

The Whole Creation Groaneth

Romans 8:

17 And 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.

18 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.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only they, 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.

24 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?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

God's elect children, predestinated to adoption and glorification (Eph 1:5-6; Rom 8:29-30), are predestinated to an eternal inheritance, reserved in heaven for them (Eph 1:10-11; I Pet 1:2-4). This glorious inheritance includes a new heaven and new earth, for God will change the present universe to make it fit for them, who are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ of all God is and has (II Pet 3:10-14; Rev 21:1-8). Until that great day, the inanimate and irrational creation, with the elect children of God, groans and travails in pain, waiting for the change (Rom 8:19-23; II Cor 5:1-5). David prophesied of this change, and the whole universe nears this fantastic climax to God's redemptive plan (Ps 102:25-28; Rev 22:1-15). The elect child of God, led by the Holy Spirit, cries out with great hope, "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:14-16, 24-25; 15:13; Gal 4:3-7). Comfort one another with these words (I Thess 4:13-18; I Cor 15:51-57)! Purify your heart in holy service (I Cor 15:58; I John 3:1-3)! Hallelujah!

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Romans 8:17-25

Preparatory Reading: Gen 3; Ps 102; I Cor 15:35-44; II Cor 4:17 – 5:9; I Thess 4:13-18; Rev 21:1-8; 22:1-15.

Introduction:

1. We begin with the glorious fact we are the children of God from the previous verses of this chapter.
2. Without understanding five phases of salvation, or *adoption*, the glorious details are made obscure.
3. Our future glory infinitely exceeds any present suffering, and it all works together for our good!
4. The world around us does not even know the past, but we know the future as well – as follows!

17 And 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.

- A. *If children* refers to the previous context of our adoption as the children of God (8:14-16).
- B. Children inherit their father's estate; *if* we are God's *children*, we are *heirs* of an inheritance.
- C. What inheritance? *Heirs of God!* God will give all He owns! An infinite inheritance of glory!
 1. God owns everything! Do you mean we own everything by inheritance (I Cor 3:21-23)?
 2. The Scriptures speak often of our inheritance from God (Matt 25:34; John 14:2-3; I Cor 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 3:16,29; 5:21; Eph 1:11; Titus 3:7; Heb 6:12,17; 11:10,16; I Peter 1:4; Rev 21:17).
- D. How does the last will and testament describe us? As *joint-heirs with Jesus Christ Himself!*
- E. The *if...that* conditional statement regarding our suffering and glorification is evidence only.
 1. The evidences of the Spirit's internal witness and our external lives have been given.
 2. If we do not bear afflictions cheerfully by faith, then we do not show evidence of sonship.
 3. Our Lord is not suffering now, so we cannot suffer *with him* in that sense; but we can suffer *with him* in kind and in response, which shows we are related to Him through God.
 4. We shall be *glorified together* with Christ, but this is only known or shown by suffering.
 5. Our glorification depends entirely on God's fore-love and predestination of us (8:29-30).
 6. Suffering is not a meritorious work as Catholics dream, but holy evidence of life given.
 7. Suffering is a duty and evidence (Acts 14:22; II Cor 1:7; II Tim 2:12; James 1:2-4; I Pet 4:12-13).
 8. Scripture offers future glory to move to cheerful suffering (Rev 2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21; 21:7).
 9. Suffering by itself means nothing – it is only suffering *with him* ... as He did, because of Him; Jesus is not suffering today, so we cannot do it *with him* as to timing (Phil 1:8-11; I Pet 2:20-23).

18 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.

- A. When Paul *reckons* by the Spirit, he is performing comparative analysis to determine worth.
- B. *Sufferings of this present time* include general affliction, life's vanity, and persecution (8:35).
- C. *The glory which shall be revealed in us* describes our resurrected bodies with glory (I Cor 15:35-44).
- D. If present suffering brings future glory (8:17), is future glory adequately worth the present suffering?
- E. The point is not proof of future glory, but the incomparable value of future glory (II Cor 4:17 - 5:9).
 1. The point here helps us to understand the following verses properly by grasping Paul's lesson.
 2. All present suffering of every kind, both ordinary and extraordinary, will be lost in eternal glory.
 3. The coming glory is not for us, but *in us*, thus a personal change (8:30; I Cor 15:52; I John 3:1-3).
 4. Such hope should cause faithfulness and promote perseverance in suffering (I Pet 1:13; 4:12-13).

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

- A. The word “creature” here is declared to be one of the most difficult words in the New Testament.
1. It cannot include sinful men outside the election of grace, for they have no expectant hope at all.
 2. It cannot include angels, since they are either (a) not subject to corruption or (b) without hope.
 3. It cannot be Gentiles, for Paul here wrote Gentiles about Jews, not vice versa (1:13; 9:24; 11:13), and a Jewish-Gentile comparison misses the point of what goes before and after (8:15-16; 23-28).
 4. Paul used "new creature" twice for the children of God (II Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), but the children of God are clearly distinguished from the creature (8:21 by "also"; 8:23 by "they" and "also").
 5. Ruling out these four options, we allow the Holy Spirit to interpret the word in the context (8:22)!
 6. If we begin positive interpretation by modifying “creature” with “whole creation” (8:22), we may begin with a basic word and concept we can easily understand and that fits the context.
 7. The point is so obvious the Spirit assumes we already know the natural creation groans (8:22).
 8. The word and concept of creation have already been declared in this book (Romans 1:20,25).
 9. Therefore, we conclude *the creature is the whole creation* with wicked men, angels, and the children of God excepted, which leaves the material universe including the earth and all in it.
 10. The creature here is a singular collective noun and/or a personification for the whole creation.
 11. Check out Proverbs 8 and 9, where wisdom is personified similarly as a woman named wisdom.
 12. The Holy Spirit is referring to the material universe ... inanimate matter and irrational creatures.
- B. The *earnest expectation* is an attitude or emotion ascribed to the personification of the whole creation as *the creature*, and the details of this expectant waiting will be found in the following verses. There is no need to deduce from this fact that *the creature* must be a rational person. It is a personification!
- C. The manifestation of God’s sons is the final phase of salvation, for which the whole universe was created to display the glory of God in adopting sinners (Prov 16:4; Matt 25:31-46; Rom 9:22-24; I Cor 15:22-24; II Thes 1:7-10; I Peter 1:3-9; Rev 20:11-15; etc.).
1. To make something manifest is to display it clearly. The sons of God are obscure to most and invisible to the world, but they shall soon be owned by Jesus Christ before all angels and men.
 2. The great Day of Judgment is the cataclysmic event the New Testament promotes, not the foolish notions of Scofield and others about a 7-year tribulation or Jewish millennium.
 3. Jesus Christ will declare to His Father in heaven that you are His child (Heb 2:13)! Glory!

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

- A. The whole natural creation has been *subject to vanity*, corruption, and pain without any choice in it.
1. Vanity describes things that are empty, futile, unprofitable, without value, and worthless.
 2. The universe is in a constant downward spiral from order and design to chaos and confusion.
 4. Decay, deformity, dysfunction, and death are only a few words to describe what we can see.
- B. The material universe did not *willingly* cause this punishment, for Adam and Eve by sin caused it.
1. The ground was cursed (Gen 3:17-19). This curse has not been lifted (Gen 5:29; 8:21; Rev 22:3).
 2. Conception and childbirth were cursed (Gen 3:16), though human corruption is stated later (8:23).
 3. Animal peace (Gen 1:30; 2:19-20) was replaced with violence and death (Gen 3:21; 6:13; 10:9).
 4. All flesh of birds and animals died during the flood for the evil of Adam’s sin (Gen 6:12-13).
 5. There was no rain until the Flood, let alone hurricanes, tornadoes, lightning, tsunamis, floods, etc.
 6. The violence, destruction, and decay of the material universe shows the whole creation’s vanity.
 7. The laws of Thermodynamics confirm these inspired word’s declaration of the universe’s decline.
 8. Heaven and earth are wearing out and growing old until the change (Ps 102:25-28; Heb 1:10-12).
 9. The whole creation was subjected to this vanity for the willful sin of others – Adam and Eve.
 10. All animals get sick, die, and decay, regardless of their apparent gentleness or delicate beauty.
 11. All matter corrupts, oxidizes, rusts, or otherwise degenerates through time from its first nature.

- C. The same God that applied the corruption of human sin against the universe also gave it hope, for He has liberty and a release planned for it.

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

- A. The *children of God* and *the creature* are two different things by virtue of “itself” and “also” here.
1. Those who try to make the creature and the children of God the same thing have a real problem.
 2. The creature, separate and distinct from the children of God, shall enjoy liberation with them.
 3. We have already proved the creature is the whole creation – inanimate and irrational creatures.
- B. The natural creation will be delivered and restored in the final phase of salvation at Judgment Day.
1. The bondage of corruption, the general decay around us by the second law of Thermodynamics, shall be lifted from *the creature*, when sin is finally eradicated for the full liberty of God's sons.
 2. We await the restitution of all things by Jesus Christ, Who is waiting in heaven (Acts 3:21).
 3. God, Who created all the things under consideration, shall change them all (Psalm 102:25-27).
 4. There shall be new heavens and a new earth, according to His promise (II Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1-5).
 5. And there shall be no more curse, for it will be lifted in the new universe (Revelation 22:3).

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

- A. Here the Holy Spirit is clearer and more direct in identifying what He has been calling *the creature*.
- B. It should be evident from scripture and nature that the whole created world is under the curse of sin.
- C. The “together” of this verse provides the plural antecedent of the whole creation for the “they” of 23.
- D. Believers painfully groan for this change, as Paul explained next (8:23; II Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-5).
- E. See the notes for verses 19-21 for further explanation of the groaning and travailing in pain until now.
- F. The decay of the universe is *now* present, because Jesus Christ has not yet come to restore its luster.

23 And not only they, 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.

- A. The words, “and not only they,” and, “ourselves also,” of verse 23 indicate more than one subject – children of God and the whole creation. These are not the same, and they must not be confused.
- B. The “firstfruits of the Spirit” is the Spirit as the earnest of this deliverance and glorious inheritance, which Spirit was given first to these early believers (8:14-16; 5:5; Eph 1:11-14; Acts 2:33; 3:26).
- C. All believers await this glorious coming event for the adoption or redemption of their physical bodies.
1. We, the sons of God, also desire redemption of our bodies from the effects and presence of sin.
 2. Life has much pain and trouble from conception to death by the effects of Adam’s and our sins.
 3. Many are the afflictions of the righteous both in body and soul (Ps 34:19; 71:20; II Cor 4:7-11).
 4. Every time you are sick or have a birthday, you realize the bondage of corruption in your body.
 5. Believers groan for this change, as Paul explained to the Corinthians (II Cor 4:16-18; 5:1-5).
- D. Jesus Christ shall call our bodies from the graves to glorification, the final phase of salvation – the buying back of our bodies from sin and death (John 5:28-29; I Cor 15:42-57; I Thess 4:16).
1. This final phase of adoption, called glorification, is so sure it is in the past tense (Rom 8:29-30).
 2. The death of the Son of God was designed and perfectly sufficient to redeem our bodies as well!

24 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?

- A. Most evangelicals frivolously declare that we are saved only by faith, but here it says hope.
- B. If you forget this doctrine and gospel, you will be practically unsaved (I Corinthians 15:2).

- C. If you forget this doctrine and gospel, you will be of all men most miserable (I Cor 15:19).
- D. Of all men on planet earth, we have the basis for the greatest and surest hope! Glory!
- E. Yet this hope is entirely based in faith of God's revelation, for nothing is visible of it yet!
- F. The believer's hope is confident and patient waiting for this deliverance – the final phase (8:24-25).
 - 1. This is our ultimate salvation from the sufferings of this present time (8:17-18; II Cor 4:16-18).
 - 2. Hope is a fixed anchor for souls in times of distress, based on God's immutability (Heb 6:17-20).
 - 3. Job found this anchor in the face of his afflictions, and he put great faith in it (Job 19:25-27).
 - 4. Hope should lift our souls up from depression and discouragement and discontentment (Ps 42:5).
 - 5. Believing the gospel through the Holy Spirit brings abounding hope and joy and peace (15:13).
 - 6. What we cannot see is more important than what we can see, if you have hope (II Cor 4:16-18).

25 *But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.*

- A. Though we do not yet see our deliverance, it is sure; and we wait for it by trusting God through hope.
 - 1. The nature of hope is a future expectation exceeding present realities, knowing they are temporal.
 - 2. Afflictions are seen, but our unseen future glory is not, but we look for it anyway (I Peter 1:3-9).
 - 3. A believer's hope is not a possibility, but a certainty from God's truth and power (II Tim 1:12).
- B. Faith and hope are closely related – the former believing God; the latter expecting the results.
 - 1. The definition of faith includes the substance of things hoped for (Heb 11:1; 6:11-20).
 - 2. Unbelievers become hopeless by afflictions, but believers always have hope by this text.

Conclusion:

- 1. If we were wise, we would not spend much time or energy on things seen (II Cor 4:17 – 5:9).
- 2. If we really grasped the promised inheritance here, we would purify our lives (I John 3:1-3).
- 3. If we really grasped what was coming, we would be most serious about holy living (II Pet 3:11-14).
- 4. If we purified our lives, we would have opportunities to a reason of our hope (I Peter 3:15).
- 5. If we were true New Testament saints, we would comfort one another with these words (I Thes 4:18).

For Further Study:

- 1. The document, "Five Phases of Salvation," ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/bible/salvation/when-were-you-saved.htm>.
- 2. The sermon outline, "The Sons of God," ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/sermons/pdf/sons-of-god.pdf>.
- 3. The document, "Gospel Millennium," ... <http://www.letgodbetrue.com/sermons/pdf/gospel-millennium.pdf>.
- 4. Ankerberg's, "The Law of Decay," ... http://www.johnankerberg.org/Articles/_PDFArchives/science/SC1BW0799.pdf.
- 5. MacArthur's, "Scripture and Science," ... <http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/sg1348.htm>.