

Romans Lesson 9

Romans 8: GROANING FOR GLORY

Webster's defines groaning as "a deep moan indicative of pain, grief, or annoyance; a sound uttered under prolonged strain". I think everyone groans instinctively without knowing it. It's that sound you make when your wife asks you to take out the trash or change the light bulbs. The sound she makes when you trash the kitchen yet again, or leave the toilet seat up. In so many situations there is just nothing to say but a deep groan, which expresses our dissatisfaction. Amazingly the author of Romans also groaned, and he recognized the universal groaning of three different groups—the creation, Christians, and the Holy Spirit. Read Romans 8:18–26.

Groaning in the Old Testament

In the Psalms David groans in his laments like Ps. 5:1, "listen up Lord, consider my groaning", meaning I got some real trouble here you need to take care of Lord. In Ps. 12, David laments injustice and lying which is afflicted on the needy who "groan" for God to intervene. In Exodus the people of Israel groan under the oppression of slavery (Ex.2:23). All the prophets spoke of the people groaning over God's judgments upon them. In Lamentations 1:4,11 "the priests groan", and the "people groan". Ezekiel wrote of the groaning of the few righteous men who recognized the "abominations" being committed against the Lord (Ezek. 9:4;21:6). The general theme of all the groaning is that things just are not right, and they long for God to do something about it.

Uniqueness of New Testament Groaning

In the New Testament the groaning has an element of anticipation to it. Paul is suffering but he looks forward in anticipation to better times. It is an eager excited anticipation of GLORY. Look at 2 Cor. 5:2-4 where Paul anticipates his resurrection body, "in this body we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven...For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." He feels burdened in this earthly decaying lustful body, and he groans for that new imperishable perfect heavenly body.

In Romans 8 Paul looks forward to the promised glory, which will be revealed when Jesus returns to receive His followers to Himself. The context of this passage is present suffering compared to future glory. In verse 18, Paul says he considers the sufferings of the present time "are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed" when Jesus comes back for us. Paul is not the only one anticipating that great event. Using a figure of speech called personification, Paul says that the entire creation anxiously, eagerly longs for the "revealing of the sons of God", meaning our resurrection. Why is the whole creation involved? Go back to Genesis 1:29-31. When God first created the earth it was like a perfect greenhouse with a plethora of plants and vines and trees of every kind that were very fruitful. Food for all of creation was bountiful, "and God saw all that He had made and it was very good". Unfortunately for the creation, when man sinned, God cursed the ground—"cursed is the ground because of you". Before, they just strolled around in peace and prosperity and there was plenty to eat, and work was enjoyable and fulfilling. Now there would be a struggle for survival, no fulfillment in this world, failed relationships, and worst of all death. I like to say that when man chose to go his own way, God said "Let's see how that works", and then He rigged the world so that it won't work, because there is no fulfillment apart from God. You might say it's difficult for you to understand how a good, loving, and holy God could curse His own creation; but Romans 8:20 we read that God "subjected it to futility in hope". The hope is that mankind, finding no fulfillment apart from God, will return to God and believe in Him and obey Him.

Romans 8 is saying that ever since the ground was cursed in Genesis 3, the creation has groaned. "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now"(8:22). That "pains of childbirth" image is perfect because in childbirth the woman suffers, but it is suffering she knows will come to an end and result in great joy. In the same way, we know that the pains of this present time are short and inconsequential compared to eternity, and "not worthy to be compared to the glory" of our promised eternal resurrection body. Therefore in verse 23 he says we also along with creation "groan within ourselves waiting eagerly for ..the redemption of our body". Like the woman in childbirth we groan, but we do so in expectation of a safe delivery.

What Have We Got to Groan About ?

Life is hard all by itself and like Jesus said –His followers are in the world but not of the world. He also told them that the world hated Him therefore the world hates His followers. The bad weather falls on both the good and evil, and death awaits us all. There is also something in our flesh that causes us to groan that Paul identified in Rom. 7:17,20,24----“sin dwells in me.. evil is present in me”. This is troublesome and we long to be free of it. The pain of failed relationships, the lies that we must tell, the things we do for money, the guilt which troubles us--- Even the best of us carry a burden that we long to be free of. God has forgiven us through the blood of Jesus, but we groan within longing for the freedom from these perishing decaying bodies and receiving our perfect heavenly body.

The Holy Spirit Also Groans

Romans 8:26 continues this line of thought saying, “And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness”. Because of our human limitations, sin, and doubt, the Holy Spirit helps us. Our “weakness” refers to the overall human condition. His divine groans are appeals for the spiritual welfare of the believer. The emphasis is on the divine intercession necessary for the preservation of believers to eternity. An author named Godet said it well, “What a statement of the unutterable disorder which reigns throughout all creation. Nature cries out a continual lament calling for a renovation from heaven. The redeemed themselves are not exempt from this groaning, and wait for their own renewal, which will be the signal of universal restoration. Finally, the Spirit who is intimate with the plans of God for our glory, pursues its realization on our behalf.”

What Is the Hold-up ?

I would prefer the glory without the suffering. I’m tired of groaning. I want maturity without pain. I want patience without irritation, but Romans 8 says, NO GLORY WITHOUT THE GROANING. Today, for a little while, we must groan, and then tomorrow the glory. In verse 17 Paul said, “we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him”. God did not spare His own Son from this suffering and groaning and He alone was sinless. The good news is that we know that Jesus suffered according to the plan of God, but now He has been resurrected and exalted to the throne of God where He exists in all His glory. Romans 8:16-17 encourages us by saying that we also are children of God and fellow heirs with Christ, therefore even though we groan now, we will also be glorified with Him.

The First Fruits

We often hear that the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we celebrate on Easter, guarantees that we also will be resurrected. In 1 Corinthians 15:20-24, Paul uses the image of the Old Testament harvest in Israel to prove this point. Before Israelites harvested their crops, they were to bring an offering of the best part of the crop to the Lord. In Ex.23:19 and Lev.23:10, it was the “choice” part of the crop, then the full harvest would follow later. The “first fruits” symbolized the consecration of the entire harvest to God, and was a pledge of the full harvest to come. Christ’s resurrection was the first fruits of the resurrection harvest of believers. The first fruits not only preceded the full harvest, but was a first installment of the entire harvest. In the same way, Christ’s resurrection could not have been in isolation from our resurrection. His resurrection was part of the larger resurrection to come.

In 1 Cor.15:20, Paul wrote “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep...but each in his own order; Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming”. Until then, don’t feel bad about groaning. It just shows that you long for something better that has been promised by God. Enjoy your time on earth, but groan for what Christ has made possible---“the glory that is to be revealed to us” in the redemption of our body at the resurrection.

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