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The Benefits that Flow from Christ, Part 7

In the opening chapters of the book of Genesis we read of these things:

- The creation of the world.
- The placing of man in the world as a king to rule and care for it.
- The stipulation that man should obey God perfectly, lest he die.
- The tragic fall of man from his position of peace and purity on account of his rebellion against God's command.

Now, what is rarely appreciated regarding man's fall is the radical effect that Adam's sin had on creation: See, Adam and Eve's rebellion NOT ONLY resulted in the death of mankind BUT it also tainted the rest of creation! Listen to a description of the effect that Adam's sin had on this world:

Genesis 3:17-21, "And unto Adam he [God] said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them."

From this passage we are introduced to the horrible effect that sin had and continues to have on this world. The earth is now cursed. Its productivity is afflicted; the earth unwillingly yields its fruit. And not only did Adam receive the penalty of death, but so did creation as the first sacrificial animal was slain on account of his sin. The sin of Adam and Eve affected NOT ONLY mankind BUT ALSO, the rest of creation; it too is FALLEN!

This is why it is no surprise to read of the Second Coming of Christ in the following terms:

Acts 3:20-21, "And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

I hope you see the significance of this phrase: When Christ returns. Not only will WE be restored to a pre-fall relationship with God but so will CREATION! And that is why we read in our passage of the CENTRALITY that God's promised glory has (or should have) NOT ONLY on the part of the child of God, BUT also on the part of creation

Centrality of Glory on Creation

Let us discuss the centrality of God's promised glory, as described in Romans 8, first ON THE PART OF CREATION.

Romans 8:19, "For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God."

Based on the context, we know that Paul's use of creature/creation in this verse is a reference to everything in the universe that is non-rational; animals, plants, and inanimate things such as stars, mountains, rivers, plains, and seas. Now this leads to the rather strange conclusion that creation has an end-time look about it by which it "longs" and "eagerly awaits" the day when God will grant us His glory. Notice the terminology.

The *earnest expectation/anxious long* is one word in the original. It carries the meaning of *to stretch the head forward*. It carries the idea of straining one's head to see something of great importance. And thus, this passage pictures creation as standing on tiptoes, as it were, as it waiting eagerly.

The term *waiting* here refers to a patient waiting of great anticipation. The form of the Greek verb (present) gives the added connotation of readiness, preparedness, and continuance until the expected event occurs. Together these two phrases give a vivid picture of the hushed expectancy of creation as it awaits the promised revelation of God's glory in the lives of God's children.

Now, some might conclude that Paul is speaking anthropomorphically here, as in the phrase, "The beams sagged in grief over the bombing." Yet it is also possible that this is not simply anthropomorphism, but a description of design! For example, we might use these phrases: "solar panels are designed to track the sun" or "clocks today are designed to wake a person up with an alarm." These are not anthropomorphisms, but part and parcel of design.

Accordingly, just as creation was made to reflect the glory of God, so with the fall we now recognize that it also has been designed to anticipate it! Now, Paul gives a threefold explanation for his words here.

Romans 8:20, "For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope."

Now, as I described in the introduction, creation fell when Adam sinned. And as a result, it became subject to futility or vanity. Now *futility* refers to something that is empty, purposeless, or transitory. It carries the idea of being without success, unable to achieve a goal or purpose. The implication of this is that no part of creation exists as God originally intended. In fact, according to the definition of this word, creation *is bound*; it is unable to fulfill its ultimate purpose. Hendriksen put it this way:

"The creation is subject to arrested development and constant decay. Though it aspires, it is not able fully to achieve. Though it blossoms, it does not reach the point of adequately bearing fruit. It may be compared to a very powerful world-champion boxer or wrestler, who is chained in such a manner that he cannot make use of his tremendous physical prowess."¹

Now it is important to note that creation's futility was not of its own accord. The world was not created by God with a built-in imperfection that hindered it from fulfilling its ultimate end. Rather, creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it: Creation did not curse itself. Rather, it was subjected to slavery. In fact, the wording here points to a single point in time (aorist); which we know in Scripture to be the day when God rendered judgment on account of Adam's sin.² The REASON that creation is described as eagerly awaiting the revelation of God's glory is because through Adam's sin, creation has been robbed of its purpose; it was subjected to futility! And yet, this subjection was "in hope." The creation anticipates the end.

Romans 8:21, "Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

That which is characteristic of creation in this age is slavery to corruption. Henry Lyte described it this way in 1847 that there is "change and decay in all around I see." This change and decay will one day cease, and creation will once again sing of the glory of God unhindered by sin. See, when God reveals His glory in His people, the whole of creation will also benefit as it too will be redeemed! Just as through man's sin, creation became corrupt so also through man's redemption, creation will be redeemed!

This redemption or setting free of creation will entail these things:

- 2 Peter 3:7, 10: says that the universe first is going to be purged by a great fire!
- 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-5: says that this purging will give way to a rejuvenation.

In other words, the fire will not destroy the universe so that nothing remain; it will just eradicate it of all corruption. And this eradication will give way to a glorious renewal in which all that is, will exist in harmony and unity once again!

And thus, though in our world various parts of creation work at cross purposes they choke each other to death and they rob each other of the ability to fully glorify God. In the New Heavens and the New Earth, ALL will work together in perfect harmony, the way God created it, unto the glory of God!

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, New Testament Commentary, Baker Books, ISBN 978-0-8010-2606-5, July 2002, Volume 6 (Romans), page 268

² Compare Genesis 3:17

In fact, speaking of this radical transformation, or better yet, this re-creation when the curse that lies upon creation has been reversed:

- Isaiah 11:6: figuratively says, “And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them.”
- Isaiah 32:15: “Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fertile field and the fertile field is considered as a forest.”
- Isaiah 35:1-2a: “The wilderness and the desert will be glad. And the Arabah (a desert in the Near East) will rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy...”

What an incredible truth. And yet, until this wonderful day and in anticipation of it, the creation will continue to groan.

Romans 8:22, “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.”.

In other words, not just a part of creation, like a sewer or dump, groans, but all of it including the most beautiful parts of it groan and suffer the pains of childbirth. Indeed, on account of man's sinfulness, all of creation has been plunged into a state of corruption with the anticipation that it too will be changed. And therefore it longs for the day that God's promised glory is revealed in man.

In fact, creation *groans* or it makes an audible expression of anguish due to physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. It references the bewailing of a condition that is painful, unsatisfying, and sorrowful- a cry for deliverance from a torturing experience. In fact it is used of the desperate utterance of the Israelites during their bondage in Egypt.

Acts 7:34, “I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.”

And thus, its primary reference is to the utterances of one caught in a dreadful situation with no immediate prospect of deliverance. Now in our context notice that this “groaning” is not a meaningless pain. Rather it is a pain of anticipation, like the pain of childbirth. Indeed, just as a woman going through child birth knows that her pain is not for nothing (at the end there will be something to show for it), likewise creation's groaning has an outlook: The revelation of God's glory in us!

Now notice that creation is said to do this, “Together.” In other words, the stars have joined their voice with the mountains in a litany of grief as they together long for the day of redemption! In this context, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way:

“Nature every year, as it were, makes an effort to renew itself, to produce something permanent; it has come out of the death and the darkness of all that is so true of the Winter. In the Spring it seems to be trying to produce a perfect creation, to be going through some kind of birth-pangs year by year. But unfortunately it does not succeed, for Spring leads only to Summer, whereas Summer leads to Autumn, and Autumn to Winter. Poor old nature tries every year to defeat the 'vanity,' the principle of death and decay and disintegration that is in it. But it

cannot do so. It fails every time. It still goes on trying, as if it feels things should be different and better; but it never succeeds. So it goes on 'groaning and travailing in pain together until now.' It has been doing so for a very long time."³

Indeed, as we look at God's creation, we must see it for what it really is: Bereft of its true purpose, and thus poised and ready for redemption. What an incredible description!

Now this passage paints a graphic picture of creation. Creation is NOT a harmonious unity or a place of innocence. Creation is in conflict as it suffers in futility. One man put it this way:

"All the corruptions of this fallen environment were different in the past from what technology and industry has wrought- but perhaps even more deadly. Certainly disease and death, as well as exposure to the natural elements and disasters, was much greater in the past. And when people were supposedly living nearer to nature, they had less comfort, more pain, harder times, more disease, and died younger. This is not a friendly earth but a violent and dangerous one."⁴

Indeed, environmentalists would have us believe that the world is not fallen or depraved. They speak of creation as our "Mother" whose tainting is the product of man! Yet, God's word tells us that the world

- Is imperfect.
- Is bent on self-destruction except for the grace of God.
- Is marred, tainted, and corrupt.

Now, this is not to say that there is no beauty or grandeur to this world. In fact, all can still behold creation and see God's invisible attributes of eternal power and divine nature.⁵ What it is to say, is that in spite of its magnificence, the world is under the curse of God.

If all that we see in creation is under a curse:

- The mountains.
- The valleys.
- The sunrises and sunsets.
- The plant and animal kingdom.
- A fresh snowfall.
- A cool autumn day.

Can you imagine what the beauty of the New Heavens and New Earth is going to look like- free of the curse? Our brains cannot begin to comprehend this truth!

And so, creation longs to see the revealing of God's glory in us. Now, while this is a personification of creation. We must not pass over Paul's point too quickly. The focus of redemptive history, and thus that to which all is progressing is the restoration of all things!

See, the promised glory that is ours on account of the cross of Christ is NOT a side-attraction for the one who comes to Christ BUT the climax toward which everything in this world is moving. The Second

³ Taken from MacArthur's commentary on *Romans*, Volume 1, page 458.

⁴ MacArthur, page 455

⁵ Compare Romans 1:20

Coming is the central focus of all things! And thus, Paul does not leave this passage without including the child of God in his description of the centrality of our promised glory on the part of the child of God.

Promised Glory on the Part of the Child of God

Romans 8:23, “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.”

The emphasis on “ourselves” tips us off to the fact that Paul considered this verse to be somewhat of a surprise to his readers, “EVEN WE OURSELVES GROAN!” See, that creation groans is understandable, because it is subjected to futility. But that the child of God who has

- Been redeemed by Christ.
- Been adopted into the family of God.
- Been given the first-fruits of the Spirit of God.

And thus, has already, in this life begun their participation in God's salvation. That he should likewise groan within himself is rather shocking at first glance. In fact, we might even be tempted to say that the Christian who groans is guilty of the sin of discontentment!

And yet mark it! It is NOT on account of their sin nature, BUT *BECAUSE* they have the “first fruits of the Spirit” that the child of God groans! See in the Old Testament, the first fruit was a sacrifice offered in the Temple in which the first of the harvest was given to God.⁶ This offering signified two things:

- The whole harvest was God'.
- These were but the *first* of many more offerings that would be made!

Now in this text (and in the New Testament as a whole) Paul slightly changes the imagery and uses the offering as a description of God's work in our life with the implication that there is much more blessing to come! The Holy Spirit is the first of many blessings promised in Christ!

Thus, we who have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, tasted of the heavenly gift, been partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come groan within ourselves and eagerly await the consummation of our salvation when we will enjoy God not in part, but in whole!

We are as the individual sitting in a dump or a sewer trying to appreciate a meal of fine food as much as we might appreciate the meal and the Cook who made it. Our surroundings would severely detract from it all such that we would long to savor the meal in a different place, a better place!

That is what the groaning and eager anticipation of the child of God is all about. As those saved by the cross of Christ we agonize over

- The appalling manifestations and consequences of sin.
- The iniquity of our day.
- The weakness of our flesh.

⁶ Compare Leviticus 23:10-11

- Natural disaster.

And thus we long for God's promised glory when the sin, curse, and corruption of this world and ourselves will be done away! As ones who have been redeemed by the Cross of Christ and tasted of the glory and the riches to come in Christ and yet, who live in a fallen and corrupt world we long for the consummation of God's promised glory! And thus far from God's promised glory being a side-attraction in our walk with God God's promised glory is the CENTRAL Focus of our lives!

Now Brothers and Sisters, there is much that can be said by way of application from this verse such as

- The nature of the care we ought to give to God's creation- in contrast to the animist or environmentalist who treat this world as a god.
- The importance of appreciating the beauty of creation, and not worshiping it.

Yet, these miss the main point of this verse! As children of God, one's who have been redeemed by the cross of Christ the anticipation of God's glory must be foremost in our minds!

- Romans 5:2: speaking of the child of God, "...and we exult in hope of the glory of God."
- Galatians 5:5: "For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness."
- 1 Thessalonians 5:8: "But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on... as a helmet, the hope of salvation."
- Titus 2:11-13: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

See, the outlook that should characterize all in Christ is the look of anticipation regarding the Second Coming of Christ wherein we shall be glorified with Him. In fact, one of the commands that Christ gave His people as it relates to the Second coming of Christ was the exhortation to "watch."⁷ Now this does NOT mean that as prophets we scrutinize the activity of Israel, and note their relative progress at rebuilding the temple. Rather, it means that we live in light of our future redemption!

Romans 13:11-13, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."

And thus, in a day in which eternity has been replaced with the PRESENT; when

- The mentality of most is, "Buy today, pay tomorrow- if it gets here."
- Our culture's motto is, "Just do it!"- regardless of the consequences.
- If your marriage is rough and you want a divorce, never mind tomorrow, "Just do it."
- If someone rubs you in the wrong way such that you never want to see them again, never mind tomorrow, "Just do it."
- If the quality of life has given way to quantity and you want out, "Just do it!"

⁷ Compare Matthew 26:41

In fact, eternity is so far from the minds of most that companies now have the audacity to guarantee their products forever! We must live in light of eternity- in light of the truth that

- What we do today as God's people effects eternity!
- The choices we make today will ripple beyond, into the life to come: will we therefore
 - Redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16)?
 - Number our days (Psalm 90:12)?
 - Live in light of eternity?

In the Bible, that which separates God's people from fallen humanity is not our virtue, perfection, or sinless living BUT, among other things, our OUTLOOK and HOPE! Colossians 1:27 describes the gospel as, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That is the message our text. Let us therefore leave this passage with the anticipation of God's glory chief in our lives!

The unifying theme of most world-views today is the denial of eternity! As children of God we must be careful that we not defile ourselves by eating the food of the Babylonians but rather, live in light of God's word and the message therein:

- We are eternal beings.
- Saved for eternity.
- With the hope of the revealing of the Promised Glory of God!

That is the Central focus of creation, and that must be the focus of our lives as well!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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