

Creation's Groans for Glory

Scripture: Romans 8:19–22

Code: 45-61

INTRODUCTION

Paul's great letter to the Romans is basically a gospel presentation. Paul said his purpose was to articulate "the gospel of God" (1:1, 15). After stating his reason for presenting the gospel and his commitment to it (vv. 13-17), Paul used the remainder of Romans to present the substance, benefits, and results of the gospel.

First Paul presented mankind's need for salvation (1:18--3:20). Next he discussed the saving work of Christ--the great doctrine of justification by faith (3:21--5:21). Then he related all the benefits and results of salvation (chapters 6-8)--the doctrine of sanctification (what it means to have been made holy in Christ Jesus).

What are the results of salvation? Because we have been justified in Christ, we are considered dead to sin. We also have union with Christ and have become servants to righteousness (Rom. 6). We are freed from the penalty of God's law. We are a new creation that wars against sin. Now our delight is in the law of God (Rom. 7). Yet perhaps the most monumental benefit is that "there is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The concept that a person could become permanently justified before God was foreign to Jewish and pagan tradition. So Paul used Romans 8 to explain that truth.

REVIEW

In our study of Romans 8 we have noted that the Holy Spirit confirms our no-condemnation status by freeing us from sin, enabling us to fulfill the law, changing our nature, empowering us for victory, and confirming our adoption. The final element is that the Holy Spirit guarantees our glory. When you were saved, God planted His Holy Spirit in you, and that was your guarantee of glory.

Reinforcing the Guarantee

The Holy Spirit assures that it is impossible for you to lose your salvation.

1. Ephesians 1:13-14

In Christ, "in whom ye also trusted, after ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (v. 13). When you were saved, you were forever sealed for God, and nothing can break that seal. Verse 14 continues, "[The Holy Spirit] is the earnest [Gk., arrhabon, "down payment" or "first installment"; modern Greek, "engagement ring"] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." When you were saved, you were purchased by God. You haven't entered into your full inheritance yet, but the Spirit is the guarantee that you will one day.

2. Philippians 1:6

"[Be] ye confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." When God begins a work, He finishes it. The Holy Spirit is the agent of His work: we will enter into the fullness of the inheritance guaranteed to us by the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

3. Colossians 3:3-4

"Ye are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear,

then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

4. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Paul said, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

Those passages verify that we will enter into the inheritance promised to us--"the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:14). One day we will receive the fullness of our salvation, and God's promise of that is kept in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit's guarantee of our glory is summed up in Romans 8:30: "Whom [God] did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." All believers will be glorified. There is no doubt. There is no such thing as salvation without glorification. No one can lose his or her salvation. It is the work of God that He began in eternity past, brought to reality in the present, and will fulfill in the future. God's promise of glorification is central to salvation, and it must be fulfilled (Rom. 8:30). If someone appears to have been saved but abandons the faith, that's evidence the person never was saved (1 John 2:19).

I. THE INCOMPARABLE GAIN OF GLORY (vv. 17-18)

"If children, then heirs--heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ--if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

LESSON

II. THE INEXPRESSIBLE GROANS FOR GLORY (vv. 19-27)

Three things groan in these verses: creation (v. 22), believers (v. 23), and the Holy Spirit (v. 26). These groans are laments over living in this world of sin and pain. The Greek word translated "groan" means "to lament" or "moan." The groans in this passage are groans for glory.

A. The Groan of Creation (vv. 19-22)

"The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

Paul took poetic license in personifying creation as groaning in sorrow over its present plight.

Anticipating the New Heavens and Earth

The Lord declared, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind" (Isa. 65:17). The Jewish people anticipated the day when all oppression, anxiety, and persecution would end and their dream of a new world would become a reality.

Some of the unbiblical Jewish writings of Paul's day expanded on that promise. For example, in the Apocalypse of Baruch we read, "The vine shall yield its fruit ten thousand fold, and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches; and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters; and each cluster produce a thousand grapes; and each grape a cor of wine. And those who have hungered shall rejoice; moreover, also, they shall behold marvels every day. For winds shall go forth from before me to bring every morning the fragrance of aromatic fruits, and at the close of the day clouds distilling the dews of health" (29:5). The people were looking forward to a utopia. In the Sibylline Oracles we find this: "Earth, and all the trees, and the innumerable flocks of sheep shall give their true fruit to mankind, of wine and of sweet honey and of white milk and of corn, which to men is the most excellent gift of all" (3:620-33).

Elsewhere in the Sibylline Oracles we read, "Earth, the universal mother, shall give to mortals her best fruit in countless store of corn, wine and oil. Yea, from heaven shall come a sweet draught of luscious honey. The trees shall yield their proper fruits, and rich flocks, and kine, and lambs of sheep and kids of goats. He will cause sweet fountains of white milk to burst forth. And the cities shall be full of good things, and the fields rich; neither shall there be any sword throughout the land or battle-din; nor shall the earth be convulsed any more, nor shall there be any more drought throughout the land, no famine, or hail to work havoc on the crops" (3:744-56). Those are not inspired accounts, but they do reflect some of what Scripture says we have to look forward to when God recreates the world.

1. The longing of creation (v. 19)

"The earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

a) Its poetic personification What part of creation is longing for that new age? It couldn't be the angels because they aren't subject to corruption—they aren't longing for another state. It couldn't be demons because they will never share in any glorious liberation. They have been sentenced to eternal bondage. It couldn't be believers since verse 23 distinguishes their groans from the groaning of creation. And it couldn't be unbelievers because they have no hope. Now that we have eliminated rational creation, all that's left is animate and inanimate irrational creation: plants, animals, mountains, hills, stars, seas, rivers, lakes, sky, earth, and flowers. Romans 8:19-22 personifies them in poetic fashion. We see that elsewhere in Scripture. Isaiah 35:1 says, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad." Isaiah 55:12 says, "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Those verses personify the joy creation will have when it enters the glory of its future state. b) Its patient anticipation Creation has an "earnest expectation." That translates a very vivid word in the Greek text. It refers to someone standing on the tips of his toes, sticking his neck way out to see something in the distance. In a sense, nature is on its tiptoes peering into the future. The Greek word translated "waiteth" means "to wait patiently but expectantly." It refers to anticipation and readiness. Nature is on its tiptoes, filled with expectation, ready for the dawning of a new age. What is nature looking for? "The manifestation of the sons of God." The Greek word translated "manifestation" means "unveiling." All creation is waiting for the unveiling "of the sons of God"—when believers enter into their perfect state. First John 3:2 says, "Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." When we walk on a street or go into a market, the people around us don't know that we have the eternal glory of God dwelling in us. Some might notice our smiles and something of a glow about us, but for the most part unbelievers don't know who we are. That's because we are still veiled by our humanness. But all creation waits for our unveiling. One day we will be glorified. Romans 8:18 says that it will be a glory without comparison. Colossians 3:4 says, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." One day we will be free from sin and the flesh, basking in Christ's presence in blazing purity. Creation anticipates the time when the saints will shine as stars forever (Dan. 12:3; cf. Matt 13:43).

2. The subjection of creation (v. 20)

"The creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope."

a) Its futility The Greek word translated "vanity" (mataiotes) means "futility" or "aimlessness." It speaks of the inability to fulfill a purpose or a desired result. Nature can't be what it was designed to be—it can't fulfill its reason for existing, which is to reflect God's perfect glory. Nature is therefore frustrated. Genesis 1:31 says God "saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." There were no weeds (Gen. 3:17-18). There was no sin or curse. The Garden of Eden flourished. Adam didn't have to work to maintain the Garden; he just picked food whenever he wanted. The earth was perfect. But when man sinned, nature was subjected to futility. It can no

longer reflect God's perfection. In the Greek text the phrase "the creation was made" contains a verb in the aorist tense: what happened to creation happened in a moment of time in the past. By some momentary act, the earth became subject to futility. Nature became a victim of decay, corruption, and frustration. That's why there's smog, pollution, and deterioration on the earth. The Sierra Club and other environmentalists won't be able to stop that. They make sincere attempts to do so, but the earth will continue to fall short of its full potential because it is subjected to futility. Occasionally we get a glimpse of creation in its splendor when observing a beautiful flower or a gorgeous, clear day in the wilderness. That gives us an idea of what the earth was like before it was cursed.

b) Its victimization
The verb in the phrase "the creation was made" is passive, which means that creation didn't make itself subject to futility--something else did. Creation was victimized. It was unwillingly subjected to futility. When Adam and Eve sinned God said, "Because thou hast harkened 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; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:17-19). God's curse brought decay, disaster, pollution, and degeneration. It was necessary for Him to do that so man would not be able to find perfection anywhere--even in outer space. God wants us to understand the tremendous effect of sin: it does not pollute just the one who sins; its ramifications are endless. One man's sin polluted an entire universe. Nature's destiny is inseparably linked to that of man. Because man sinned, creation fell. When man is restored to the glorious state that God has planned for His children, creation will likewise be restored. There will be a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1)--an uncursed, eternally glorious domain that perfectly reflects God's glory.

c) Its hope
Nature is looking for the glorious manifestation of the children of God because that's when it will be freed from the bondage of corruption.

The Deterioration of the World

An incredible connection exists between man's sin and the decay of the universe. In the physical sciences the law of entropy states that the order of a system tends to become disorganized and random. There is disintegration everywhere because of the curse, and that is emphasized in Romans 8. The theory of evolution is not true because it is opposite the truth: the universe is not in an upward trend but in a downward trend. It's moving from absolute perfection to total disaster. Everything will end in a devastating holocaust brought about by God. You need not be afraid of total nuclear war because the Bible doesn't say the Soviet Union or any other nation will blow up the whole world. The earth will still be around at Christ's second coming. He will recreate it Himself. The world will come to an end only when the Lord causes it to do so.

Creation is looking for that great time "in hope" (Rom. 8:20). In Revelation 21:1-4 the apostle John says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." That's what creation is so eagerly waiting to see. And it will happen at the unveiling of the glorious children of God. But until then creation groans because it, along with mankind, remains under God's curse.

3. The restoration of creation (v. 21)

"The creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Creation is looking for the time when it will be restored. The Greek verb translated "delivered" is passive--creation will be renewed by God, not by itself.

a) The liberation of creation
Second Peter 3 describes what will happen: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (v. 10). A thief doesn't make much noise; he moves quietly when people least expect him. That's how the Day of the Lord will come. The rest of verse 10 continues, "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 in it, shall be burned up." That's what happens in an atomic explosion, though I doubt that atom bombs will destroy the earth. I think the destruction will be atomic in that God will disintegrate the atoms of the universe and set forth a chain reaction beyond anything we can imagine. Everything will be burned up. Verse 11 says that "all these things shall be dissolved [Gk., luo, "set loose"]." Atoms that are bound together will be split. Verse 12 says that in "the coming of the day of God ... the heavens, being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." After all that there will be "new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness" (v. 13). All creation is on its tiptoes, looking off into the horizon, awaiting a cosmic regeneration. Everything will be renewed. Christ said to His disciples, "Ye who have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). Acts 3:21 refers to "the times of restitution of all things." Everything will be the way God wants it to be. There will be no sin, evil, pain, sorrow, death, or tears. Everything will be glorious. Creation longs for that. It will get an initial taste of that glory in the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:4), and the full taste in the glorious new heavens and earth. Romans 8:21 says, "Creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption." The stain of sin in the world holds creation in bondage. There's no way to stop the law of entropy. The disintegration of our universe is consistent--it cannot be reversed. We see decay even in our social institutions. Everything man touches turns to ashes. Creation is bound in corruption, but it will be delivered. However, only God can reverse the curse--nature can't release itself from bondage.

b) The liberation of Christians
When nature is freed, it will be delivered "into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Paul said, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53). We will all have new bodies (vv. 51-54). Jesus in His glorified body was able to walk through walls and eat, so what we have to look forward to will be amazing in one sense and familiar in another. Those of us who are Christians have great hope for the future. We know where the world is going. God, the great environmentalist, will restore the whole earth Himself. Since "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), creation isn't alone in its groaning. We too are on our tiptoes looking forward to when we are delivered into glorious liberty. We eagerly anticipate the time when we will be liberated from the bondage of corruption. As Paul said, "We look for the Savior,... who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious body" (vv. 20-21).

4. The pain of creation (v. 22)

"We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

"Until now" means "up to the present." "Groaneth" literally means "to groan together." All the elements of creation are groaning in harmony about their cursed state. How great is the evil of sin! The next time you try to justify a sin, remember that if you had committed the first sin, you would have polluted the universe. Bible commentator Richard Haldane wrote, "As the leprosy not only defiled the man who was infected with it, but also the house he inhabited, in the same way, sin, which is the spiritual leprosy of man, has not only defiled our bodies and our souls, but, by the just judgment of God, has infected all creation" (An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans [Fla.: MacDonald, 1958], p. 372).

Verse 22 says that creation "travaileth in pain together," a reference to the pain of childbirth. The pain creation endures is not futile--it leads to something good. The pain of childbirth is one pain a woman can look forward to because it brings a child into the world. That pain was a part of the curse in Genesis 3:16, yet it brings forth something good. In a similar way the groaning of the earth

precedes the new age.

CONCLUSION

Martyn Lloyd-Jones had the wonderful ability to grasp insights from Scripture. Musing over Paul's vivid personification of creation in Romans 8 he observed, "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. So it goes on 'groaning and travailing in pain together until now'. It has been doing so for a very long time ... but Nature still repeats the effort annually" (Romans, vol. 6 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], pp. 59-60).

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to Ephesians 1:13-14 what happened when you became a believer?
2. According to Philippians 1:6 what can we be confident of?
3. Why are creation, believers, and the Holy Spirit groaning?
4. What did the Jewish people of Paul's day look forward to? Explain.
5. Paul said that creation is longing for a new age (Rom. 8:19). What part of creation was he referring to? How do you know?
6. What does "earnest expectation" (Rom. 8:19) refer to?
7. What is creation waiting for?
8. What does it mean that "the creation was made subject to vanity" (Rom. 8:20)? Discuss the significance of the aorist and passive tenses?
9. Who subjected creation to its futility? Why?
10. What is nature's destiny inseparably linked to?
11. What does Revelation 21:1-4 say the new age will be like?
12. According to 2 Peter 3:10-12 what will happen on "the day of the Lord"?
13. What will creation be delivered from one day (Rom. 8:21)? Who will bring about that deliverance?
14. What will happen when we are glorified?
15. Romans 8:22 says creation "travailleth in pain together." What does that phrase refer to? How is that similar to the pain of creation?

Pondering the Principles

1. In Romans 8:19 Paul says, "The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God" (NASB). Read Matthew 13:43, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, Philippians 3:21, and 1 John 3:2. Using those verses, write down everything you can learn about what will happen when we are glorified. How does our present, unglorified state differ from what you have listed?
2. Write down some of the things you appreciate about animate and inanimate creation (for example, the song of a bird or the beauty of wild flowers). What are some things about nature that manifest God's wisdom (such as the way God designed penguins to tolerate freezing temperatures)? Add those things to your list. Praise God for the magnificence of His creation!
3. Can you think of ways that nature has been affected by man's sin? (For some clues, see Genesis 3:18, Isaiah 24:6, Jeremiah 12:4, and the contrast provided by Isaiah 11:6-9.) Look up the following verses: Psalm 5:4-6; Proverbs 6:16-19; 15:8-9, 26; and Habakkuk 1:13. According to those verses, how does God view sin? Just as sin is ugly to God's eyes, so the impact of man's sin is a blight on nature. Think of several ways that man has had a negative impact on his environment. What would

be involved in trying to reverse the damage man has done? Can man completely reverse his negative influence on nature? One day the earth as we know it will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10-12), and there will be "new heavens and a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness" (v. 13). Thank God for the promise of a cosmic regeneration. Thank Him for allowing you to be a part of His perfect, eternal kingdom.

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