:23). And the intercessory groaning of the Spirit is directed toward the same end, as Ὠσαύτως (“in the same way”) in 8:26 shows.³⁷

The Spirit, Paul says, helps believers “in [their] weakness” (τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ, 8:26a). What weakness does Paul have in mind, though? It is common to read the second phrase of 8:26 as defining the weakness Paul has in view: “the Spirit helps us in our weakness, *for we do not know what to pray.*”³⁸ To read it in this way, however, divorces 8:26–27 from the flow of Paul's argument. It seems better to understand the believer's weakness in terms of the situation Paul has been previously describing, the weakness that results from living in “bodies of death” (7:24; cf. 8:10).³⁹ Their present existence, subject to physical corruption and to the subverting influence of the flesh, causes believers to groan and wait eagerly for the redemption of their bodies (8:23), when their glory will be revealed (8:18–19).⁴⁰

Accordingly, the γάρ clause in 8:26 (“the Spirit helps us in our weakness, *for we do not know what to pray*”) does not define the weakness. Rather, the clause expresses the specific way the Spirit helps believers *in their weakness*.⁴¹ They do not know how to get from their trials and experiences in their corruptible bodies to the glory which God intends to produce in them. But the Spirit, as the guarantor and the agent of glorification, does. He intercedes for believers “according to God,” so that he might produce glory through the “all things” (8:28) that believers face. This

³⁶ The inheritance of believers—“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (8:17)—recalls Paul's earlier statement regarding “God's promise to Abraham and his seed that he would be heir *of the world*” (Gk. κόσμου, Rom 4:13). Paul understood God's promise to Abraham to be about more than just inheriting Canaan. Rather, for Paul, the Abrahamic promise is linked to God's original purpose for humanity to fill all of creation and to rule over it (Gen 1:28). This unified purpose of God runs through redemptive history, from Adam to Abraham to Israel, and finds its fulfillment in Christ and the children of God who are united to Christ by faith, becoming coheirs with him.

³⁷ Cf. Wright, *Romans*, 598, who concludes from the use of Ὠσαύτως that Paul clearly intended the groaning of the church, the groaning of creation, and the groaning of the Spirit to be seen in parallel.

³⁸ See, e.g., Cranfield, *Romans*, 1.421; Schreiner, *Romans*, 435–36.

³⁹ See Dunn, *Romans*, 1.477; Moo, *Romans*, 523; Wright, *Romans*, 598; Timothy Wiarda, “What God Knows When the Spirit Intercedes,” *BBR* 17 (2007): 298–99.

⁴⁰ The presence of “weakness” in the context of future glory and the redemption of bodies (contrasted with the deadness of the body of believers, cf. 7:24; 8:10–11) provides an interesting parallel to 4:19–20 where Paul says that Abraham did not “weaken” (ἀσθενήσας) in faith when he considered the “deadness of his body” but instead grew strong in faith “giving glory to God.”

⁴¹ Contra Schreiner, *Romans*, 434–35.

glory—which Paul describes as conformity to the image of the Son in 8:29—is the “good” (εἰς ἀγαθόν, 8:28) toward which the Spirit directs “all things.”

What does it mean that the Spirit intercedes “according to God”? Here, Paul’s use of the phrase τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος (“the mindset of the Spirit,” 8:27) is significant: “And he who searches hearts knows what is the mindset of the Spirit.” Paul uses the noun φρόνημα in only one other place in his writings, in 8:6, where he contrasts the “mindset” of the flesh with the “mindset” of the Spirit: “the mindset of the flesh is death, but *the mindset of the Spirit* (τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος) is life and peace.” That Paul repeats the identical phrase in 8:27 begs for it be read in association with 8:6. Yet this connection is often overlooked.

Believers, Paul has affirmed, no longer live in the realm of the flesh, though as long as they live in bodies of death, the flesh will continue to exert influence. Now, however, they live “in the Spirit” (8:9). Whereas the “mindset of the flesh” characterizes those who live in (and according to) the flesh and so set their minds on the things of the flesh, the mindset of the Spirit characterizes those who live in (and according to) the Spirit and so set their minds on the things of the Spirit. This is Paul’s point in 8:6.

So closely intertwined is the spirit of believers with the Holy Spirit—seen, for example, in the Spirit-produced “Abba” cry in believers, in which Spirit bears witness with their own spirit that they are children of God—that Paul says “the mindset of the Spirit” characterizes both: believers in 8:6; the Holy Spirit in 8:27.⁴² In both cases, “the mindset of the Spirit” is a mindset directed toward “life and peace” (8:6b), which are eschatological blessings given to those who seek for glory through perseverance in good works (cf. 2:7, 10). This “mindset” is manifested in believers through their perseverance in trials and the obedience of faith that characterize their present existence as they groan and earnestly wait and hope for the glory of God. And it is manifested in the Spirit’s intercession on behalf of believers “according to God” (8:27).

Seeing how Paul connects the believer’s spirit with the Holy Spirit helps answer the question of who is doing the groaning in 8:26. Paul says that “the Holy Spirit intercedes ... with groanings too deep for words.” Paul attributes these groanings to the Spirit, but they appear to be manifested in human groanings that are beyond verbal expression. Thus, just as the Spirit of adoption in the children of God produces the cry, “Abba, Father!,” and just as his mindset becomes their own, so also the Spirit’s groanings are intimately linked with believers’ own groanings. The groaning throughout this passage (of creation, 8:22; of believers, 8:23; and of the Spirit, 8:26) has the new creation in view. It is a groaning for the fullness of redemption, for the freedom of the glory of children of God, leading to creation’s own freedom from its bondage to corruption (8:21). The Spirit, who is the agent of

⁴² The interrelationship between the human spirit and God’s Spirit is so close that it can be difficult to distinguish between them in certain occurrences of πνεύμα, leading Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 613, to sometimes opt for “the inelegant ... ‘S/spirit.’” Fee concludes that even in cases where the human spirit is probably in view, “in Paul the ministry of the Spirit is not far away.”

new creation,⁴³ groans within believers, intercedes on their behalf, and works to bring about the renewal of all things that will come when the sons of God are revealed in their full glory (8:19).⁴⁴

Believers long for their full participation in the glory of God, which was God's intended purpose for humanity from the very beginning of creation. But due to their present limitations, they do not know what God is doing in each situation or how it is intended to bring them to the desired end (hence, "we do not know what to pray for as we ought," 8:26). The Spirit translates the groaning of believers for glory (8:23), characterized in 8:26 as the Spirit's own groaning, into effective prayers before God, who then acts by that very same Spirit to produce perseverance, tested character, and ultimately, their full share in the glory of God for which they long. In sum, the "mindset of the Spirit" (τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος, 8:27b) within believers, known by the heart-searching God (8:27a), is set upon life and future glory. The Spirit, we have seen, is the guarantor of this future glory (5:5; 8:23). And he is the one who gives new creation life—bringing about a present transformation into Christlikeness (6:4; 7:6; 8:4) that is a preview of the full glory to come at the resurrection (8:11, 23).

This work of the Spirit in believers, a work that is "according to God" (κατὰ θεόν, 8:27), is the very reason believers can "know" (cf. Οἶδαμεν, 8:28) that for those who love God and are called according to his purpose, all things work for good. The Spirit's intercession "according to God" means that he intercedes in accordance with—and then acts to bring about—God's own character, nature, and purpose in believers' lives.⁴⁵ In other words, the Spirit works in the "all things" that believers experience—things which, in the context of Romans 8, particularly relate to affliction and suffering—to conform believers to the image of the Son (8:29) and to bring them into their full share in his glory (8:30).⁴⁶ This, Paul, has shown throughout Romans, is the "purpose" (πρόθεσιν, 8:28) for which God originally created humanity. And this divine purpose has progressed through redemptive history, finding its fulfillment in the Messiah and in the new humanity he creates.

To be "called according to his purpose" (8:28) is to be effectually called to salvation through the gospel, called into relationship with God "in order to advance

⁴³ On the Spirit as the giver of new creation life, see Yates, *Spirit and Creation in Paul*, 142–73.

⁴⁴ Jacob, *Conformed to the Image of His Son*, 244–45, sees in the Spirit's intercession a task for God's children, participating in his restoration process through prayer: "In this way they participate with the Son's rule over creation as those whose new identity is in Christ. Just as the Son intercedes on behalf of the saints in his glory in Romans 8:34, so also the saints demonstrate their sonship, and thus their participation in the Son's glory, in the present."

⁴⁵ Cf. Eph 3:24, "the new man created *according to God* (κατὰ θεόν) in true righteousness and holiness"; Col 3:10, "the new self which is being renewed in knowledge *according to the image of its creator*" (κατ' εἰκόνα τοῦ κτίσαντος αὐτόν). Given Paul's reference to conformity to the image of the Son in 8:29, it is not a stretch to think that Paul had a similar thought in mind when he referred to the Spirit's intercession as being "according to God," a phrase that occurs relatively infrequently in Paul's writings.

⁴⁶ This does not mean that the Spirit is the grammatical subject of the verb *συνεργεῖ*. Rather, it seems to me that God is the implied subject, though the means by which he works to bring about glory is through the agency of the Spirit.

God's purpose in and for the world."⁴⁷ Paul later writes of those whom God "prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called" (9:23–24). That is the same idea Paul communicates in 8:28: those who are "called according to [God's] purpose" are the ones God has called to salvation in order to share in his very glory, which is God's ultimate purpose for his people.⁴⁸

Those who, through the new covenant work of the Spirit in their hearts, have come to love God (8:28a) are called into participation in Christ's own glory, a glory which fulfills God's original purpose of setting those created in his image as servant-kings over creation in order to fill the earth with "the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (cf. Gen 1:28; Hab 2:14). God has determined to share his glory with his people, and the Spirit is at work in the lives of believers to bring it to pass. The present work of the Spirit, producing deep groans, eager longing, and perseverant hope for their full glorification, and then "interceding according to God" (8:27) to accomplish this glorification for which they hope, is the reason believers *know* that all things work for good (8:28).⁴⁹ This is another way of communicating what Paul has already said in 5:2–5: the poured-out Spirit, God's love-gift to his people, produces perseverance and tested character through their afflictions, so that afflictions actually serve to produce a more certain hope of future glory (cf. 5:2, 5).⁵⁰ They are, in fact, tools in the Spirit's hands, which he skillfully uses to chisel and form and shape believers, bringing them into a full share in their Christlike glory.

V. CONCLUSION

The Spirit's groaning is a groaning for the glory of the sons of God. The Spirit is both the guarantor of this glory and also the agent who brings about this glorification. His present work, transforming believers through the trials and afflictions they face, is the certainty of the complete transformation—full conformity to the image of the Son—which will be realized at the resurrection of the dead, "the redemption of our bodies" (8:23). Until then, creation groans for this glory. The children of God groan for this glory. And the Spirit himself effectually groans and intercedes for the saints—those who are predestined for conformity to the image of

⁴⁷ Wright, *Romans*, 602. See also Moo (*Romans*, 530), who rightly says that "Paul always uses the verb *καλέω* and the noun *κλητός*, when they have God as the subject of the action, of God's effective summons by which people are brought into relationship with himself."

⁴⁸ Cf. Rom 8:30, "predestined, ... called, ... justified, ... glorified."

⁴⁹ Hence the connection between the Spirit's intercessory work and the emphatic "we know" (*οἶδαμεν*) of 8:28.

⁵⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 447, helpfully summarizes Paul's point in these verses: "Believers are assured that everything works together for good because the God who set his covenantal love upon them, predestined them to be like his Son, called them effectually to himself, and justified them will certainly glorify them. All the sufferings and afflictions of the present era are not an obstacle to their ultimate salvation but the means by which salvation will be accomplished."

the Son, those who are called, those who are justified—until they are, *in toto*, finally glorified.⁵¹

⁵¹ This article is dedicated to my doctoral supervisor, Daniel Fletcher (1974–2019), who was always generous with his time and provided valuable feedback during its writing. His groaning on earth has ended, and as he shared in Christ's sufferings, so too will he share in his glory.