

Groaning and Glory

Romans 8:17 - 27

17Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. 18I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21that^u the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. 26In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

In today's Bible lesson, Paul addressed the issue of "groaning." There is a difference between complaining and grumbling and the groaning that Paul described in Romans 8. Paul described groaning in the context of waiting for and wanting fulfillment from the Lord in some way. There is a sense of incompleteness or emptiness for which we await a filling that comes from the Lord alone. There is a tension present in the creation. And the tension lies between what is and what will one day be.

Paul described this tension in three ways in verses 20-21...

- 1. The creation is subjected to frustration (attributable to the presence of Satan and evil in the world).**
- 2. The creation is in bondage awaiting its deliverance.**
- 3. The creation does not yet know the fullness of God's freedom and liberty.**

We often fail to consider that the created order itself is awaiting redemption and liberation. When Adam sinned, a Pandora's Box of evil and misfortune laid siege to the creation (verse 22). God will redeem and restore His creation too. Though the redemption of the created order is a distant second to the redemption of man, God will remake the creation into His original plans.

Paul said that Christians can often groan too...not in the sense of complaining or griping but in the sense of a spiritual longing. We can long for the

completion of our salvation (when we enjoy eternal company and fellowship with the Lord and our fellow Christians). We long for our final adoption into the presence of the Lord. We were adopted and claimed by God at the moment of our conversion. But our adoption is not yet fulfilled and complete. The fulfillment and completion take place when we enter into the presence of the Lord and enjoy what He has pre-pared for us (see John 14:1-3).

Christians also long for the redemption of their bodies. Anyone who has suffered from chronic or debilitating illness and pain can understand this groaning. No human body is perfect, or ever will be. These bodies we possess are subjected to aging, disease, disrepair and finally death. As the body begins to age and break down, the spirit understandably groans for redemption, change and transformation. David Jeremiah has written, *"our bodies are the center of our physical weaknesses and the home of our sinful natures. No wonder we groan in them! We groan knowing that someday these bodies are going to be redeemed and transformed into glorious bodies like the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Paul is careful to counsel that any groaning must be balanced by hope. In summary, verse 25 teaches that we wait patiently in hope for God to complete or fulfill His plans for our lives. We wait with hope, but we also wait with help. In verse 26, Paul says the Spirit of God waits with us and intercedes in our behalf. The Spirit is our faithful companion and sustainer as we await all that God has in store for us. Even when vexed and perplexed to the point of speechlessness, the Holy Spirit is able to help us and intercede for us.

Our groaning also forces us to see eternity. One principle by which we can live is called ALIVE. ALIVE is an acronym for Always Live In View of Eternity. Our salvation is not yet complete, so we can groan. But we live hopefully in view of eternity.

Applications . . .

1. Give thanks to God for the assurance that He will one day bring your salvation and faith to completion and fulfillment.
2. In what areas of life do you need an eternal perspective? Where do you often struggle with pettiness or trivial things? Give them to God.
3. Reread verse 26. Are there things in your life where you struggle even to form prayers of petition and concern? Give those areas to God and ask Him to help console your groaning.
4. Offer your help today to someone who is challenged physically. Offer some form of love and encouragement.

