

GROANINGS BECAUSE OF SIN

A Study on Romans 8:18-27

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Wherever one goes in this world, he will find suffering, heartache and tragedy among men. These sufferings bring deep groanings from the sufferers.

There are the groanings of men who suffer tragedy. There are the groanings of those who are afflicted with disease. There are the groanings of those who suffer in war and there are the groanings of those who are about to die and pass on into another world. Men are born into this world with the groanings of a mother in childbirth, live a life of groaning because of suffering, and utter their last sounds in the groanings of death.

All men must suffer and groan, but there are some sufferings that the unsaved, non-Christian world will never know — there are spiritual sufferings for the child of God, and these sufferings bring deep, inward groanings as the Christian seeks to be delivered from sin.

This portion of Scripture deals with spiritual groanings because of sin:

- (1) The creation groaning because of sin (Rom. 8:22);
- (2) The groanings of the child of God because of sin (Rom. 8:23); and
- (3) The groanings of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the child of God who is still sinful (Rom. 8:26).

SPIRITUAL SUFFERINGS — Romans 8:17b-18

In Romans 8:17 Paul has told us that every Christian has been made a son of God and a full heir of God through Christ. The Father has bequeathed all to his Son, Jesus Christ, his heir. Because the Christian is in union with Christ, he is a joint heir with Christ. The Christian is a spiritual millionaire, and God wants us to lay hold of this reality through faith. The one condition set on this heirship is that we suffer with Christ in this life. This verse states that it is necessary for the Christian suffer in this life, and suffering is evidence that we are heirs of God. Suffering is an expression of our union with Christ.

In context, this is not providential suffering for all men suffer to some degree. This is suffering with Christ. It is spiritual suffering. It is the suffering that comes because of

indwelling sin as one seeks to live a holy life, and suffering as the Christian seeks to tell the world about Jesus Christ.

These spiritual sufferings are not in vain — there is a divine purpose behind them. These sufferings will give us an appreciation of our salvation now, and will ultimately bring us to complete and final salvation when we will receive our resurrected and glorified bodies.

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time.” The context indicates that this refers to spiritual suffering with sin. It is the inward battle and conflict that goes on inside the Christian as God is working a great salvation in him. As long as the Christian is in this human body, he will suffer spiritually.

The Christian has an assurance that Christ at the Cross won the battle over sin. He knows that ultimate victory is certain, but he realizes that sin is still very real in his life and there is a daily battle that must be fought with it.

In World War II the Allied Forces were victorious over Japan. Japan was brought to a place of unconditional surrender in 1945. The Japanese had been defeated, surrender was official, and victory was declared — but this did not end the war. Many Japanese soldiers were still fighting the war years after the nation surrendered. There were still the mopping-up operations on the Japanese army who refused to surrender, or who did not know the war was over.

So it is with the Christian. Christ defeated sin at the Cross. Victory was proclaimed for the Christian, but there is still fighting going on with sin in the Christian. In spiritual suffering the Christian is alive unto God, victorious in warfare, assured of victory, but finds himself still in the front lines of battle in the mopping-up operations on the enemy sin.

It has been ordained that the Christian suffer. God has declared it in his Word, and this spiritual suffering is for a divine purpose. God wants us to get the right attitude about this suffering. There are just three ways we can face sufferings: we can break out, break down, or break through!

Break out: If you break out, you rebel at the suffering and grow bitter, hateful and hard.

Break down: Some folks break down under spiritual suffering, not realizing that suffering is part of the Christian life. Thus, they become neurotic, filled with self-pity, run away from life, withdraw from society, and some may even end up in the hospital.

Break through: But God wants us by his grace to break through and touch the hidden springs of the life of Christ within us, accepting the suffering with joy, counting not our life dear unto ourselves but gladly counting it a privilege to bear suffering for Christ. God wants us to rejoice in suffering, to accept it as his design, and to learn from it.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

“Are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” The glory that will be revealed in us looks forward to the time of glorification in which the Christian will receive his new body. A Christian is “one who lives his life in light of heavenly realities”; he sets his affections on things above. The believer’s suffering now with sin is but a “drop in the bucket” compared to a future time when he will be free of all sin forever.

THE GROANINGS OF CREATION — Romans 8:19-22

Paul’s point in this section is that the creation is cursed today because of Adam’s fall. Paul personifies creation, speaking of its groaning under its bondage to sin and its waiting for the final resurrection of all believers when the curse from the earth will be lifted.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God.” The creation is anxiously awaiting the time when the children of God are all revealed as perfect and the presence of sin is removed from the body of every believer.

“For the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.” The Fall of man in the Garden of Eden not only affected mankind, but also physical creation. Man was given dominion over the earth, and when he sinned, the earth was cursed since it was under his dominion. The earth had no choice and was subjected to the curse because of the sin of Adam and Eve.

“Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage [slavery] of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” The universe is in a constant state of deterioration. Corruption and decay characterize the earth.

When man fell, creation fell. When God's children will be ultimately redeemed, creation will be redeemed. Thus, creation is standing on its tip toes, anxiously awaiting the revelation of God's children. This process will find its completion in the new heavens and new earth.

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” The creation groans as a woman with birth pangs, and it longs for the day when it will escape the curse of sin. This day will come only when the Christian receives his new body. God is going to redeem the earth and it too will have a new birth, but this will only happen when God completes salvation for his own children. Creation will be made fit for the redeemed community.

THE GROANINGS OF THE BELIEVER — Romans 8:23-25

“And not only they [so], but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Because the Christian is still in this sinful body, he groans spiritually for deliverance. He longs for the day when he will be free from sin forever. In that future day his adoption as an adult son will be complete and final, and he will be free from sin forever.

Those who groan are those who have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit. The firstfruits were a sample of the harvest to come. The Holy Spirit working in the believer now is a sample or foretaste of the glory which shall be revealed in us.

In our home, when we have a big, festive dinner, we usually don't eat until around four in the afternoon. About one o'clock, I begin to get hungry and hang around the kitchen. My wife puts me off as I beg for food. Around three-thirty she takes the turkey out of the oven and gives me just a sample of the meat and it tastes so good! But this is just a sample or foretaste, and I know that there is more to come, much more. The sample or foretaste makes me long for more, and makes me even more anxious for the big dinner to roll around. The presence of the Holy Spirit now in our lives is simply a sample or foretaste of what it will be like to have a glorified body.

Indwelling sin is taking its toll on believers — the body is becoming more frail, older, and progressively wearing out. As we grow older we realize this more than ever. We get aches and pains. The print of the written page becomes smaller and smaller. Stairsteps grow steeper and hills grow higher. The lines in our brows become deeper and the hair becomes grey. 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, “The outward man is perishing, but the inward man is being renewed day by day.” As we move toward the end of life, the outward man is perishing, but what is happening to the inward man? What is happening on the inside? The Christian is

learning how to walk in the Spirit. He is learning how to be obedient to the Christ life within him, and how to maintain fellowship with Christ moment by moment. It is this that prepares us for those glorious bodies which will someday be ours, which will be responsive to every demand the Spirit makes upon us, and through which God intends to reach the whole of his created universe to establish his kingdom wherever there is matter in the universe.

This verse is devastating to those who promote the theory that the mark of a Christian is a perennial smiling face. They contend that a Christian should be a cross between a Cheshire cat and a house-to-house salesman. They say that a Christian should grin at all times. Smile your troubles away is good for Rotary, but is not the Christian method. There are times when we simply groan within for deliverance from this body.

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” We were saved in hope. Salvation is by faith in Christ, but salvation brought a hope (confident assurance) that someday we would receive a resurrected body. There would be no confident hoping if we already had our new, resurrected and glorified bodies.

“But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” We do not have completed salvation now, but we have a confident hope or assurance that we shall have it sometime in the future. This then produces within the Christian an attitude of patient endurance as he lives everyday in light of the fact that one day in God’s plan he will have a glorified body.

God, through our attitude of patient endurance, is preparing the inner man now for his yet future body. That is one of the reasons our salvation is not yet complete.

THE GROANINGS OF THE SPIRIT — Romans 8:26-27

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities [infirmity].” This should be translated “infirmity,” not “infirmities.” Paul refers to our weakness of failing to have patient endurance because of indwelling sin.

“For we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” Because of indwelling sin in the Christian’s unredeemed body, the believer does not even know how to pray rightly. The Christian prays, but his prayers are feeble at best.

“But the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” The Holy Spirit who indwells us knows our deepest needs, and he makes intercession in us and for us. The Holy Spirit groans because of sin in the believer’s life, and

he prays that the Christian will continue in patient endurance and ultimately be delivered from the presence of sin forever.

How many times I have been so conscious of my own sinfulness that when I tried to pray I could only groan a few sounds in disgust of my own condition. But the Holy Spirit can take these feeble groanings and turn them into the most eloquent prayers to the Father. The Spirit is here to intercede in us and for us. Praise God for this truth when we are heavy in the battle with sin!

“And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” The Spirit of God intercedes for us to the Father to bring the believer the very best, even God’s perfect will. God’s will is the progressive sanctification of the Christian in time and finally perfect conformity to Christ in eternity.

CONCLUSION

Only those who know Christ groan within themselves, waiting patiently for their redeemed bodies. But the man who is not a Christian has no redeemed soul and no hope of a redeemed body. He has no forgiveness of sins; he has no hope of resurrection unto life; he has no assurance of a future redeemed body.

If you will believe in Christ, God will forgive you of your sins, give you eternal life, and guarantee you a place in heaven. If you will trust in Christ, God will redeem your inner man now and will ultimately redeem your body in the yet future resurrection.

The man who knows Christ will groan because of sin until he receives his new body, but the man who does not know Christ will groan for all eternity in the Lake of Fire because he has no Saviour to take away his sins.