

The story is told of a Sunday school teacher who wanted to explain to the 6-year-olds in his class what someone had to do in order to go to heaven. In an attempt to discover what kids already believed about the subject, he asked a few questions.

"If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church," he asked, "would that get me to heaven?"

"No!" the children answered. The teacher was encouraged.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me to heaven?"

Again the answer was, "No!"

"Well then," he said, "If I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?"

Again they all shouted, "No!"

"Well then," the teacher asked, looking out over his class, "how can I get to heaven?"

A boy in the back row stood up and shouted, *"You gotta be dead!"*

Last week we covered a passage in Romans... where the Apostle Paul made several points... that everyone who is saved can know for certain... that they are Children of God... and are therefore saved. ... I want to start today's message with a brief review... because the section that we come to today... in Romans chapter 8... is a response to it. ... So let's look now... at what our passage (today) is answering.

In the verses that we'll review... we find four proofs for anyone to use... to check and see - if they truly are a child of God. ... Here is our first proof.

Romans 8:10-11

1.) Have you been made **alive** to Spiritual things? Are you **alive** to God in worship? Do you have an inward desire to read and understand God's Word? Do you have a growing sense of love and loyalty to fellow believers?

Romans 8:14-15

2.) Do you reflexively turn to God... as your "Daddy" (Abba, Father) ... whenever you encounter troubling circumstances in your life? Or is God (rather) a distant stranger Whose harshness you fear... because of sin in your life?

Romans 8:16

3.) Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit's direct witness to your own (human) spirit? Have you ever experienced a time when you felt an overwhelming sense of God's presence... like a divine whisper... saying: "You are mine" (?)

Now... the next verse gives us the fourth test. ... This one can create some confusion... and that is why we have the passage of our study for today. It answers the misunderstanding that *might* develop. (You see) the fourth test... that is found in verse 17 is... Have you suffered with Christ?

Romans 8:17

Suffering...? ... Whaaaat...?! Wouldn't you think that the absence of suffering would make a much better proof that the God of the Universe has made peace with you...? "*Check to see if you are a Child of God... and if there is the presence of suffering for Christ – you are His Child !*" - (REALLY?) ... This doesn't seem to make much sense. Wouldn't God

do for His children... what **we** all try to do *with our own children* – (that is) PROTECT them from suffering...? Isn't that what a loving Father is *supposed* to do...?

The *immediate stimulus* for the passage we will be studying today... is Romans 8:17... Paul does not try to hide the truth that believers will suffer. In fact... he highlights it... and places it in the context for knowing that you are saved. [P A U S E]

Someone once asked Roger Staubach (the former great quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys) about football injuries. “*How do you keep on keeping on...*” (Boy!... There's a 1970's expression for ya!) Staubach's answer was “*If you're not playing hurt... you're not playing football...*” Romans 8:17 seems to be saying **that** ...about what being a Christian is. ... And I think its true. (LISTEN!)... If you're not living in hurt... you're probably not living the Christian faith... [P A U S E]

But... on-the-other-hand... I am so thankful for the passage that we come to today! I have titled this message “*Freedom from Discouragement.*” ... (You see)... once we consider the message of Romans 8:17... we might have to battle some discouragement. “*Is the Christian life worth it...?*” ... The Christian life is *not* supposed to be easy. It is meant to involve rigorous self-denial... persecutions... and suffering. ... (If you're not living in hurt... you're probably not living the Christian faith...)

Unbelievers... (worldly people)... seem to have it **better**. ... “*Why shouldn't we... too... be able to live only for pleasure?*” ... [P A U S E] ... (And should I say it?) “*What is to be gained by godliness?*” ... “*Is it worth it?*”

So... to start freeing us from discouragement... Paul immediately writes verse 18...

Romans 8:18

This is very astounding... considering that it is coming from the Apostle Paul! ... If he wasn't barely surviving a terrifying shipwreck... or being given 39 lashes of a whip by a Roman torturer... or being so severely beaten to within an inch of his life... or pelted with stones and left in his own pool of blood with everyone thinking he was dead... or imprisoned for long periods of time in a dark... smelly... rat-infested cave... or defending the truth of the Gospel against Judaizing legalists who followed him from city to city - if he wasn't suffering any of that – he was constantly concerned (like a mother hen) about the fledgling churches that he started around the Roman Empire – who faced their own persecutions.

The Apostle Paul **KNEW** suffering! And he is the one who tells us that our suffering cannot be compared to the coming glory that will be ours! – AMAZING!!! Yet his (and our) future glory is **greater!**

2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

Weigh all the suffering that we go through here on earth. Put all of that on one side of the scale... and all of our future glory on the other side. ... The glory that is about to be revealed in us – so completely **outweighs** our suffering... that the two cannot even be compared.

But lets just **try** to use our imaginations for just a minute. (As absurd as it sounds) imagine yourself engaged in a task... of using a small thimble (that is used for sewing)... and scooping the Pacific Ocean out... (thimble-by-thimble full.) Picture dumping each thimble into one of Elon Musk's Space-Ex rockets that fly as many loads of water-cargo to mars as it takes... until the entire ocean is dry. ... Ridiculous...? Of course! ... But here's the point: we **CAN imagine** it! ... But the glory that will soon be ours - is **beyond anything we could ever imagine!** ... We cannot compare side-by-side the suffering that we experience... with the glory that is coming in us. It just will not compute. (It is unfathomable.)

So our passage today... provides relief from discouragement by #1. Calling us to believe in God's reward that stretches beyond our imagination... #2. Pointing to what enables us to wait patiently for it... and #3. Informing us about the help that we have (right now) in our suffering. ...Our passage will show us how (*believe it or not*) **groaning** will do all this.

- 1. Creation groans (vv. 19-22)**
- 2. We believers groan (vv. 23-25)**
- 3. The Holy Spirit groans (vv. 25-27)**

The sufferings that we (and "the whole creation") endure... are like the sufferings of childbirth... and are therefore proof that what we cannot (now) imagine is coming. ... And it is why (although we do groan)... we do not groan hopelessly. ... On the contrary... our groanings intensify our hope and enable us to wait patiently for the consummation.

How does groaning intensify our hope and enable us to wait...? To answer... I am going to borrow an illustration from Chuck Swindoll.

Many of us have pictures of our wives after they have delivered a child, and typically the baby is in their arms and mother is radiant. None of us have a picture of our wives in labor. We do not reach into our wallets saying, "*Let me show you a picture of Margaret groaning in labor. Isn't the agony terrific?*"

Here is the point of the illustration: the groaning in labor intensified the hope and enabled the wait for the imminent "Kodak moment"... (the ecstasy of finally holding a precious child in her arms... which is picture-worthy.) Groaning in the pains of childbirth (while not glorious)... is neither hopeless... It only increases expectation. ... And so does the present groaning that we (and all of creation) currently experience. We will one day be delivered.

Romans 8:19-22

Creation groans "*as in the pains of childbirth.*" ... The pain a woman about to deliver a child experiences... is a vivid metaphor of suffering that has a joyous outcome. ... But how are we to understand all the parts of what we just read. Is it all a metaphor...?

Paul used an interesting word (in the Greek language) for "earnest expectation" - (ἀποκαρδοκία) *apok-ara-dokia* ... which means "*to watch with the neck outstretched and the head erect.*" It is a persistent... unswerving expectation... an expectation that does not give up... but keeps looking until the event happens. ... But is there any literal sense to this...? Do rocks... hills... and trees... (that which we call "inanimate") actually possess some kind of feeling...? Do they possess it... but it is merely imprisoned (right now) under the curse...?

Back in Genesis... we saw that the story of Creation concluded with a pristine world... in which every blade of grass is jade green... every stream is crystal clear... every tree laden with fruit. God pronounced it all “good” and then gave it to His first children... (Adam and Eve)... as an inheritance to steward (Gen. 1:27-30). But then the children of God exchanged the truth for a lie... and they opened the door for disease... disaster... death... and decay to enter God’s once idyllic world. ... The animal world was invaded by fear and violence. ... And now - all creation groans.

Science has called to our attention the fact that nature sings in a minor key. (A minor key is that mournful tone that elicits an intense dark emotion in the movies we watch.) ... The wind howling through the trees... or trying to gain entry into our house... emits the same sob. ... The music of trees has been recorded... and it is doleful. ... So is the oceanic cry of a whale... or the startled cry of some frightened animal or bird... and the howl of coyotes... which all pierce the night air and chill the blood. ... Surely nature bears audible testimony to the literal accuracy of these verses of Scripture.

So,,, nature does indeed groan! (That is not metaphorical.) But is nature literally waiting to be restored? ... When the effects of the curse are reversed... will creatures be able to talk...? (You know) the Garden of Eden (before the curse) had a snake that talked... and no one seemed to think that it was (at all) unusual. Perhaps all the animals (before the fall) could speak... and will one day talk again.

I don’t know. (Maybe!) ... But this I do know: The prophet Isaiah described what the reversal of the curse will be like... in this manner:

Isaiah 11:6-9 (ESV)

⁶ *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.* ⁷ *The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.* ⁸ *The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.* ⁹ *They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

What a powerful picture of the redeemed world that will be! The creation is waiting for that day, says Paul. ... And if it is ... can we not (also) wait in hopeful expectation? ... And be faithful children of God?

Before we move on... how are we to use this understanding (that creation groans and longs for its release and transformation into the new heaven and new earth?) ... What is the practical application here? ... We ought to experience the following:

1. *We should not be surprised when things go wrong in this life.* This world is not a good place. We live in a fallen environment. Your plans will misfire... you will often fail... others will destroy what you have spent long years and much toil to accomplish. This will be true even if you are a Christian and are trying to follow Jesus.

2. *We should not place our ultimate hope in anything human beings can do to improve this world's conditions.* Do good wherever you can... but not delude yourself into thinking that the salvation of the world's ills... will be brought about by mere human efforts. ... (For example) feed the poor... but know that Jesus said... "*The poor you will always have with you*" (Matt.

26:11a). ... (Also) pray for your leaders... but know that they are sinful men and women like yourself... and that they will always disappoint you.

3. *We should keep our eyes on Jesus*. Where else can you look? Only He is worthy of your trust. He has promised to return in His glory... and He is going to reveal an unimaginable glory in us.

No wonder the early Christians prayed, "*Maranatha!*" Come, Lord Jesus!

1. Creation groans... and next...

2. We believers groan (vv. 23-25)

Romans 8:23-25

Once again... let me quote Chuck Swindoll.

We are like children in an orphanage, waiting with bags packed and completed adoption papers in hand for the coming of our Father . . . whom we can call "Daddy"

The thing we groan for is our adoption as sons. ... But wait a minute...? Paul said in Romans 8:16 that we have already been adopted as God's sons. How can adoption be both past and future at the same time...?

Here we find a classic New Testament example of the "*already-not yet*" tension... that we see throughout in explaining the Christian life. ... Yes... we are God's children **already** — justified... reconciled... and brought into His family. ... But we are **not yet** God's children (in the way we one day will be) — possessing the full glory of our inheritance.

We do (however) have the “**first fruits**” of this future glory... showing us that it will happen. Farmers understand this term. “First fruit” is the promise of greater things to come (a bountiful harvest.) The presence of the Holy Spirit in our life... is the **first fruit promise** of greater things to come. ... He gives us assurance - but the presence of the Holy Spirit in us... also makes us groan.

The reason we groan is because we have experienced "the first fruits of the Spirit" - a foretaste of the glory to come. ... (You see)... 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. ... This makes us want (all the more) our “thrilling adoption **climax**.”

In verses 24-25 Paul refers to this - as our “**hope**.” ... What is striking about the Christian attitude of hopefulness... is that it is a "sure and certain hope." It is not “**mere wishful thinking**.” (You see) the world has watered-down the concept of “hope” to the **mere possibility for something to happen**. ... But Christian hope is FAR DIFFERENT than “*I hope that I will win the Publisher’s Clearing House Drawing this year.*” (Oh... my poor mother-in-law. Every year she had such high hopes...) What makes the Christian’s hope different... is that it is **very confident expectation**.

Paul presents the hope as so substantive... that creation groans for it... believers groan for it... and even the Holy Spirit aids believers with His own groans.

1. Creation groans (vv. 19-22)

2. *We believers groan (vv. 23-25) ...and*
3. *The Holy Spirit groans (vv. 25-27)*

Romans 8:25-27

I do not know of any subject that has caused more confusion for Christians... than the subject of prayer - unless perhaps - it is the matter of knowing God's will. ... And (of course) the two are related.

Christians who want to pray in accordance with God's will... find themselves asking: What should I pray for? How should I pray? Can I pray with confidence, "*claiming*" things by faith? Or do I have to make my prayers tentative... always adding "*If it be your will*"?

What happens if I pray wrongly? ... Can prayer do harm? ... We often pray (with passion) to be released from our trials. ... However... that prayer (although passionate and heartfelt) - may not reflect God's will.

Boy(!) I am so grateful for the truth expressed in verses 25-27... aren't you...?

When I am tempted to think that God is cruel to leave us in our suffering... I remember that He, too, moans with "*groanings too deep for words*." ... (LISTEN!)... whenever we see a mother sobbing over the dead body of her child... we know that the Holy Spirit suffers her anguish too. ... Whenever the mortician pauses on his way out the door... and pulls the sheet back... so a heart-stricken wife can kiss the cold cheek of her husband who has just passed... we know the Holy Spirit feels her desperate ache.

God is concerned about the suffering of His people. When Jesus was ministering on earth... He groaned when He saw what sin was doing to mankind (Mark 7:34; John 11:33, 38).

Today the Holy Spirit groans with us... and feels the burdens of our weaknesses and suffering. ... But the Spirit does more than groan. He 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... and we do not always know how to pray... So the Spirit intercedes... and the Spirit "shares the burden."

What a perspective to have – for times when we suffer! We groan. But we are not alone... for we are surrounded by the sympathetic groanings of creation... and even of the Holy Spirit. ... And one day our groanings will be replaced by glory! ... A glory awaits us that exceeds the wildest imaginations of our most gifted science fiction writers. (Not even they could ever imagine it!)

... .. [P A U S E]

Please allow me to close now... with three general observations from our passage today... and my own Christian experience.

First - **The greater the groan... the greater the glory will be.** ... When you find yourself afflicted and suffering... rest assured that however deeply you are hurting... you have an incomparable joy when all our trials end. Therefore... endure with hope (confident assurance) !

Second – *The weaker our spirit... the stronger His support will be.* I remember several times when I barely had the strength to pray. I knew that I needed to pray... but I did not have a *clue*... as to *how*.

I was mid-way through my second year of seminary... which many say is the most difficult part. Patti and I had invested everything we had in the belief that God had called me to ministry... and had led us to Portland (far away from home and family.) ... Patti's full-time job provided just enough for us to buy food and pay rent. I took out loans to pay for my books and education. We were just scrapping by. ... But then Patti developed a condition known as "*hyper-emesis gravidarum*" during her pregnancy... Not only was she unable to work and provide our only income... but she needed to be hospitalized... and we did not have any medical insurance.

I was scared for my wife – she was so ill – and I was scared for our future. We had invested *everything* in our supposed "call to ministry" which now presented itself as an illusion. I could not continue and would need to drop out of seminary. At the height of our plight... I sat alone one night by myself in a dark room. My tears had all been exhausted. I remember trying to pray... but I was so utterly confused. "*God... am I called? ... Why did You mislead us and bring us all the way here to Portland from California...? Why must I throw away the past year and a half of schooling...?*" ... I honestly did not know how to pray. I feared that I was dishonoring the Lord... and yet... I CLEARLY felt as though I was in God's presence... by His powerful grace.

To this day... I cannot explain to you what exactly happened... except suddenly I found myself working at three brand new jobs – and continuing as a full-time student... completing the most difficult phase of a seminary experience. (God brought me through – what was totally beyond my ability.) ... And one of my jobs was a coveted position of a clerk at UPS – which paid all of our medical expenses. ... [P A U S E]

The greater the groan... the greater the glory will be (and) **The weaker our spirit... the stronger His support will be.** (Now here's the third...)

#3. Our suffering today only guarantees that much more glory when Jesus Christ returns! It is beyond our imagination!