

Believers' Groans for Glory

Scripture: Romans 8:23–25

Code: 45-62

REVIEW

Ephesians 1:14 says the Holy Spirit "is the earnest [down payment] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." When you became a Christian, God gave you His Holy Spirit to guarantee that you will make it to glory. He promised you would be glorified, and it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to carry out that promise. The Spirit guarantees our making it from salvation present to salvation future. He is the down payment on "the purchased possession" of God (Eph. 1:14). Our bodily redemption will not take place until we are glorified. God has put us on layaway, and will reclaim us fully in eternity.

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

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

In Romans 8:17-30 we find the Greek verb stenazo and its noun form stenagmos. The verb form means "to sigh" or "groan," and the noun form refers to the groanings or sighings of a person trapped in undesirable or inescapable circumstances. It's used in Acts 7:34, where God says, "I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them." He then told Moses He would free the Israelites from their oppression (Ex. 3:7-8). Jesus Himself groaned or sighed when He saw a deaf man suffering as the result of sin (Mark 7:34). Another example of groaning appears in Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief [groaning]."

There are three groans in Romans 8:19-27: the groan of creation, the groan of believers, and the groan of the Holy Spirit.

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."

Restoring the Universe

The Bible clearly teaches there will be a cosmic regeneration--God will recreate the entire universe. Revelation 21:1 speaks of "a new heaven and a new earth." There are three facets in the restoration of the universe:

1. The destruction of the cursed earth

The present earth will eventually be destroyed. That won't happen instantaneously; it will take place in phases. Revelation describes a sequence of events that will occur when the earth begins to fall apart: the sun will be blackened, the moon will become like blood, and stars will fall (6:12-13; cf. Joel 2:10; 3:15). The waters of the earth will be cursed--both salt water (Rev. 8:8-9) and fresh water (Rev.

8:10-11). There will be death everywhere. From the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation period to the end, there will be a sequence of devastating destructions upon the earth. God will systematically destroy the present universe and the people who are set against Him.

2. The establishment of the millennial kingdom

In this age marvelous things will happen: the lion will lie down with the lamb (Isa. 11:6; 65:25), and the desert will blossom like a rose (Isa. 35:1). But that's only the first phase of the restoration--just a taste of what is to come.

3. The establishment of the eternal kingdom

At the end of the millennial kingdom, God will create "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). That will usher us into the eternal state, where "there shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3).

All creation longs for the curse to be removed. That will happen when the tribulation and the millennium are over.

Some prophetic passages of the Bible, when describing future glory, describe events that will occur during the millennium. Others speak of what will occur in the eternal kingdom, when the cosmic regeneration is complete. In Romans 8 Paul is simply saying that creation is groaning for deliverance because it has been polluted by the power of sin. It wasn't his purpose to go into the details of the deliverance itself.

LESSON

B. The Groan of Believers (vv. 23-25)

We who are saved join creation in lamenting the curse of sin. David groaned because his iniquities were like a burden too heavy for him to bear (Ps. 38:4). He said to God, "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hidden from thee" (v. 9). That's a common lament for Old and New Testament saints. Paul said, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). We can identify with that--we get tired of our sinfulness.

Paul also said, "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4). Wouldn't you like to be rid of the debilitating sinfulness in your flesh? John 11 tells us that Jesus was full of agony when He came to the tomb of Lazarus. He was shaking and sobbing because He saw the terrible consequences of sin. Believers are in the midst of undesirable circumstances. God, by His marvelous grace, gives us joy and blessings, yet we still groan for a better state.

1. The believer's adoption (v. 23)

"Not only they [creation], but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit [the guarantee of our glory], even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, that is, the redemption of our body."

When you came to Christ in saving faith, your soul was redeemed. The old inner man is gone--you have a new inner man and are a new creation (Col. 3:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:17). A definitive eternal work was accomplished in you. But you still have to deal with your humanness.

We are "waiting for the adoption." Technically we have been adopted, but we haven't entered into the full manifestation of it as yet. Although we already are "the children of God" (Rom. 8:16), our identity as such is not readily apparent to the world. The apostle John said, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God; therefore, the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-2).

We groan within ourselves because although we know we have been adopted, we must await the redemption of our bodies, which is when we shall be like Christ. Only then will our adoption be complete. We are called the children of God, but we have yet to match our redeemed souls with redeemed bodies. That's why Romans 13:11 says, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we

believed." That's a reference to the future aspect of salvation. If you were saved yesterday, that means today you are one day closer to the full redemption of your body.

a) The salvation of our bodies Since we were redeemed, we have become new creations in Christ: "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). We have become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and are fit for eternal glory. We have been made suitable for heaven. But for now we are in bondage. We have to contend with the lusts, desires, and thoughts of our bodies. The new creation in us is still housed in an earthly body. We are corruptible, mortal, and prone to disease and death. We are human. We are awaiting the salvation of our bodies. Someone might wonder if Christ's atonement provides healing. It does, but not until our bodies are redeemed.(1) Romans 6 Paul said, "[Since] we have been planted together in the likeness of [Christ's] death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (v. 5). When we were redeemed, we were planted with other believers into Christ's holy likeness. We have His nature. We are a holy seed living in an unholy shell. Paul continued, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed" (v. 6). When you were saved, the old man in you was crucified. The "old man" is who you were before salvation. Your unregenerate nature is gone. You don't possess an old and new nature simultaneously. You are a new creation. Sin was able to flourish in the old man. Now that the old man is dead, "we should not serve sin" (v. 6). But although the old man is dead, sin is still in us. Verse 12 says, "Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body." Before you became saved, you were rotten on the inside and outside. But when you became a Christian, God planted a new nature within you--a holy, incorruptible, eternal creation--but it is encased in the shell of "your mortal body." That includes not only your physical body, but also your lusts, desires, motives, and thoughts. Verse 13 gives an additional perspective: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness." "Members" refers to bodily parts. In the purest sense, we can say that sin is in your flesh, not in your soul. Sin is not a part of your new nature. Verses 17-18 says, "God be thanked, that whereas ye were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being, then, made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Your new nature is free from sin. You have been transformed, but your humanness is still a problem. That's why we look forward to getting redeemed bodies.(2) Romans 7 In Romans 7 Paul makes personal application from the preceding chapter: "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I understand not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I" (vv. 14-15). He still battled with sin even as a believer. In verses 16-17 he says, "If, then, I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (vv. 16-17). Paul's new nature wasn't giving him problems; it was the sin that dwelled in his humanness. He continued, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.... Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (vv. 18, 20-23). Paul concluded, "So, then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin" (v. 25). The inner part of us is redeemed and fit for heaven. All God has to do in the future is redeem our bodies. When Paul said, "We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption" (Rom. 8:23), he was referring not to the redemption of our souls, but to our bodies. He said the same thing a different way in Philippians 3:20-21: "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our lowly body, that it may be fashioned like his glorious body." That will be "the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). Inside we are already children of God. The world can't see that because "it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). Then it will be obvious to the whole universe that we are the children of God.b) The description of our redeemed bodies What will our new bodies be like? The best description is in 1 Corinthians 15. Our new bodies won't be like the

ones we have now. Paul said, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not made alive, except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain. But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed its own body" (vv. 35-38). According to Paul, asking what our bodies will be like is silly. If someone puts forty different seeds in your hand, how will you know what each one will look like when it grows? If you aren't a farmer or some other specialist, you wouldn't know a weed seed from any other seed. The seeds in your hand could produce anything from a small weed to a giant tree. We can't predict what our glorified bodies will be like by looking at our present bodies. Then Paul said, "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, and another of birds" (v. 39). Different kinds of flesh come from different combinations of amino acids, which will only reproduce themselves. For example, if you eat chicken all your life, you won't grow feathers because no matter what you eat, the amino acids will be converted into what you are made of. Paul was saying that since God has created so many different types of flesh, we cannot speculate on what our new bodies will be like. Paul continued, "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial.... There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (vv. 40-44). What did Christ look like after His resurrection? He still had the nail marks and scars from the crucifixion (John 20:20). He still looked like Himself, except people couldn't recognize Him unless He allowed them (Luke 24:13-16, 30-31; John 20:14-16). He could eat (Luke 24:30), and instantly show up wherever He wanted (John 20:19). In Acts 1:9 He flew up to heaven--perhaps in an instant. The possibilities of what your new body will be like are endless. You'll just have to wait to find out! Paul ended 1 Corinthians 15 with these thoughts: "We shall all be changed ... and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.... Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (vv. 51-54).

A Taste of Glory

Why should we be eager for the redemption of our bodies? Because we have within us "the first fruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23). Since the Holy Spirit lives and works in us, displays God's power through us, and shows us God's grace and goodness, He gives us a taste of glory. When I see the Holy Spirit give me victory over sin, I get a taste of what it will be like when I have complete victory over sin in eternity. When the Holy Spirit allows me to praise God, I sense what it will be like to praise Him perfectly. When I see the Spirit help me serve God in a way that brings forth blessing, I get a taste of what it will be like to serve Him without the bondage of mortality. Each taste makes me long for what I could do were I not encumbered by my humanness.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). A little taste is all we need to make us want more. Everything we experience of the wonder and power of God's Spirit is only a foretaste of glory.

2. The believer's hope (vv. 24-25)

a) It is inseparable from salvation (v. 24a) "We are saved by hope." Hope is an essential element of our salvation. The Greek word translated "saved" is in the aorist passive tense and implies that our salvation was planned in the past, bestowed in the present, and characterized by hope for the future. Hope is inseparable from salvation because salvation is certain: Jesus said He wouldn't lose any that the Father had given Him (John 17:12). Everyone who comes to Christ is secure in Him. We were saved not only to experience the immediate redemption of our souls, but also to have hope in the future salvation of our bodies. Hebrews 6:17-19 affirms the believer's security: "God, willing more

abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul."First Thessalonians 5:8 refers to the believer's helmet as "the hope of salvation." I'm saddened for Christians who don't feel secure about their salvation. The reason many believe a person can lose his or her salvation is the result of an inadequate understanding of salvation. Today the gospel has been cheapened, the standard for salvation has been lowered, and many people who are not really saved profess Christ. When those people stop professing Christ, they will appear to have lost their salvation. But if we uphold the standard of the gospel--if we preach the same gospel Jesus did--people won't think they're saved when they aren't. What about a Christian who doesn't believe in the security of the believer? A true Christian can think he is going to lose his salvation, but he won't. What he will lose is the joy of being a Christian. If you are truly saved, you are saved in hope. A person's salvation is not real unless it has a future fulfillment.b) It is an unseen reality (vv. 24b-25)"Hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."Although our hope is not something we can see, it is still a reality. If you hold something in your hand, you don't say, "I'm hoping for this," because you already have it. You don't hope for what you see. We have been saved, but our bodies aren't yet redeemed. Therefore, we hope for "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23).We have confidence that "He who hath begun a good work in [us] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). That isn't wishful thinking--that is confident assurance! First Peter 1:13 says, "Gird up the loins of your mind [think clearly], be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Live in constant anticipation of what will happen to you when Christ is revealed in glory. When I sin, I long for the redemption of my body. I don't let sin depress me; instead, I anticipate the greater reality awaiting me. And the reality of my hope affects the way I live because I have confidence in my future salvation. I'm secured by the Holy Spirit. Paul commended the Thessalonians, saying, "[We remember] without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 1:3). You can labor in love and service to Christ only by having the hope that one day you will be glorified with Him. The Christian is not a fatalist or a pessimist. We were saved in hope, and wait patiently for our glorification. There is a better day coming. Creation sighs for that day, and so do we.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Explain the meaning of the Greek word stenazo.
2. What will happen in the first phase of the restoration of the universe?
3. What will happen when the millennial and eternal kingdoms are established?
4. What does every child of God groan about?
5. What happened when you came to Jesus Christ in saving faith?
6. Why did Paul say we are "waiting for the adoption" (Rom. 8:23) when he said previously we were already "the children of God" (Rom. 8:16)?
7. What did Paul mean when he said, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11)?
8. What important biblical concept does Paul mention in Romans 6:5?
9. Why do we as Christians still sin, even though the old man in us is crucified with Christ? What constitutes our "mortal body" (Rom. 6:12)?
10. Why did Paul struggle with sin (Rom. 7:14-25)?
11. What did Paul say about what our new bodies will look like (1 Cor. 15:35-38)?
12. Why should we be eager for the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23)?
13. What does hope have to do with our ?
14. Can we be confident that someday we will be glorified? Support your answer with Scripture.

Pondering the Principles

1. We groan as believers because we lament the evil we see in our lives. Do you groan over your sinfulness? Write a list of the weaknesses that you know are present in your life (for example: a quick temper, lustful thought patterns, a tendency to gossip). For each item on your list, ask yourself this question: Do I groan over that weakness? By asking that, you will find out how you really feel about the sins in your life. Begin to cultivate a genuine hatred for the sins in your life and a willingness to deal with them biblically.

2. Do you live in anticipation of eternal life with Christ? On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong would you rate your hope in your future salvation? Read the following verses: John 6:39; 10:28; Romans 8:35-39; 1 Peter 1:3-5; and Jude 1. What does each affirm about the security of our salvation? According to Titus 1:2, when did God promise believers eternal life? Will He revoke that promise? What did God give us as a pledge of His promise (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5)? Read 2 Corinthians 4:18. Are you living in hope or are you just focusing on your present circumstances? Don't allow anything to divert your focus from what awaits you in eternity, and don't fear losing your salvation. Thank God for the fact that "Christ in you [is] the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

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