

Freedom from the Evil of Afflictions, 1  
*Christian Liberty*  
By Bob Vincent

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**Bible Text:** Romans 8:18-39  
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*Lord, unless you fill me with your Holy Spirit, words drawn from my own intellect and emotions, natural abilities will do no one good, but we believe your promise that you will accompany the reading and the proclamation of your word with your Spirit, and so we pray for that. Lord, hear our prayer. Lord, help us. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen.*

I'd call your attention to a statement printed in your bulletin, and this is what I've been preaching from now for five sermons, and that's from our *Confession of Faith*, chapter 20, paragraph 1. Maybe we would like to read it out loud together.

**“The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists** in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law, and **in their being delivered** from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from **the evil of afflictions**, the sting of death, the victory of the grave and everlasting damnation, as also in their free access to God and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear but a childlike love and willing mind.”

Rusty, if you would put up that set of statements by Scott Peck.

Many years ago, when I was counseling someone, he told me, he said you must have read *The Road Less Traveled*. And I said, I don't know the book you're talking about. And he said it's by M. Scott Peck, Peck, MD, who is a Harvard trained psychiatrist. And so, it intrigued me, and I went and bought the book and discovered that Peck was saying many things that I was saying, and that is because Peck, though he said he was somewhat of a Buddhist and somewhat of a Christian, discovered in the Bible basic biblical truths that people tend to ignore. And so, this is from his book, *The Road Less Traveled*, and I'm going to read it as Rusty puts it up there.

“Life is difficult.

"This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult, once we truly understand and accept it, then life is no longer difficult because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters."

And we'll just leave that quote up there. It's such a great quote, and it fits very much with the passage of scripture I just read. Life is difficult and that's clearly what St. Paul tells us here in Romans 8, beginning in verse 18, "I consider that our present sufferings," our present sufferings. When will our present sufferings end?

They will end when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, and it won't be until then. And you see, he says in verse 20, Romans 8:20, "the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."

It's very obvious as we live in this world that we're in the bondage to decay. No matter what I do, trying to make my body work well, I can't make it work exactly the way I want it to work. It used to work better than it works, but there's still aches and pains, and as we age, those aches and pains tend to get worse.

Our ability to think clearly diminishes as we age. I have to pause and think, "Wait a minute. Why did I come in the room? Oh, I know I came in the room. I need to go to the bathroom."

And so, as we age, we experience this bondage to decay, and we need to understand that at the moment Adam and Eve sinned against God, that bondage to decay began. It began in the two of them in the profoundest way. First evidence that they died that day, because God said in the strongest possible way to say it in Hebrew grammar, "Dying you will die" (מִוֹת תָּמָוֶת) (Genesis 2:17).

They died that day. How do we know that? Blame-shifting. Blame-shifting. Are you a blame-shifter? I am. Whenever there's something going on, I want to blame somebody else. Don't you? That's part of the bondage to decay. That's why every marriage is in trouble without exception.

And that very day, you'll remember what happens, they begin to blame each other. In fact, Adam is the most arrogant of all. He's the one who knew what he was doing when he sinned (1 Timothy 2:14). Poor Eve was gullible and

beguiled and didn't really realize the full import of what she was doing, but Adam did. And what does he do? He blames God.

"It's the woman you gave me" (Genesis 3:12). He's blaming God. "You're the one that's caused me to have all this trouble. If it wasn't for this woman, I wouldn't be in this mess. I wouldn't have done what I did if you hadn't given me, if you hadn't given me . . . this woman."

And of course, the other thing that happens is they grab fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). You ever grab fig leaves? You know what fig leaves represent psychologically? It represents the need to cover ourselves, to cover ourselves, to cover up, to hide ourselves, not to let anybody really see inside ourselves.

This morning as I was opening the service and praying, you saw a little bit of me, more than I normally reveal. You saw a frustrated side of me, and I get frustrated. Now, not all frustration and anger is sinful. When Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple, was he just laid back, and it doesn't make any difference? "Okay, guys, whatever y'all want to do." He was frustrated (John 2:13-17).

I'm frustrated with my country. I've never been more frustrated with my country than I am right now. And I'm frustrated with the church. I didn't say this church, though it includes this church. I'm frustrated with the church.

As I travel around and visit churches, this is what I see happened. World War I was the biggest mistake this country ever got involved in. It was none of our business. We got involved in a fight between inbred first cousins. Do you realize that? That war was fought between inbred first cousins, and it wasn't our business, and it brought terrible results on our country.

Our country changed radically after World War I, and eventually certain things began to happen and by World War II, you see, God chastened us with what changes began in America after World War I.

When we went into the Roaring 20s, which in part was due to young GI's coming back from Europe, he chastened us with the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl and other things, and World War II brought a sort of revival, but not a revival.

It was a revival of church building but not a revival of the Spirit of God coming down and changing people's hearts.

People came back and wanted to build a better America, "Build back Better," but there wasn't a great awakening, and so what happened?

One of the things that happened in America was the death of the prayer meeting. People used to spend the whole day on the Lord's Day in public worship and in public praying. That's what my friend Daniel Situka told me, who was an African, who travels back and forth between Africa and Houston. I have known Daniel for years, even before I came into the EPC. Daniel said, "Bob, in Africa we look forward to getting to church really early and we begin to pray, and we begin to worship the Lord, and then there's preaching, and there's a break, and people will pray, and then they'll eat together and fellowship together, and then we gather again for worship and prayer, and we spend the whole day in worship. And then because people sometimes have to walk, we head out before dark." Struck with that .

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What happened in America is the rise of the individual as a law unto himself. Individualism, "Just me and my Bible. That's all I need. Me and my Bible, and I don't need to worry about going to church. I don't need to worry about praying together with other Christians. I can pray to God right here."

And you know you can. You can pray to God in your bathroom, in your bedroom, in your den, but there's something about praying with other Christians. And what happened in America is really praying with expectation that somebody was on the other end of the line listening—that disappeared. What happened to the American church was what began before World War I and what used to be called German unbelief, because of the influence of German universities on theological students. And it came to America, and when people lost confidence that this book is God's infallible word, then they lost confidence in prayer.

You see, that's what we've got to have and what's wrong in America is churches get together, but rarely do they get together really to pray.

I'm struck with what I've been reading about Asbury, that this younger generation that we're all worried about tracking and checking and seeing where sometimes a grandchild is not when I think they should be, this younger generation, that's what's happening at Asbury. It's the younger generation and the younger generation is what?

Praying and crying out to God and interceding. And you know what the thing that angers me the most as I read about it, is the carping criticism of some conservative Presbyterians.

"Well, that couldn't be revival. Those are women involved in speaking. That couldn't be revival because they're Arminians." And you know, dear ones, I'll just say one thing: When God raised up the greatest prophet of the Old

Testament—who was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament? Moses’ successor, Elijah, who met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses representing the law, and Elijah representing the prophets. He was the greatest of all the prophets.

He didn’t come to a conservative part of the world. The conservative place was Judah, Judea. The southern kingdom was the conservative place. The southern kingdom was where worship was done exactly the way it ought to be done in God’s holy temple where God caused his name to dwell (Deuteronomy 12:11).

Where did Elijah go? Where was Elijah raised up to go? He was raised up to go to the Yankees, to the northern kingdom. The northern kingdom was an apostate kingdom from the very beginning when Jeroboam the great—or Jeroboam the first, led the secession away from the house of David.

From the very beginning he decided, “I need to come up with a better plan of worship, otherwise the people are going to be tempted to go back to Jerusalem.” (1 Kings 12:26) And so he invented a way of worship. He appointed people as priests who wanted to be priests (1 Kings 12:31), maybe pay a little money (2 Chronicles 13:9).

His worship was an abomination to God, and yet that’s where the great revival came. One of the greatest moments of revival that ever happened among God’s Old Testament people happened at Mount Carmel when Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal. You remember the event. I won’t go into detail with it, but the point I want to make is that was a stupendous and an amazing act of revival.

When Elijah said to the people, “How long will you halt between two opinions? If Baal is God serve him, but if Yahweh is God serve him.” (1 Kings 18:21) And then he challenged them, “The God who answers with fire, he is God” (1 Kings 18:24).

And you know what happened, people tried to work up emotionally. You can’t work up emotion to create revival. Emotion doesn’t build into revival any more than intellect builds to revival. It’s a sovereign act of God.

And so, what happens? All the prophets of Baal, who was a god of sex and fertility, they’re there and they’ve done their thing and they’re dancing around and they’re cutting themselves with knives. (Whenever people cut them themselves, recognize there’s something demonic behind it.) So, they’re cutting themselves. They’re lancing themselves. The blood is

flowing. “O Baal, hear us! O Baal, hear us!” Dancing and crying out and yelping and yelling and screaming, “O Baal, hear us!” (1 Kings 18:25-28).

But nobody answered, and then Elijah, you know, he was very polite. He didn’t want to offend people. He began to tease them. “So, shout louder! Maybe use this. maybe that.” And he even throws in there, “Maybe he’s had to go to the bathroom,” which is actually what he hints at in the Hebrew (1 Kings 18:27, *siyg*, שִׁיג).

And finally, when everything is said and done, with water poured over the offering for the Lord, he simply at the time of the evening sacrifice says, “O Yahweh, hear me” (1 Kings 18:37). And you know what happened? The fire of God fell down and consumed not only the offering but the wood and the very stones and licked up the water in the trough (1 Kings 18:38).

The greatest revival in the Old Testament occurred in an apostate nation with an apostate church.

We should never forget it, but we live in a world where life is difficult, where there are great needs, and we’re overwhelmed by it, and that’s not going to end until Christ comes again, and you see, God has willed that the effect of Adam and Eve’s sin would be visited on us for one fundamental purpose. Why has God allowed the curse of Adam and Eve’s sin to be visited on your marriage? On your finances? On your children and grandchildren? On your nation? Why has he allowed that? You see what he’s done?

He’s subjected it, we’re told in verse 20, “in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into glorious freedom of the children of God.” The first thing we need to remember is that the evil that we see in this world with all of its afflictions, has a divine purpose that for those who trust in Christ, the **evil** of afflictions is removed.

Now notice in verse 22, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we await eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

You see, that’s our blessed hope, isn’t it? That we’re going to rise from the dead. These bodies that within...Iona isn’t here today, but within 50 years, maybe 80 years at the most, everyone of us is going to be worm food. That’s a sobering thought, isn’t it? Worm food. Worm food. Worm food (Isaiah 14:11; Job 17:14; 21:26). This mortal flesh is going to rot and decay. Our brains are going to rot. Every part of us is going to rot. And no matter what

skill the Undertaker has—I've never seen a corpse yet who looked like he was asleep. Hmm, that's where our bodies are going.

But dear ones, there's coming a day when the trumpet will sound, when the archangel will shout. That's when we'll be liberated from that (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and we wait for the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23).

And then he says in verse 24, "For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

Now why are we waiting and waiting patiently? For the renewal of the earth, for this end of this groaning within ourselves. Part of that groaning is the realization that I want to be better than I am. I want to be able to respond to evil in the world in a better way than I do. I don't want to be angry and frustrated at the world around me. I want to live a life of self-sacrifice, especially with those I love the most—never to telegraph irritation.

I'm waiting for that but notice what he says in verse 26, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

Now, you've probably heard me tell the story of the death of my brother, and I will never forget that day. I was at my office going about my business as I normally do, studying, answering phone calls, when suddenly the phone rang, and it was Sandy, and she was sobbing, and she was sobbing so much I couldn't understand, not only what she was saying, but I didn't know who it was: my own wife. And so, I said, "Who is this?" because it was obviously an extremely distraught, very emotionally upset, broken person, and she said,

"This is your wife. Marie called. Your brother is dead." And what did I do? I dropped the phone. I fell on the floor of the office, and I began to howl. I groaned and howled and wept and wailed because it was so overwhelming. My grief was the greatest grief I have ever known because it was sudden. You expect to bury your parents, you don't expect to bury your only sibling. It was the most agonizing moment in my life. I groaned and groaned and groaned.

Well, I want us to understand something about groaning. As we see here, the Spirit groans within us. He says in verse 26, in the second sentence, “We do not know what we ought to pray for.”

That’s why dependence on the Holy Spirit is so essential to everything we do. Following the liturgy is wonderful, praying the Lord’s Prayer is wonderful, for it’s a guide for the basic things we should be praying for, but ultimately, we need the leadership of the Holy Spirit when we pray.

Do you ever experience the leading of the Holy Spirit when you pray? If you pray a lot, you begin to experience that, and people for whom prayer is merely intellectual—I would to God that every Christian would learn to listen to the voice of the Spirit, because it’s not hearing words in our tympanic membranes, vibrating those membranes, it’s in our heart of hearts, having a sense, a direction, how we ought to pray.

And when you pray for people regularly, you begin to know what’s going on in their lives. Why? The Spirit leads you when you pray, how to pray for people. That’s why I know you, because I pray for you, and as I pray for you, the Spirit leads Sandy and me, as we pray together for you—you begin to have a sense they’re struggling with this right now. We need to pray for them. He’s struggling with this right now. We need to pray for him. She’s struggling with this right now. We need to pray for her. The Spirit leads us when we pray, and sometimes the Holy Spirit manifests himself in a way that makes people think we’re crazy.

You remember that’s what happened on the day of Pentecost. It was 9:00 o’clock in the morning when the Spirit came with power on the church of Jesus Christ after Christ had ascended to heaven. And 10 days later he poured out in baptism—baptism can mean pouring out—and the Spirit baptized the church as he was poured on the church and people saw it.

“This is amazing.” Some people were excited, “This is wonderful. Listen, they’re speaking wonderful things about God. I’m hearing them in my own language!”

And other people looked at it and said, “These people are plum crazy.” They were like some Presbyterians I know, some ultra-Reformed people I know who are so carping in their criticism about anything that God might have done in history that they are completely oblivious and end up becoming enemies of what God is doing.

May Almighty God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit deliver each of us here from having that attitude. If we have an attitude of contempt for the move of



the Spirit of God, not only will we miss it, but we will bring down judgment on our own heads. I don't want to be that person.

So, what happens when the Spirit comes on a person? What he says here is that he intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. Wow, I think about my own experience in my brother's death. I wasn't articulating any words to God. I knew that the man that I had always looked up to—because my brother was eight years older than I was, I'd always looked up to him. I'd always thought well of him. I admired him. I thought that he would be alive today. But at the age of 46, he dropped dead with a massive heart attack, and I groaned. I didn't groan any specific words. It was just an inner agony of, "O God! Ohhhhhh!"

The Holy Spirit, sometimes when we pray, doesn't give us articulate words to say, but he just moves on us with a great passion, a great burden, a great longing. It's something of what I felt as I came in here today.

I'm looking out over people who are dying. I'm looking out over a church that is typical of the churches I'm responsible for in the state of Texas. And what is that? No real gathering together for intercessory prayer. No groaning and travailing as in birth for God to birth something good. And it is so grievous to my soul because I love you.

You need a pastor who lives here. We haven't been able to find anybody yet. I wonder why? Does that bother you? I'm willing to come here until I'm no longer able to travel because I love you.

When my father was dying in the hospital in the Rapides Regional Hospital, in 1987, I was by his side the whole day, except for the early morning when I had to go to a session meeting. I was with him at the moment of death.

But I don't want to be with you at the moment of your death. I want to see God do something here in this place. Something extraordinary. And what would that be manifesting itself fundamentally in? Groaning. Travailing. Child birthing prayer. Child birthing prayer.

I've been present at the birth of four of my children—my second daughter was too fast for me—and one of the grandchildren being born. And what does a woman do when she's giving birth? She groans. She cries out because birthing a baby is for a male unimaginable. I don't know what it's like. Is it like having kidney stones? Is it like this? Is it like that? I don't know. I'll never know.

But groaning and travailing in giving birth is an amazing thing, and Dear ones, that is exactly what the Holy Spirit does when he comes and moves us in power to pray.

I want us to know something of what's happening in Kentucky. Do you know one of the amazing things that's happening there?

There was a Roman Catholic priest who was chaplain of a Roman Catholic high school not far away, and he went there, and he began to describe what he was seeing, and he saw many of his former students gathering in there crying out to God, praising God, travailing in prayer, "Lord, do this. Lord, do that."

I'll tell you this: I do believe that doctrine matters, and I'm a Calvinist because I believe that system of doctrine is what in essence is taught in scripture. But doctrine that leads us to hold other groups in contempt is of the devil. I look back at my own ancestry, descended from five Baptist and four Methodist preachers and one Presbyterian because the daughter of a pastor married a pastor.

You don't think you can cooperate with an evangelical Methodist? My grandmother's father was a Methodist pastor. Did they believe the same basic truths? Yes. We need to never be people who major on the minors and minor on the majors. We need to major on the basic truths that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried and the third day he rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-5), and that if we are to make it to heaven, we must cast ourselves on God's mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ, turn in repentance and faith to him (Luke 18:10-14; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 10:8-11). Can I cooperate with everyone who believes that? If I can't there's, something wrong with me.

Our nation's dying. It really is dying. Our public schools have become a septic tank of corruption, destroying the hearts and minds of little children. Are there godly Christian teachers in the public system? Of course, and they're doing their best to hold back the flood of iniquity, but the flood of iniquity is there.

And if you think that on the issues that matter most, there wasn't a dime's worth of difference between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, you just haven't studied well enough. Both men are a judgment on our nation. God's judging America and the signs are all around.

My only hope for America is that what's happening at Asbury College, University would be, in truth genuine, where people evidently are confessing

their sins and repenting and crying out to God, and where Christians are coming together across denominational lines, and people are even coming from as far away as Africa and Korea because they sense the presence of God.

In the first Great Awakening where God used Jonathan Edwards, the founder of the college of New Jersey, a Presbyterian minister, and George Whitfield, who was an Englishman, who was a Calvinistic Methodist, and who used John Wesley and Charles. People would describe phenomena like this. “I was riding in my wagon, and I passed Trinity Church in Texarkana, Texas (Of course, Texarkana didn't exist when the First Great Awakening took place. I said this to connect my congregation.), and I sensed the power and presence of God so powerfully that I pulled my buggy to a stop, and I got out, and when I got out, I felt compelled to fall on my face before God and to repent of my sins and to cry out, ‘God change me! Give me a new heart, a loving heart!’”

That happened in the first Great Awakening. It also happened in the second Great Awakening. The only reason America came into existence is because of the first Great Awakening. The only reason that Great Britain didn't end up like France where kings had their heads chopped off is because of the Great Awakening, where God used John Wesley and Charles Wesley and Daniel Rowland and George Whitfield and others to stir people. They abandoned the traditional role of the church.

“Oh, you've got to preach from a pulpit, and you've got to follow the prayer book.”

What did they do? They went out where the workers were, where coal miners were digging and coming out of the coal mines, and they preached Christ, and they offered the Lord Jesus Christ to poor people exactly the way he's offered in the gospel. They invited poor people to come to Christ. You see, it's always been the problem of the church, particularly of certain types of churches, that we don't really want stinky, nasty, filthy, really poor people to come in.

“They might sit in my pew, and then I'd have to get my Lysol out.” There's a problem even in the first century church. James writes about a rich man comes in, “You sit here. Poor man, you can sit down there, or you stand over there.” (James 2:3)

What happened in the Great Awakening in England, in Wales and Scotland? They took the gospel out of the stupid building, and they took it into the highways and byways and people were converted. Coal miners with tears

streaming down their faces sought God. And God changed England and God changed Wales. And there was another Great Awakening that occurred in the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Wales. Would to God, we would see it again.

May we pray.

*Lord, teach us to pray with a howling, groaning, travailing work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts because what we all need is true revival and renewal. Do it again, Lord, because we're desperate. Our nation is dying, our civilization is dying, our churches are dying, and Lord, the only thing is the coming of the Spirit of God who can make these dry bones live (Ezekiel 37). And we pray for that in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*