

Romans

Romans Chapter Eight

Romans 8:18-25

January 2, 2011

This is lesson number 71 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

“What the elect hope for.”

Romans 8:18-25

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.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

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. 24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

In the last study we saw that the irrational creation groans in eager expectation of the revelation of the sons of God. I called my lesson
“Groaning to be Glorified.”

The ‘whole creation’ in verse 22 is the non-rational creation.

The ‘whole creation’ cannot include the **good angels** because they were never subjected to ‘futility’ and they will never suffer decay or corruption.

The ‘whole creation’ cannot include **Satan and his demons**.

They are ruled out, for they will never be set free, nor will they be glorified.

Romans

The ‘whole creation’ verse 22, cannot include all those people who will never be saved, the **non-elect**.

And the ‘whole creation’ cannot include the **elect** because they are dealt with separately in vs. 23-25. “Not only that...”

When you exclude these four groups [good angels, demons, lost men, and saved men] all that is left is the animate and inanimate **irrational creation** or non-rational, subhuman creation.

We looked at several Scriptures where the writer ascribes human qualities to non-rational things like rivers and trees and animals. So Paul personifies the ‘whole creation’ and says it is with earnest expectation, with outstretched head, craning forward, eagerly looking forward to the revelation of the sons of God.

Today we will take up the ‘we’ in verses 23-25 who also groan for the complete adoption, the redemption of our body.

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.

Today’s message is called, **“What the elect hope for.”**

There are a lot of people who are put off and even offended when a preacher starts to talk about God’s sovereign choice in election and predestination. I am simply going to follow the example of Scripture when it does not attempt to ‘prove’ there is a God. God is simply presented.

“In the beginning God created....”

So when we preach about election and predestination we simply preach what the Bible says about God. If a person wishes to deny God’s sovereign choice in election he will have to rip out Chapter Nine of Romans and Chapter One of Ephesians and many other pages of Scripture.

Only man’s sinful pride is offended by the sovereignty of God.

What our text tells us is that at the end of the ‘present time’ {18}, the whole creation along with the elect will be glorified. The whole creation and the elect of

Romans

God will be released from the bondage of sin and death and decay and the 'we,' the elect, will be publicly revealed to be the sons of God.

It seems necessary to me to comment on the **eschatology** assumed here in this text. Eschatology is the doctrine of last things. Eschatology is about is going to happen immediately before and after Jesus Christ returns?

Paul has already hinted at matters of eschatology in previous verses in Romans. I will not go back to them now but will bring them in when we get to Chapters 9, 10, and 11 so we can see how consistent is Paul when we explain 11:26,

“and so all Israel will be saved,....”

But I can't adequately explain today's text about 'Christian hope' without pointing out the eschatological view that it assumes.

My eschatology is very simple. It would not take eight or more volumes, of fiction, such as the "Left Behind" series to explain what I believe. Here it is.

My complete eschatology can be stated in one sentence.

There is the 'present time,' the return of Jesus Christ, and there is the 'end of the age.' That's it!

That is not very sensational and that won't sell many books but that is all I can find in the Bible about **eschatology**.

But Jim, what about the 'rapture' of the church and the thousand-year millennium when Christ reigns on earth and the binding of Satan?

Let's hold that for Chapter 11.

Let me give you a lesson on inventing a new eschatology.

The eschatology that I oppose is called Dispensationalism and is less than 200 years old.

Romans

Here's how to invent a system of eschatology: First you decide on a theory of last things. Assemble your preconceived notions and then find a line of Scripture that can be lifted out of its context and pile all of your imagination on top of that one thought.

That one thought is that the 'thousand-year reign' of Christ must be a literal 1000 years on earth **before** the end of time.

Next you take the only reference in the Bible to a thousand-year reign of Christ. You find it in Revelation 20. You take the only reference to a 'thousand-year reign' of Christ in Chapter 20 of Revelation and impose on it a lot of unscriptural assumptions and the result is a very complicated and confusing eschatology. You can then sensationalize it and sell millions of books and make some movies too.

Revelation is largely a symbolic book and especially chapter 20. How then, can anyone logically insist that one thing, the thousand-year reign, is literal and all or most of the rest of the chapter is symbolic?

Then you compound the assumption that the thousand-year reign of Christ must be a literal one thousand-year period by imposing a group of Old Testament prophecies on the New Testament.

You interpret the New Testament with the Old Testament. That is simply backwards. We must interpret the Old Testament with the New Testament.

As I said, I will fully develop the eschatology of Romans when we get to Chapter Eleven, but consider what our text today tells us.

I am fully aware that it is impossible to prove a doctrine by silence in Scripture but if there is to be a literal thousand-year reign of Christ before glorification I believe Paul would have put it right here.

There is a time for groaning and expectation and there is glory.
There is the 'present time' and glory. That's all there is.

Now let's look at vs. 23-25. Who are the 'we'?

Romans

Not only does the sub-human creation groan for the glorious liberty of the children of God but **‘we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit...’**

It is not difficult to see who the ‘we’ are in this verse.

Who has Paul been talking about all along?

8:1 “...the ‘we’ who are in Christ Jesus.”

8:5 “...the ‘we’ who live according to the Spirit.”

8:14 “...the ‘we’ who are led by the Spirit of God...”

8:15 “...the ‘we’ who cry our ‘Abba Father.’ ”

8:16 “...the ‘we’ whom the Spirit bears witness with their spirit.”

8:17 “...the ‘we’ who are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.”

Those are the ‘we’ in verse 23. Later in this chapter and especially in Chapter 9, Paul tells us how the ‘we’ came to be included in the ‘sons of God.’ The ‘we’ were chosen by the sovereign God!

Since the ‘we’ already have the Spirit of God dwelling in them they are convinced that there is much more promised. In spite of anything that we may experience in the ‘present time’ there is the hope of glory.

Many commentators make the groaning in verse 23 refer back to the cry of the wretched man in 7:24. But the man in 7:24 is a man who is trying to be sanctified through the law and is not the mature Christian who knows **there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.**

How could he make that cry if he is convinced that he is no longer subject to punishment for his sin?

But what are the ‘firstfruits of the Spirit?’

Firstfruits clearly refer to the Old Testament worship in the law for the Israelites to give God the first of their increase be it crops or cattle or wine or oil.

Exodus 23:19

The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 18:4

The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him.

Romans

Israel offered its firstfruits to God. But so does God Himself give the ‘firstfruits of the Spirit’ to the Israel of God, who is the seed of Abraham, by grace through faith.

This is not just a small portion of the Holy Spirit to be followed by a ‘second blessing’ of some spiritual gift. This is the fulness of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

That this is not a portion of the Holy Spirit can be seen by comparing Ephesians 1:13-14

13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

It is the Holy Spirit Himself who is the ‘firstfruits of the Spirit.’ The Holy Spirit comes to us when we are baptized by the Spirit {6:3} in the new birth.

We have the guarantee of our inheritance until the day of the redemption of our bodies. We have the sure hope of complete salvation and glory when Christ returns.

But now there is groaning. What is this groaning?

The whole creation groans together with the children of God.

Think about the subhuman creation that is struggling for its very survival.

There are earthquakes and floods and the beasts of the wild are tooth and claw in a constant quest for food. E.g., a National Geographic series, “great Migrations,” is excellent if you can filter out the evolutionary bias.

So do the children of God face every imaginable kind of suffering.

The subhuman creation is “craning its neck” to see the revealing of the sons of God. So do the children of God wait for the redemption of their bodies in perseverance. The dear children of God have the firstfruits of the Spirit.

Romans

So we groan. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. We desire to be obedient to Christ. But sin continues to seek a starting point and tries to ruin our testimony.

Jesus told Peter: Luke 22:31-32

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

And if you are one of His sheep Jesus is praying for you right now {34}.

God keeps us but we dare not presume on God's grace.
We will endure to the end; but we will be groaning and persevering in hope.

Verse 15, 16 says that we are already adopted as children of God. But we are not yet glorified. We are not yet on public display as trophies of God's grace. In the 'present time' our bodies are subject to suffering and death but on that great resurrection morning when all the saints of God will rise we will have a new and glorified body that new body will be like the glorified body of Jesus. **There is hope!**

24 For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope;
for why does one still hope for what he sees?

Christian hope is not what we normally mean by 'hope.'

Wife asks husband, "Will you get a bonus this year?" "I hope so."
They want the bonus, they need the bonus, but they are not absolutely certain they will get the bonus.

But that is not Christian hope. Christian hope is the absolute assurance that God can and will keep His promise to His dear children.

Verse 24 in the KJV is simply not a good translation.
It says we are 'saved by hope.'
But Paul has not changed his theology of grace.

Romans

Cf. 3:22, 26, 28; 4:5, 16; 5:1 and many other references, especially Ephesians 2:8 “**For by grace you have been saved through faith....**”

Every other good translation says ‘saved in this hope.’

Children of God are saved at different times and under different circumstances but everyone who is saved has the promise of more to follow.

There is hope! And this hope is absolute assurance.

If you are saved you were chosen by God before the foundation of the world; drawn by the Father; regenerated by the Spirit; and justified by the precious blood of Jesus. And you are now living under the influence of the Holy Spirit who is sanctifying you.

There is hope that is seen. And that is no longer hope.

“but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?”

There is hope that is seen?

Remember that Chapter 8 is about assurance based on what Jesus has already done for His people.

We know that our righteousness is in Jesus Christ. **Assurance!**

That is hope that is seen!

We know that God justifies the ungodly. And so I have “all the fitness He requireth, just to feel my need of Him.” **Assurance!**

That is hope that is seen!

But hope that is seen is not hope.

But there is hope that is not seen. We are saved in hope of the return of Jesus and the redemption of our body at the end of the ‘present time.’

The conclusion in verse 25 is beautiful.

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

Romans

There is groaning and there is eager anticipation and there is **perseverance**.

Calvin says, “All that the Gospel promises concerning the glory of the resurrection vanishes away, unless we spend our present life bearing with patience the cross and tribulation.”

The Christian hope is the anchor of the soul. Hebrews 6:19-20

19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, 20 where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Paul’s argument is that when you can see what you hope for it is no longer hope. You have the assurance of faith in Jesus Christ.

But remember you were **saved in this hope**. You are absolutely convinced that Jesus is your Savior, but you are not yet glorified.

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

Paul says the same thing in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,¹⁸ 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.

So dear saint keep on groaning in the sure hope that God will do as He promised. And you will **eagerly wait for it with perseverance**.

Are you living under the influence of the Holy Spirit?

Do you have this Christian hope?

Do you have the absolute assurance that Jesus is your Savior?