

## Assurance (Part Three): Glory And Hope

**Romans 8:18-21**

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**Given 02-Jul-16; Sermon #1330**

In my last two sermons we saw that the purpose of Romans 8 is to give us assurance through God's Spirit that we are true Christians. Paul tells us to examine ourselves, and he does this by sharply contrasting those who live according to the sinful nature and those who live according to the Spirit.

We saw that we have not been given the spirit of bondage, but the spirit of adoption to sonship, which means we are assured we will be fully spiritual children in God's spiritual Kingdom. "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

Now, I want to pick up where we left off. The Bible contains God's thoughts, and none of us is ever fully able to encompass the mind of the infinite, which is certainly God's mind. Nevertheless, there are teachings that we do basically understand, because God has revealed them to us.

Not so with every idea in the Bible. From time to time, we come to biblical thoughts that we know we will never fully understand in our physical lifetime, at least not until we are changed to Spirit beings and have fully the mind of God.

Glory is one of these ideas. We might call it incomparable, not only because it resists comparison with anything we know in this life, particularly suffering, but because glory is truly beyond our comprehension.

Glory is the word best used to describe God's magnificence and therefore also the dazzling magnificence of the throne of God and our share in the Family of God. And yet, the greatest word for what is in store for God's people is glory.

**Romans 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

This glory is evidence of God's presence. Now turn to Colossians 1. What is glory? There is a longing all human beings have for something that can hardly be expressed. It is a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy. It is found in our hope to be approved by God. The biblical word for expressing this hope is glory.

**Colossians 1:27** To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The idea of seeking divine approval expresses a natural and desirable order of things. We find a type of this in human families. A child wants approval from his parents and is right to want it. Creatures should want approval from their Creator. We are God's creatures, and we do also want that approval. But the problem is that we behave in a way that destroys the possibility of that approval, unless God intervenes to save and transform us, which He does in Jesus Christ.

Glory means not only worth, acceptance, or approval, it also signifies brightness, splendor, and luminosity, perhaps even beauty. And we long for all that, too. We long not only to see what is beautiful, we want to participate in it, to be on the inside of this divine, holy beauty, rather than on the outside. And someday, God willing, we will receive a measure of it.

Do we understand the meaning of glory now? No, not really, at least not fully. We long for glory, and, as the human race, we once enjoyed it. Adam was made “in the image of God,” which means that mankind at the beginning had a kind of glory.

Yet what is humanity’s condition today? Mankind is a disgrace compared to what it once was. Over all mankind should be written the tragic Old Testament name, “Ichabod,” meaning “the glory has departed.”

Israel had God’s approval while the Ark of God was in Israel’s possession, and this gave Israel a certain glory because it meant God was in their presence. However, because of the Israelites’ sin, the Ark of God was captured by the attacking Philistines and taken away.

**I Samuel 4:19-22** Now his [Eli the priest’s] daughter-in-law, Phinehas’ wife, was with child, due to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, “Do not fear, for you have borne a son.” But she did not answer, nor did she regard it. Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel!” because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

After a while, the Ark was sent back to the Israelites because it caused tumors and death to come upon the Philistines. They would move it from one city to the next and everywhere it went tumors and death followed. It came to the point where thousands had died, so they gave it back to the Israelites. It had been moved to Israel and stayed there all this time, then, about 20 years later we pick up the story in I Samuel 7.

**I Samuel 7:3** Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, “If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.”

So this gives you the reason why God allowed His own Ark to be taken by the Philistines. It was because of the sin of the Israelites here. And as the glory departed from Israel because of God’s disapproval of their sins, similarly man’s glory in general has departed from him, from his body and mind.

I am not talking about the glory that mankind has that places him above the level of the animals. That is a kind of glory that results from having a human spirit that sets apart every human being from the animals and gives us dominion over them. The glory I am referring to here is the kind of approval from God that He had of Adam and Eve before they sinned.

He made them perfect and gave them a glimpse His greatness. For a short while they had a direct relationship with Him in the Garden of Eden. They had God's approval shown by His presence with them which is later represented by the Ark of God. God's glory was with them and His presence was there.

Mankind was once a beautiful physical specimen. The man Adam and the woman Eve were the glory of creation. They excelled the rest of the created order in every respect. Man was also beautiful in heart and mind, the most beautiful of all the creatures. He had nobility that transcends our ability to fathom.

But once Adam and Eve sinned, that beautiful heart and mind was tarnished. Decay, sickness, suffering, and eventually death came upon them. They had begun to lie and cheat and shift the blame from their own failings to those of others.

Most significant was the ruination of their spirits—the spirit was that part of Adam and Eve that had communion with God. They had walked and talked with God in the Garden. But once they sinned, they were separated from Him and no longer sought to have a relationship with Him in the same way that they had before. They hid from Him, and the encounter that eventually came was a judgment.

What an awe-inspiring thing it is then, when we turn to the written Word of God, to find that the end of our salvation is in Christ. It is not merely a deliverance from sin and evil and our consequences, but it is a process of glorification and is the result of our sanctification.

This is what Paul is beginning to deal with in Romans 8. There is something greater even than the restoration of Adam and Eve's lost glory involved here. As we read on in Romans 8, we find that we are to have an enjoyment of God and a participation in God that surpasses what Adam and Eve had.

In Romans 8:18 Paul is comparing the future glory to be enjoyed by God's people to our present sufferings. But he is also saying that our future glory far outstrips our suffering. That is very obvious, is it not? Because, if the glory we are to enjoy is to exceed even that minimal glory enjoyed by Adam, it is certain that it will exceed the trials we are now enduring.

Paul introduces an interesting though somewhat hidden image at this point in the verbal adjective translated "not worth comparing." It is the Greek word *axios*, from the verb *ago*, which means to drive, lead, or cause to move. It is figuratively used to refer to something that is heavy enough to promote motion in a balance or, as we would say, to tip the scales.

When we remember that the word glory itself signifies something that is weighty or has substance, it is clear what Paul is suggesting. He is saying that the future glory laid up for us is so weighty that our present sufferings are as feathers compared to it and that they cannot even begin to move the scales.

Paul provides a parallel to Romans 8:18 in II Corinthians 4:16-17, following a poignant mention of the many persecutions and sufferings he had endured for the sake of Christ.

**II Corinthians 4:16-17** Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Every single day God is renewing us and giving us strength to deal with the complexities and challenges of daily life. These two passages suggest several areas of comparison between our present sufferings and the glory that is to come.

The first area of comparison is between the intensity of the suffering and the intensity of the glory or, as we have been saying, between the weight of the two. Suffering is heavy, it hurts. It can hurt so intensely that we scream with terror or cry out with pain. But, Paul says, the intensity of our sufferings is not worth comparing with the glory.

He should know. Paul suffered as much as any man has suffered other than Jesus, judging from his descriptions. Listen to what he described to the Corinthian members here in I Corinthians 4.

**I Corinthians 4:9-13** For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

**II Corinthians 4:8-12** We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.

This is the result of being renewed day by day. We can come out of these things and face the world with the strength of God's Holy Spirit.

In Paul's opinion the intensity of the former is not to be compared to the grandeur of the glory.

The second area of comparison that Paul gives us is between the location of our sufferings and the location of our glory. In Romans 8:18 Paul says that the glory of God is to be revealed "in us," using a word that literally means internally or in our very being. This should be contrasted with the words "though outwardly we are wasting away," which he uses in the parallel passage in verse 16.

**II Corinthians 4:16** Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

The idea seems to be this: Suffering, though felt deeply, nevertheless only affects our outward person, our bodies. It does not affect the real us, those redeemed beings that, Paul says, are "being renewed day by day." It is that real me; the inner me, that is going to participate in the glory. In other words, we are not just going to observe the beauty, we are going to share in it. The endurance of outward suffering is no comparison to our participation in this glory.

Now the third and final point of contrast between suffering and glory concerns their duration. In Romans 8:18 Paul distinguishes between present sufferings, which means those belonging to this

present age, and the glory that will be revealed in us, meaning the unchanging and eternal glory of the age to come.

In II Corinthians 4:17 he calls the sufferings momentary and the glory eternal. You and I do not think much about eternity from day to day, but if we can make ourselves think this way, it is evident that there is no comparison between the glory of the eternal state and the sufferings of this passing earthly time, however painful our sufferings may be while we are going through them.

What Paul is saying in Romans 8 can have the effect of changing the way we look at life, our worldview and the way we live. It provides at least two things. The first thing is that what Paul is teaching encourages vision. Focusing on the promise of glory will give us a vision of life in its eternal context, which means that we will begin to see life here on earth as it really is. We see life from the right perspective.

Now two things interfere with us not having the right perspective in our lives. First, we are limited by our concept of time. We think in terms of the 70 years allotted to us, or at best the few years that have led up to our earthly existence or the few years after it, for example the beginning of the Millennium. We do not have a long view.

Second, we are limited by our materialism. Our reference point is what we perceive through our senses, so we have the greatest possible difficulty thinking of the Spirit and other intangibles. We have a need to be delivered from this bondage and awakened from our spiritual blindness. In a sense, Paul is emphasizing that truth is completely opposed to this world's falsehood or this world's "worldview."

The second thing that Paul is teaching in Romans 8 encourages endurance. Having the right perspective gives us strength to endure whatever hardships, temptations, persecutions, or physical suffering according to God's will.

Suppose there were no glory. Suppose this life really were all there is. If that were the case, we could endure little or nothing without falling apart. Look at what is happening to the world under all the pressures and all the sin that is coming down upon it by their own willful choice.

But knowing that there is an eternal weight of glory waiting, we try to do what pleases God and hang on in spite of everything, because God is our Father and we want His approval.

Now there is one more word in Romans 8:18 that we need to examine. It is the word "consider" or "reckon" in the King James Version. It is used 15 times in this epistle, noting that it has to do with reason. It is the process by which we figure something out. In light of God's real world, we are instructed to think this out clearly.

**Romans 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

"I consider that," meaning that he has thought it through and concluded that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory. By using this word, he encourages us to think it through thoroughly.

The glory to come is worth anything you might be asked to face here, however painful or distressing. We do not really belong to this present age because our citizenship is in heaven. This present world is passing, transient, and temporary. The world to come is the real—and the permanent—world. If you know that you are part of heaven's citizenry, you will endure because the benefits are just far too great not to.

**Romans 8:19-21** For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Now we just saw the importance of the word “consider,” in verse 18. It refers to a rational process by which a thinking person is able to figure something out. Paul is thinking about whether the Christian life is worth it in his attempt to explain it to members of God's church.

The Christian life is not easy. It involves rigorous self-denial, persecutions, and even some sufferings. Unconverted worldly people seem to have it better. Why should we, too, not live only for pleasure? What is to be gained by godliness? As Paul considers this, it becomes perfectly evident to him why the Christian way is the only rational way.

In verse 18 Paul uses the word present to refer to the shortness of this temporal age and does not actually mention eternity. But in the parallel text in II Corinthians 4:17 he contrasts our momentary poor-quality troubles with eternal high-quality glory, making the point clear.

The reason why the Christian life is rational lies in the contrast between the weight of our sufferings, which is light, and the weight of the glory yet to come, which is great.

Paul does not deny that the earthly sufferings we experience are miserable. In I and II Corinthians he lists some of the tribulations he endured, and they were certainly heavy. But, he says, weighty as they are, “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

He says, think it out! Put both on a scale and if you do, you will find that our present sufferings are really inconsequential if compared with the glory to come.

The two arguments from Romans 8:18 alone are adequate to prove Paul's point, that the Christian life is eminently worth it. But Paul continues to prove his point as we are seeing into verse 19 and beyond.

In an effort to provide smooth English sentences, the New International Version translators have eliminated the conjunction “for,” which begins each of verses 18 and 19. You will see that word at the start of verse 20, but “for” actually begins verse 18 and verse 19 as well in most Bible translations. Verses 18, 19, and 20 literally say, “For I consider,” “For the creation waits,” “For the creation was subjected.” In other words, verses 18-21 are all part of a long and carefully sustained argument.

The new element at this point is the creation or, as we would probably say today, the cosmos. It is important to get this reference straight, because the word creation can obviously refer to all things God has made: man, the angels, the physical universe, animals, and so on. But is that its meaning here?

It does not take much thought to realize that in these verses creation must have a restricted meaning. The children of God themselves are not included because they are distinguished from the creation, in verses 19, 21, and 23. And neither can the unconverted of the rest of mankind be included because the earnest expectation does not characterize them.

In other words, all of rational creation is excluded by the terms of verses 20-23. The only thing that is left is the non-rational creation; animate and inanimate.

Paul is talking about the physical world of matter, plants, and animals. His argument is that although the creation, also called nature, is presently in an imperfect state, it is longing for the day of liberation.

Paul is personifying nature, of course, but obviously he does not mean that inanimate nature has personal feelings that correspond to ours. He means only that nature is not yet all that God has predestined it to be.

It is waiting for its true fulfillment. But if nature is waiting, we should be willing to wait in hope, too, knowing that a glorious outcome is assured. God's way is worth it, beyond a shadow of a doubt. The weight of it far outweighs the suffering of this human life.

This view of creation is radically different from the world's, of course, and this is worth pursuing. In general the world makes either one of two errors. Either it deifies the cosmos, virtually worshipping it as an ideal, which is seen today in environmentalism. Or else, it regards the cosmos as gradually evolving toward perfection, accompanied by the human race, which is also evolving, which is seen in evolutionism.

Paul says, "For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits," or, "waits in eager expectation." This has been translated by J. B. Phillips literally as "is on tiptoe to see." But, according to Paul, it is not man who is on tiptoe looking, it is figuratively creation itself.

In other words, the entire cosmos is essentially looking beyond itself to God. And what creation is earnestly awaiting, as it looks beyond itself, is the glorious freedom of the children of God that it will share and benefit from.

The world makes a great error. It sees in nature some kind of ongoing and automatic perfecting principle. This is almost like saying, in error, that the world is not God yet, but it is on the way. New Age religion and evolutionism does this and thinks that it is going to ascend to the level of God just by evolution. This is a form of idolatry and clearly seen in environmentalism, which is a syncretism of humanism and evolutionism.

In cosmic terms this is the principle of evolution. In human terms it is the principle of inevitable perfection. The motto of the world is, "every day in every way I'm getting better and better." or in other words, "I may not be God yet, but I will be, given time."

Of course, a lot of time has gone by, millions of years according to evolutionists, yet mankind seems to be as much unlike God as he ever was. And man's world is woefully far from perfect.

The true Christian's perspective, supplied by Scripture, is far more balanced and mature than anything the blind and unconverted world can devise. The true perspective of the cosmos has three parts.

The first is that God created the heavens and the earth. Everything in Romans 8 presupposes this, not least the fact that the cosmos is called "creation." That term presupposes a Creator, which is exactly what the Christian maintains is the case.

This world is not eternally existent, nor did the world come into existence by itself. Logic tells us that. In order for the creation to come into being by itself it would have to create itself, and that would mean it was in existence before it was created. In other words, it would have had to be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship, which is absurd. The only rational view of origins is that God made everything.

The consequence of this for Christians is that the cosmos, the creation, has value. It has value, not because humans ascribe value to it, but because God created it and it is therefore valuable to Him. There is a fundamental divergence between the Christian and the non-Christian outlooks.

Because Christians view the creation as God's handiwork, they respect and value the cosmos but do not worship it as an end in itself. Those who do not understand that God is Creator of the cosmos either worship the universe, or else they abuse it, stripping it of anything that is of value to themselves.

The second true perspective that Paul gives us is that this world is not what it was created to be. The problems with the cosmos are not only those that the human race has inflicted on it, mostly destruction and pollution. The world has also been subjected to troubles as the result of God's judgment on man, rendered at the time of Adam and Eve's failure. God told Adam, in Genesis 3.

**Genesis 3:17-19** Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

Man has still not learned the lesson to this day and still abuses the earth and receives the brunt of this curse. Nature had not sinned, Adam had, but nature was subjected to a downgrading because of him and thus entered into His judgment.

It is this trouble, the result of God's judgment on sin, which Paul is particularly concerned with in Romans. He uses three words to describe it. The first is *frustration*. This is the feeling we humans have when we know we should attain to some goal and are trying to reach it but are repeatedly thrown back or defeated.



Picture the creation's frustration in the way nature asserts itself in the annual renewal of springtime but is constantly defeated as spring passes into autumn and autumn into winter. It is as if nature wants always to be glorious but is impeded in its attempts to be so.

The second term is *slavery*. The slavery of nature is linked to its frustration and is the cause of it. Slavery speaks of the actual state of things, while frustration has to do with the resulting feelings. Slavery is where one entity is unwillingly subjected to the authority of another.

This is what Paul means here. He is saying that although nature does not want to be as it is, it is powerless to do anything about it. The creation needs to be delivered by God. This is what restoration is all about, of course. The creation longs for restoration and renewal and it will have it when the children of God are likewise fully renewed.

The third term is *decay*. Nothing Paul says about creation is as obvious to today's scientific observers as this: the cosmos is decaying and running down. This is called the second law of thermodynamics.

It is another scientific axiom that neither mass nor energy are destroyed but are only converted from one to the other. Einstein's formula of relativity,  $E=Mc^2$  is an expression of this. But although, by this formula, energy is not being destroyed, it is nevertheless becoming increasingly dissipated, which means that it is becoming increasingly less useful.

For example, the sun's energy is not being lost even though its mass is being converted into energy. But that energy is being dissipated into space where it is not accomplishing very much, if anything. One day the sun will use up its energy and be gone. The whole universe is like that. It is all running down, dissipating, and becoming increasingly useless.

However, in Romans 8:19-21, Paul was probably thinking specifically of death, which comes to all living things, rather than the scientific principles I mentioned, since he would hardly have known of these laws except by general observation. It is not only the sun that is dying, of course, living creatures die, too.

Now the third true perspective is that the earthly creation will one day be redeemed. In spite of creation's current frustration, bondage, and decay, the day is coming when the earth will be renewed. The land is the Lord's, so one cannot sell his inherited land as though it were his permanent possession. God gives the reason here in Leviticus 25.

**Leviticus 25:23-24** 'The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land.'

The status of the Israelites is that of strangers and sojourners with the Lord and thus they are tenants, so to speak, in the Promised Land. This principle is later applied to our existence in this world.

Biblically, if an Israelite is forced to sell his land temporarily, he and his family retain the right of redemption. The land may be redeemed in one of three ways: 1) A kinsman-redeemer buys back the land; 2) The seller himself is able to buy it back; or 3) It is restored to the rightful owner at the Jubilee. Verses 23 and 24 express the principle on which the law of Jubilee, as it regards the land, was based.

The land belonged to God, and it was He who allotted it among the families of Israel for their use. No estate could therefore be alienated permanently, by any human authority, from the family to whose right to the land it was.

In granting redemption of the land God granted approval to deliver the land to the original holder who had parted with it. This is so he may recover it. Just as the land in Israel was to be redeemed at the Jubilee, so also is the whole earth to be redeemed and renewed at the appropriate time.

An analogy to the redemption of our bodies seems to add to this idea.

**Romans 8:22-23** For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption [sonship], the redemption of our body.

The redemption of our bodies means the deliverance of our bodies. So it seems that this is what Creation will experience, a deliverance from the futility of corruption. Verse 21 again says:

**Romans 8:21** because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

This is a very *positive* event. Creation will be delivered from decay and ruin, and into freedom. Adopting the apostle Paul's Christian worldview and all we know of it, rather than the theologians' world-and-life view will rearrange your values and change your approach to suffering and the disappointments of life.

In adapting to this teaching of God, which Paul was inspired to pass on to us, you will not be surprised when things go wrong in this life. This world is not a good place. We live in a degenerating society. Our plans will misfire, we will often fail; others will destroy what has taken you long years and hard work to accomplish. But our physical successes are not what life is primarily all about. What matters is our love for God and His way of life; and our faithfulness to Him in thought and action.

With this Christian worldview we will not place our ultimate hope in anything human beings can do to improve this world's dire conditions. This does not mean that we will fail to do what good we can do in this life as well as encourage others in their efforts to do good. As Christians, we will encourage others and do good, wherever good can be done.

But we do not delude ourselves into thinking that the salvation of the world's ills will be brought about by human efforts. We may feed the poor, but we know that Jesus said in Matthew 26:

**Matthew 26:11** "For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always."

We pray for our leaders knowing they are imperfect and make mistakes similar to how we do. Often they disappoint us. However, our true spiritual leader, Jesus Christ, will never disappoint us or make a wrong decision on our behalf.

**I John 3:2-3** Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Furthermore, when we are made like Him in His glory, the creation that is also straining forward to that day will become glorious in its own way. So even though the leaders of the world are so very disappointing, we can see that their worldview is nothing like God's.

In Romans 8:22-27, we find a word that is repeated three times and yet is found nowhere else in this letter. In fact, it is found only six more times in the entire New Testament. It is the Greek word *stenazo* and it is translated as “groan” in verse 23, “groans” in verse 26, and “groaning” in verse 22.

The interesting thing is that it is applied to three different entities in these verses: to creation, to ourselves, and to the Holy Spirit. Of creation Paul says:

**Romans 8:22** For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Of ourselves he says:

**Romans 8:23** Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Of the Holy Spirit he says:

**Romans 8:26** Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Two of these references are hard to understand. And since Paul is thinking of the inanimate creation and not men, angels, or demons in verse 22, it is hard to imagine how mere matter or even plants or animals can be conceived of as “groaning.” It is also difficult to envision the Holy Spirit's groans for different reasons.

The one part of these verses that is not difficult to understand is our groaning. Groaning seems to be a part of daily life with which almost anyone can easily identify. Now we need to see two things about this human groaning, if we are to understand Romans 8:23-25.

First is that the groaning mentioned in verse 23 is that of believers in Jesus Christ and not that of all people generally. Paul makes this obvious when he writes that “we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves.”

This does not exclude the kind of groanings that Christians share with other people, expressions of grief caused by physical suffering or the loss of a loved one, but it means far more.

As Christians, we grieve over the presence of sin in our lives, which unbelievers do not. In fact believers groan increasingly as we grow in Christ.

We also groan as the result of persecutions suffered for the sake of our life and witness, and this is also different from what non-Christians experience.

The second thing to understand is that the groaning of Christians is not mere grief over the things I mentioned. It is expectant grief, that is, grief that looks forward to a time when all that is causing pain will be removed and salvation will be completed.

Christian groaning is a joyful grief that gives birth to a sure hope and patient endurance. Romans 8: 24-25, which we will read here, show this since hope and perseverance, or hope and patient endurance, are the notes on which the verses end.

**Romans 8:24-25** For we were [this should be translated as are saved] saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

But there is also a powerful image at the start of this paragraph that shows how the groans of Christians are to be interpreted. Paul uses the image of childbirth in verse 22: “the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs,” adding in verse 23 that “we ourselves groan within ourselves.”

This is an important analogy, because it points beyond the cause of grief to its joyful perfect ending. The pains of childbirth are real pains, severe ones, but they are not endless or hopeless, they last only for a time. They are filled with joyful expectation, since under normal circumstances they climax in the birth of a child.

Paul is saying that our griefs as Christians are like childbirth. We groan, but we do so in expectation of a safe delivery—ours.

Suppose someone asked you “are you saved?” How would you answer? As a Christian it would be proper to answer in three ways. The first answer you could give is, “Yes, I have been saved.” In that case, you would be pointing back to the death of Jesus Christ on your behalf and to that initial work of God through His Spirit in turning you from a path of sin and betrothing you to Christ.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

**Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

The second answer you could give is, “I am *being* saved.” If you said that, you would be pointing to the continuing work of God’s Spirit in your life, much as Paul did in the earlier part of Romans 8. You would be thinking of the Spirit’s work of sanctification.

**II Corinthians 2:15** For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

The third answer you could give is, “I am *going to be* saved.” In that case, you would be thinking of the resurrection, when the work of God, begun by the death of Christ and continued by God’s work through His Spirit in joining you to Christ and sanctifying you, will be completed.

**Matthew 24:13** “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

**Romans 5:10** For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

In chapters 5, 8, 9, and 10 of Romans, Paul mentions all three timely ways the firstfruits receive salvation. We “were saved,” are being saved,” and “shall be saved.”

Now remember that the theme of Romans 8 is the Christian’s assurance that he or she is saved by Christ and will be kept in this process of salvation by the love and power of God the Father.

**I Corinthians 1:18** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Now flipping back to Romans 8, it distinguishes between those who are truly being saved and those who are not. Paul was aware of the dangers of presumption, of claiming an assurance that one has no the right to unless one’s conduct shows that the Spirit of Jesus Christ really is within him.

But having made that point, that those who are Christ’s will live for Christ, Paul then got into his major argument, showing that true Christians can know they were and are being saved and be confident in that assurance.

We have seen that there are four proofs which are: 1) The fact that those who are Christians really do live for Christ, 2) The internal sense Christians have of being members of God’s Family, 3) The Holy Spirit’s direct witness with our spirits, and 4) suffering. Paul said, “Now 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.”

We would think that it would be the absence of sufferings, not their presence, that would prove we belong to Christ. That is exactly what mainstream Christianity believes and why they get so confused over the difference. We have two worldviews that are total opposites of each other.

If God loves us, should He not keep us from suffering? Or is not He able to? When things get hard human nature begins to doubt God’s favor rather than being assured of it. The main reason is because we are viewing suffering from the world’s perspective, when we should be viewing it from a true Christian’s perspective—God’s worldview.

That is why Paul has digressed to talk about suffering and why he is talking about our groanings now. It is why he has explained the involvement of creation in our present distress. What he is saying is that the sufferings we and the whole creation endure are the sufferings of childbirth and are therefore proof that Jesus Christ is returning.

And it is why, although we do groan, *we do not groan hopelessly*. On the contrary, our groanings intensify our hope and enable us to wait patiently for the return of Christ. Romans 8:24-25 also gives substance to our hope, that is, that they begin to bring out the main features of the joyful perfect ending for which we are waiting.

Paul has been talking about our sufferings, and it is primarily in our bodies that we experience them. Physical suffering, whether from illness or abuse inflicted by persecutors, is experienced in the body. And there is even a sense in which psychological wounds are physical. We experience them in our minds, which are hard to distinguish from mere brain matter and neurological connections, but the effects are often directly physiological since they are seen in such things as: sleeplessness, ulcers, hypertension, and other maladies.

It is no wonder that we groan in these bodies. They are the seat of physical weakness, on the one hand, and of our sinful natures, on the other. But spiritually we groan in hope, knowing that these weak and sinful bodies are going to be transformed into spiritual bodies that are strong, sinless, and glorious, like the resurrected body of Jesus Christ.

An image that Paul offers in Romans 8:23 is of our sure hope of future glory is adoption as sons. This is the same word that we saw in verse 15, where it was translated “sonship.” But that creates a question. In verse 15 our adoption was treated as something that has already taken place.

I spoke of our having been taken out of the family of Satan and having been brought into the Family of God. It corresponds to the way a young couple today might adopt a child who has no parents or has parents who are unable to care for him or her.

But in verse 23, adoption, which should be translated “sonship,” is treated as something still in the future, something for which we wait eagerly. How can adoption or sonship be both past and future at the same time? The answer, of course, is that the word is used in two senses.

In one sense we have already received our adoption, since we have been brought into God’s family. Nothing is ever going to change that family relationship. Yet in a second sense we still wait for our sonship, because we do not yet enjoy all its privileges.

When Paul speaks of our “adoption as sons” in verse 23, he seems to be thinking of the special Roman custom of adoption and not of what we usually think of when someone uses that word today.

The Romans, as well as the Greeks, had adoption in our sense, that is, when a child is taken out of one family and is placed into another. But the Romans also had an important ceremony in which the son of a leading Roman family would be acknowledged publicly as the son and heir.

It corresponded somewhat to the Jews bar mitzvah, when a Jewish boy becomes a “son of the covenant,” though among Romans it was less religious and more a matter of adulthood and the right of inheritance.

Earlier Paul had spoken in verse 17 of our being “heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings.” We are sharing in the sufferings now, but the day is coming when we will enter into the full rights of our inheritance in glory.

Another image Paul offers in Romans 8:23 of the joyful perfect ending to which believers in Christ are moving, is a harvest, suggested by the words “firstfruits of the Spirit.”

**Romans 8:23** Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

Of course, this does not refer to the fruit of the Spirit, as Paul does in Galatians 5:22-23 where he teaches:

**Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

The word used in Romans 8:23 for “firstfruits” is *aparchee* indicating the firstfruits of the harvest, the portion that was first collected and consecrated to God as an offering of gratitude. Hence, the word means what is first in order of time.

A very small portion of God’s Spirit is required in order to call sinners out of this world. How else could God open a person’s mind? When we are called into God’s church we partake of the first influences of the Spirit.

Out of the whole world since Adam and Eve, the firstfruits of God’s Family are the first of God’s spiritual harvest to have God’s Spirit dwelling in them; so and they were among the first who have partaken of that influence.

Earlier in this sermon I talked about the word *groan*, pointing out that it is used of the creation, ourselves, and the Holy Spirit. Also, that the usage we understand best is our own groaning, since we groan in our bodily weakness and sins. But groaning is not the only thing Paul says we do. He also says in Romans 8:25 that “we hope,” and in Romans 8:23 and 25 “we wait, waiting” adding in the latter case that we do it both eagerly and patiently.

Let us look at “we hope.” Hope is one of the very great words of the Christian vocabulary, occurring in such important phrases as “our blessed hope” in Titus 2:13, and “the hope of glory” in Colossians 1:27. It is one of the three great virtues listed in I Corinthians 13:13. Paul had already written about hope in Romans 5 before he reached chapter 8.

**Romans 5:1-5** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The word hope has two senses: one, is an attitude of hopefulness, and two, is the content of that for which we hope. Both uses of the word occur in Romans 8. The idea of content in Romans 8:24, “In this hope we are saved,” and the attitude of hopefulness in Romans 8:23-25, “we hope.”

What is outstanding about the Christian attitude of hopefulness is that it is a sure and certain hope and not mere wishful thinking. What makes it sure and certain is the content. The specific content is

the return of Jesus Christ together with the things we have been mentioning in these verses: the redemption of the body, the adoption of God's children, and the gathering of God's harvest. These things are all promised to us by God.

Consequently, the Christian hopes in confidence, a confidence grounded not in the strength of one's emotional outlook but on the sure Word of God, who cannot lie. If God says that these things are coming, it is reasonable and safe for us to hope confidently in them.

"We wait," more specifically, we wait for them, which is the second verb Paul uses.

**Romans 8:23** Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

**Romans 8:25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

It is important to take the two adverbs together, because biblical patience is not passive. This is an active, though patient, waiting. It expresses itself in vigorous service for Christ even while we wait for His appearing.

The word *eagerly* makes us think of the creation waiting "in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed," which Paul introduced in verse 19, though the Greek words are not the same.

In verse 19 Paul pictured creation standing on tiptoe, in a sense, looking forward with outstretched neck in eager anticipation of the satisfying conclusion. It is a grand picture, and it is what we are to be doing, too. It is one mark of a true Christian.

Hope is a measure of true Christianity and is from *above the sun*. Pseudo-Christianity always looks primarily at this world from under the sun.

**Ecclesiastes 1:14** I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

But true Christianity has its eye mainly on the world which is to come from above. It is not primarily concerned even with deliverance from the grave and punishment, and all the things that trouble us and weary us. That really belongs to the past, because they are temporary.

**II Corinthians 4:17-18** For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paradoxically, of course, it is only these heavenly-minded people, true Christians, who are able to make any real or lasting difference in the world. No one can make the difference that we can make in this world, because we are being trained to be leaders in God's Kingdom and being trained to have God's worldview.