



**BETHEL**  
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# **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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## The Centrality of our Glory

In the opening chapters of the book of Genesis we read of

- The creation of the world.
- The placing of man in the world as a co-regent.
- The establishing of the Covenant of Works by which man was bound to obey God perfectly.
- The tragic fall of man and his expulsion from the Garden on account of his rebellion against God.

Now, what is rarely appreciated about the Fall is the radical effect that Adam's sin had on creation: Adam and Eve's rebellion NOT ONLY resulted in the death of mankind, BUT it also tainted the created world! Listen to...

Genesis 3:17-21, "Then to Adam [God] said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it"; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground...' And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them."

This passage introduces us to the horrible effect that sin had and continues to have on this world.

- The earth is now cursed!
- Its productivity is thwarted. The earth unwillingly yields its fruit.
- And NOT ONLY did Adam receive the penalty of death, BUT so did creation as the first sacrificial animal was slain on account of Adam's rebellion.

Truly Adam's sin had a profound impact on this world! And that is why it is no surprise to read of the Second Coming of Christ in the following terms when Peter shared the glorious news of Christ:

Acts 3:20-21, "And that [God] may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of the restoration of all things..."

When Christ returns NOT ONLY will WE be restored to our original glory, BUT so will CREATION!

And that is what is behind Paul's teaching in Romans 8 and the benefit that flows from the cross of Christ, the promise of glory!

Romans 8:18, "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 ['IN'- εἰς (*eis*)] us."

Truly, when we enter the final state, we shall participate in the glory of Christ! Paul describes it this way:

Philippians 3:20-21a, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory..."

John also proclaimed this truth.

1 John 3:2, "...We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him..."

Romans 8 details some of the elements of this coming glory:

- The Revealing of our True Identity as Sons/Daughters of God, v. 19b.
- The Completion of our Adoption as Sons where we Inherit the Earth, v. 23b.
- The Full and Final Redemption of our Body, v. 23c.

Now, it is NOT God's intention that we quickly forget this. Accordingly, Paul turned to the centrality of this glory in the here and now! It begins with what God did to the world on account of the Fall. Notice the centrality of our future glory on the part of creation.

Romans 8:19, "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."

Based on the context, Paul's use of "creation" is a reference to everything in the universe that is nonrational — animals, plants, and inanimate things such as stars, mountains, rivers, plains, and seas. Each of these facets of God's creation has an end-time look about it. Notice the language:

- "The anxious longing": ἀποκαραδοκία (*apokaradokia*); behind this statement is one word in the original which carries the meaning of "to stretch the head forward." It carries the idea of straining one's head to see something of great importance.
- "Waits eagerly": ἀπεκδέχομαι (*apekdechomai*); the expression speaks of an eager waiting as if on tiptoes! The word is in the present tense which gives an added connotation of continuance until the expected event comes to pass.

Accordingly, Paul is speaking of the hushed expectancy of creation as it longingly awaits the revelation of God's glory in the lives of God's children! Now some might think that Paul is speaking anthropomorphically here. Yet he is NOT. He is giving us a description of creation design! For example:

- Solar panels are designed to track the sun.
- Many clocks are designed with the ability to wake a person up at a selected time.

NEITHER of these are anthropomorphisms. RATHER they are part of a created design! Accordingly, just as creation was made to reflect the glory of God, so with the Fall creation was RETASKED to anticipate the coming of God's glory!<sup>1</sup> Notice vs. 20.

Romans 8:20, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but

because of Him who subjected it, in hope.”

As I referenced at the beginning, creation fell when Adam sinned. As a result, it became subject to “futility” ματαιότης (*mataiotēs*): the word refers to something that is empty, purposeless, or transitory. It carries the idea of “being bound” and so without success — unable to achieve its stated goal or purpose. What Paul had in mind is the changing seasons which bind creation each year! D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way:

Nature every year, as it were, makes an effort to renew itself, to produce something permanent; it has come out of the death and the darkness of all that is so true of the Winter. In the Spring it seems to be trying to produce a perfect creation, to be going through some kind of birth-pangs year by year. But unfortunately it does not succeed, for Spring leads only to Summer, whereas Summer leads to Autumn, and Autumn to Winter. Poor old nature tries every year to defeat the ‘vanity,’ the principle of death and decay and disintegration that is in it. But it cannot do so. It fails every time. It still goes on trying, as if it feels things should be different and better; but it never succeeds. (MacArthur, 1991, p. 458)<sup>2</sup>

William Hendriksen added this:

The creation is subject to arrested development and constant decay. Though it aspires, it is not able fully to achieve. Though it blossoms, it does not reach the point of adequately bearing fruit. It may be compared to a very powerful world-champion boxer or wrestler, who is chained in such a manner that he cannot make use of his tremendous physical prowess. (Hendrickson, 1992, p. 268)

Truly, built into creation is a yearly grasping for its ultimate end — an end it has yet to achieve! Yet once again this is NOT simply a metaphor. For notice, God built this into creation after the Fall, “not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it.” We say we enjoy the seasons, yet we must never forget that they did NOT exist prior to the Fall! God created the seasons for a purpose which is here stated: To serve as a reminder to His people of a coming redemption which will never pass away! Someday creation’s grasping will achieve its ultimate end! That is what is what Paul was referencing when he wrote Romans 8.

Romans 8:19, “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.”

When Paul saw the changing seasons, it reminded him of the glorious future we have in Christ! For someday the bareness of winter (Think of the condition of the world when once it is burned up on the Last Day [2 Peter 3:10]. It will be reminiscent of a barren field in winter. Someday, the winter barrenness of this world...) will break forth into a Spring and then a Summer that will know no end, expiration, defilement, or decay!

Maybe it will be this year? That is the idea behind the final expression in v. 20, "...in hope"! What specifically is Creation's "hope"? Its end game? That to which it is aspiring?

Romans 8:21, "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"

Truly, someday creation's slavery to corruption<sup>3</sup> will cease! The bareness of Winter will break forth into a Spring and Summer that will never end!

When will that happen? At the Second Coming of Christ! When Christ returns the world will be radically transformed into a New Heavens and Earth (cf. 2 Peter 3:13). Until then, the world groans.

Romans 8:22, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now."

Once again, this is a rather interesting statement.

- "Groan:" συστενάζω (*sustenazō*); generally, this is an audible expression of anguish due to physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. It references the bewailing of a condition that is painful, unsatisfying, and sorrowful- a cry for deliverance from a torturing experience.

Along with the changing of the seasons, this also would reference the Signs of the Times so characteristic of our world today: earthquakes, natural disasters, drought, famine, sickness, disease, wars, and rumors of war! We must understand that these groanings are NOT meaningless! FOR once again they anticipate a coming, glorious event.

- "Creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth until now": indeed, just as a woman going through childbirth knows that her pain is NOT for nothing, likewise creation's groaning has a purpose: It looks to "the revelation of God's glory in us"!

And so, through the Seasonal Changes (and the signs of the time) God has built into Creation an announcement/call for us to look forward to the future and the eternal state!

Now as glorious as that is, it get's better. For this reminder also has been built into our person. Notice this on the part of the child of God.

#### **On the Part of the Child of God, v. 23a.**

Romans 8:23, "And not only this, but also we ourselves [this is emphatic], having

the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves [another emphatic] groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”

The emphasis of “we ourselves” tips us off to the fact that Paul considered this verse to be somewhat of a surprise to his readers- *“even we ourselves groan!”* See the re-tasking of Creation makes perfect sense once you see it. Built into it is a longing for the coming of Christ and the final state — again, every sign of the time as well as every seasonal change testifies to it! But the child of God? We too have a built-in anticipation of the coming of Christ? Most Certainly! Built into our being as Christians is a longing which we don’t even recognize, BUT which all of us experience!”

Notice the expression, “we ourselves groan within ourselves.” Pointed in the wrong direction this “groaning” will lead to the sin of discontentment! What is this groaning?

- It is every time we feel the pain of decline in our bodies... walking up the stairs, getting out of a chair.
- It is every time we fail to achieve what reasonably is in our grasp.
- It’s the groan that accompanies physical labor of any sort: the rehabbing of a muscle, the lifting of a heavy weight, etc.

If these “groans” which we have every day remain earth bound, in time we will become discontent, gripey, and complaining. You’ve been around those Christians, their speech is filled with grumbling and complaining of all sorts! If you ask them how they are doing you hear an organ recital! They are longing for the good old days when they had their health and things weren’t near as bad as today!

Yet, it ought NOT to be this way. God has an intended purpose/end for each of the “groanings” that we experience in our lives and that end is NOT grumbling! Well then, what is it? A heightened longing for our “adoption as sons”!

- The charge here is that we work with the labor pain accompanying life in this world- and so improve upon our suffering.
- Accordingly, we are to direct our groanings to anticipate the final age where sorrow, mourning, sadness, decline, and death are no more!!!

How can we do this? Look at the text again (v. 23): It comes by and with “...the first fruits of the Spirit...”

In the Old Testament, the “First Fruit” was a sacrifice offered in the Temple in which the first and so the best of the harvest was given to the Lord (Leviticus 23:10-11). This offering signified two things:

- The whole harvest was God's, and that...
- There were many more offerings to come!

Now Paul slightly changes the imagery and uses the offering as a description of something GOD GIVES US, with the implication that there is something more glorious to come! What has God given us? The down payment of His Spirit!

Ephesians 1:13-14, "In Him [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance [as you know literally, 'a down payment' when it comes to our inheritance] with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory."

Do you understand? Because the Spirit of God dwells within you, you have a guarantee from God that (regardless of what the here and now may want you to believe) your future is glorious!

Yet indulging in this Redemptive Groaning requires us to be men and women who are relying upon the Spirit of God. This leads us to the seventh benefit that flows from Christ: Help in Weakness (Romans 8:26-27)! To understand what that means, understand that at the Fall we too were tasked with glorious calling to direct all groaning and painful desiring to anticipate the glorious future that awaits us in Christ!

This is what faith does to all the trials and difficulties of life. It doesn't stop the groaning, it redirects it to its God-given object: The Coming of Christ, the Redemption of this world, and the Recreating us into the image of God!

So Christian, groan away... but do so in faith! Bryan Chapell put it this way:

Our obedience does not qualify us for his mercy, and our disobedience does not disqualify us from it. So, why is God concerned for our behavior? The answer is the heart that dispenses God's grace is the same that designed God's law. God does not save His children from sin's disease, then encourage them to play in its traffic. His standards revive the soul, make wise the simple, and bring joy to hearts by the relationships they protect... God has established his commands in order to care for those His grace secures. Out of love for us, He calls us to walk in paths that are perfect for experiencing his love. (Thoughts taken from Psalm 19:7-8) (Staff, 2021)

## References

- Hendrickson, W. (1992). *Commentary on Romans (Luther Classic Commentaries)*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- MacArthur, J. (1991). *Romans 1-8 MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series Book 15)*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.

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**End Note(s)**

<sup>1</sup> This is not to imply that God muted or silenced His general revelation through creation (cf. Romans 1:20).

<sup>2</sup> Hendriksen added, “The creation is subject to arrested development and constant decay. Though it aspires, it is not able fully to achieve. Though it blossoms, it does not reach the point of adequately bearing fruit. It may be compared to a very powerful world-champion boxer or wrestler, who is chained in such a manner that he cannot make use of his tremendous physical prowess.” (Hendrickson, 1992, p. 268)

<sup>3</sup> As Henry Lyte wrote in 1847, “...change and decay in all around I see” (Hymn #335)