

## Hope Romans 8:22-27

Have you ever wondered if you have believed in vain? Have you thought, “if I am really saved, why do I have so many trials? Why isn’t the world a safer place for me?” If you were to imagine what life would be like for the Christians of the world it would not be one of pain and death. If you were to imagine a life that is to have the blessings of perfect peace and happiness it would not be a world with death and sorrow. It would be a world where you would feel secure and where there would be no fear of what or who could harm you.

Like Christians today, the members of the Church of Rome had challenges and questions. If the Holy Spirit really came on the day of Pentecost, why are there still problems? If Jesus is coming back as He said why hadn’t He made it back already? Why are there problems in the church? Why? Why? Why? There is no wonder that so many people doubt. We ask the same questions today. Brenda, you tell us over and over again that I received the Holy Spirit at my baptism, but what difference has the Holy Spirit made in my life? We look around and see fields of churches and still there is pain and suffering. You dare to tell us to support the denomination, but how do we know that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have the true faith? There are all kinds of Christian groups and most are saying the others have it wrong and they are the better way! If the Holy Spirit working on our behalf, where is the difference in the world? There are still wars...there is still poverty....there is still injustice...there are still the isms of the world that make some be the haves and others be the have nots! How can you say that God has given us salvation and the Holy Spirit and the world is in this situation?

In light of the questions and situations of the world in which they lived, Paul wrote to the Roman Christians that “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.” When God finished Creation it was a good Creation (Gen. 1:31); but today it is a groaning Creation. There is suffering and death; there is pain, all the result of sin. Paul used words like suffering (Rom. 8:18), vanity (Rom. 8:20), bondage (Rom. 8:21), decay (Rom. 8:21), and pain (Rom. 8:22) to describe the plight of creation. However, this groaning is not a useless thing: Paul compared it to a woman in travail. There is pain, but the pain will end when the child is delivered. Paul had never experienced childbirth, but he did understand that it was painful and at times seemed unbearable. Paul may have been at his sister’s home when she gave birth to his nephew. He knew the sounds and the worries and the fears that gripped a first century household when a baby was being born. There was the fear and the possibility that the mother and/or the child would die. But he also knew the joy of the household when the pain had ended and the new member of the family had safely arrived and both mother and newborn were resting from their ordeal! Paul said Creation itself is having labor pains, but there will come a day for which we hope when all will be joy and completion. One day creation will be delivered, and the groaning creation will become a glorious creation!

Christian also groan and have “present sufferings” but this will all be forgotten when our joy is full. We have the first fruits of the Spirit, which we each received at our baptism. This means that the Holy Spirit is “the first fruits” of God’s work of salvation and re-creation in Christians. In Ephesians 1:14 the Holy Spirit is called “a deposit or down payment guaranteeing our inheritance,” and a foretaste of the glory to come. The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains it this way: a farmer’s “first fruits” were the initial harvesting of his first-ripened crops. This first installment was a foretaste and promise that more harvest was to come. Just as the

nation of Israel tasted the first fruits of Canaan when the spies returned (Num. 13:23–27), so we Christians have tasted of the blessings of heaven through the ministry of the Spirit. In a similar way the Holy Spirit, indwelling in Christians, is a foretaste that we will enjoy many more blessings, including living in God's presence forever.

Because of “present sufferings” (Rom. 8:18) we Christians, like the Creation, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as children of God and this makes us want to live with Him and serve Him forever. This “adoption” describes our relationship to God as a result of God's grace received by faith. In one sense each of us has already received the adoption because we have “received the Spirit of adoption,” and we are children of God (Gal. 4:6-7). But, we Christians still anticipate our adoption in its completeness, giving us our adult standing and full inheritance in God's family.

God has promised that we will finally be delivered from sin and its effects by the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. Those of us who respond by faith to that promise have hope. Things are not as they will be, but we eagerly anticipated with steadfast patience and endurance in our present sufferings. The Christian does not focus on today's sufferings; but looks forward to tomorrow's glory (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:15–18). Today's groaning bondage will be exchanged for tomorrow's glorious liberty!

Meanwhile, we wait and hope. “That blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). The best is yet to come! The Christian does not get frustrated as he or she sees and experiences suffering and pain in this world. We know that the temporary suffering will one day give way to eternal glory.

This scripture also points out that Christians are not left to our own resources in our sufferings and groaning. The Spirit helps us in our weakness. It is not that the

Spirit helps in those occasional times when we Christians are weak. Because our state is always one of weakness, the Spirit continually helps us. The Greek word used for “Helps” is the idea of someone helping another carry a heavy load.

One evidence of our weakness is the fact that Christians do not know what we ought to pray. In our weakness both the content and the manner of proper prayer eludes us, but the Holy Spirit comes to our rescue and intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. Natural Creation groans (Rom. 8:22) and Christians groan (v. 23), and so does the Holy Spirit. This groaning is done by the Holy Spirit, not Christians, and is not stated in words, but nevertheless intercedes on our behalf before God. “Intercedes” means “approaches or appeals to someone.” The One who searches our hearts is God (1 Sam. 16:7; Heb. 4:13), and God knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. Even though the Spirit’s words are not expressed, the Father knows what the Spirit is thinking. Like Jesus who continually intercedes for us in God’s presence (v. 34; Heb. 7:25), so the Holy Spirit also intercedes on our behalf! Though we Christians are ignorant of what to pray for and how to voice those requests, the Spirit voices our requests for us.<sup>1</sup>

Today the Holy Spirit groans with us and feels the burdens of our weaknesses and suffering. But the Spirit does more than groan. The Holy Spirit prays for us in His groaning so that we might be led into the will of God. We do not always know God’s will. We do not always know how to pray, but the Spirit intercedes so that we might live in the will of God in spite of suffering. The Spirit “shares the burden.”

---

<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:472

How can we Christians ever be discouraged and frustrated when we already share the glory of God? Our suffering today only guarantees that much more glory when Jesus Christ returns! <sup>2</sup>

Paul saw human's sin and the state of the world; but he also saw God's redeeming power; and the end of it all for him was hope. Because of that, to Paul life was not a despairing waiting for an inevitable end in a world encompassed by sin and death and decay; life was an eager anticipation of a liberation, a renovation and a recreation shaped by the glory and the power of God.

The Christian does not live only in the world; we also live in Christ. We do not see only the world; we look beyond it to God. We do not see only the consequences of human sin; we see the power of God's mercy and love. <sup>3</sup>

The story is told of a Christian lady who was diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So as she was getting her things "in order," she contacted her pastor and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. The woman also requested to be buried with her favorite Bible. Everything was in order and the pastor was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her.

"There's one more thing," she said excitedly.

"What's that?" came the pastor's reply.

"This is very important," the woman continued. "I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand."

The pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say. "That

---

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Ro 8:18

<sup>3</sup>Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letter to the Romans*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 107

surprises you, doesn't it?", the woman asked.

"Well, to be honest, I'm puzzled by the request," said the pastor.

The woman explained, "In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main courses were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, "Keep your fork." It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming...like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance! So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, "What's with the fork?" Then I want you to tell them: "Keep your fork. The best is yet to come."

The pastor's eyes welled up with tears of joy as he hugged the woman good-bye. He knew this would be one of the last times he would see her before her death. But he also knew that the woman had a better grasp of Heaven than most Christians did.

God's Word and the Holy Spirit assure us that we are not trusting in vain! The keystone of the Christian life is always hope and never despair. The Christian waits, not for death, but for life.