

Romans 8:22-25 Commentary

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Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " Jensen's Survey of the NT "				

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The Resource of the Holy Spirit

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

Romans 8:22 For we know that the [whole creation groans](#) and [suffers](#) the [pains](#) of [childbirth together * until now](#). **23** And not [only](#) this, but [also](#) we [ourselves](#), [having](#) the [first fruits](#) of the [Spirit](#), [even](#) we [ourselves groan within ourselves](#), [waiting eagerly](#) for our [adoption](#) as [sons](#), the [redemption](#) of our [body](#). **24** For in [hope](#) we have been [saved](#), but [hope](#) that is [seen](#) is not [hope](#); for [who hopes](#) for [what](#) he already [sees](#) ? **25** But [if](#) we [hope](#) for [what](#) we do not [see](#), with [perseverance](#) we [wait eagerly](#) for it.

In Romans 5:12, Paul tells us why this world—and all it's creatures—is in the shape it's in: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned." Adam's sin caused the curse to fall upon all of God's created order, not just upon mankind.

We saw last time that Paul tells us in Romans 8:20-21: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Because of Adam's sin, God Himself subjected all the created order to futility, to the fact that it cannot reach it's intended purpose. Nothing can change that except God. And the event that God's word says will bring about that change will be when we, God's children, are glorified with Him. Paul said in Romans 8:19: "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."

The event of our glorification will set into motion a series of events that will culminate in a brand new heaven and a brand new earth. Creation will be set right one day. It's future is directly tied to ours as believers.

In the meantime, there is a lot of pain, suffering, and, as we will see in this passage, a lot of groaning waiting for that event.

But, the believer has a brand new perspective towards his suffering. A little further down in the text, Paul tells us that we are being conformed into the image of Christ. Look at Romans 8:28-29: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren."

The picture I get is that we are in the "quarry of life" and we are being shaped into the image of Christ. My friend, Bill Stafford, explained it using Stone Mountain, Georgia as the illustration. Artists carved the images of three presidents right into the stone of Stone Mountain. Nothing was added to them, but all that did not resemble the three presidents had to be chipped off.

We saw in Ephesians that we already have all we are going to get in Jesus. But all that does not look like Him in our lives is going to be chipped off us as God conforms us into His image while we are in this quarry. The tools that God uses are the "trials" and the "pain" and the "suffering" that is in this world. One day when we see His "finished work" we will be amazed and realize it was worth it all.

We are going to look at all the "groaning" that is going on in this world because of sin. But we are going to see the Resource that the Holy Spirit is to us in the midst of it.

Romans 8:22

First, Paul shows us that because of the suffering in this world, all of creation groans. Look at Romans 8:22: "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." The suffering of this world is intensifying and all of creation is aware of it. We just reviewed that it all came into being because of Adam's sin.

Paul tells us in verse 22 that "the whole creation groans and suffers." Nothing is left out. There are three things that I think that we need to see in verse 22. First the specific meaning of the word "creation." The word for creation is the same word that has been used from verse 19 on. It is the word *ktisis*, and normally refers to that which God has created. In verses 19-21 it has referred in the context to nature—the plants, animals, fish, etc.—in the previous verses. We ruled out angels since there is no redemption for them. We ruled out demons and Satan because their future is sealed in eternal doom. We ruled out man, because man is dealt with in other verses. All of nature suffers and their suffering is in direct relationship to man's.

But also the specific manner in which this suffering is detected: "the whole creation groans." The word "groans" comes from two words, *stenazo*, meaning to groan to where there is great sighing; and *sun*, which means together with. All of creation groans together. Like one large symphony, inaudible groans are being uttered because of the suffering that nature is going through.

But, in all the "groaning of creation" there is a specific message being declared. You see, the more intense the pain and the suffering of creation becomes, the closer we are getting to the event that Paul has cited for us. Paul says that the intensified pain and suffering that they are feeling are the labor pains of childbirth.

Any of you mothers know that the pains of labor intensify. The more intense they become the more imminent the birth that is about to happen. You measure not only the intensity, but also the time between each pain to determine when the event of birth will take place. The closer together you have each pain, the more imminent the event.

Oh, does this put this in a brand new perspective when it comes to pain and suffering. The world thinks everything is falling apart. But God says it is coming together. The pain and suffering that all of creation is experiencing is simply pushing us one step closer to the event that Paul has been talking about—the event of the revelation of the sons of God. This event will finally free all of God's creation to be what He intended it to be. Thank God that He and He alone is going to stop the pain and the suffering and has announced when that will be!

In the meantime, all the created order is suffering with intensified groanings and is sending us all a message that the "blessed event" of the glorification of the sons of God is nearing. But we know that the more suffering

intensifies, the closer the blessed event becomes.

Romans 8:23

Next Paul tells us not only the whole creation (all of nature) is groaning, but all believers groan. Romans 8:23: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

We must understand that all believers are included in the groaning that goes on on this earth. Believers are not exempt. We too, have to deal with suffering while on this earth. This is so contrary to what people are preaching today. They say that God would not allow pain and suffering to His children. Oh, no brother, we are included in this pain. But all our suffering works for righteousness' sake.

Let's note three things in this verse. First, Paul identifies the unique possession of believers: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit." We have the foretaste of the glory that awaits us in heaven. The term "firstfruits" refers to all that we now have in the Holy Spirit that gives us a foretaste of what is to come. It is very similar to Ephesians 1:14: "who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." All that the Holy Spirit has given and is giving to us now is the "first fruits of the Spirit"....

One day our bodies will be glorified and changed by the Holy Spirit and those same bodies will become immortal, whereas now they are mortal. But right now, the Holy Spirit is changing us in our inner man. We are already in the process. Suffering is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to chip away at us in the inner man. One day when we are transformed outwardly, it will only be a transition from what we are already becoming.

In the meantime, sin and its corruption, both our own and that of this world, still causes every believer to groan. But we have the Holy Spirit living in us. By grace we are "in Christ," but we are left in a body that knows the meaning of suffering from day to day. Thank God that we have the Holy Spirit living in us to enable us through this time of suffering.

Paul not only identifies the unique possession we as believers have even though we suffer, but he also identifies the unique place where believers groan: "within ourselves". It is within that we groan silently. There is a silent, inner groaning in believers even amidst the joy that the Holy Spirit brings in our everyday life.

This groaning within has been going on for a long time. In the Old Testament David groaned in the Psalms over his own sin. Look at Psalm 38:4: "For my iniquities are gone over my head; As a heavy burden they weigh too much for me." Go on down to verses 9 and 10: "Lord, all my desire is before Thee; And my sighing is not hidden from Thee. My heart throbs, my strength fails me; And the light of my eyes, even that has gone from me."

Paul showed us how we all groan as long as we are in this earthly tent. He says in 2 Corinthians 5:4, "For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

Finally, in verse 23, Paul also identifies the unique perspective with which the believer groans. We are, just like all of nature, "waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body." Again Paul refers to the event that we have already determined is when Christ comes for the church. We have already been adopted, but we are waiting for our adoption to be perfected. All the preliminaries have been taken care of, but we are now waiting to go home where we will finally get our redemption body.

Just as our salvation has not yet been experientially completed, neither has our adoption. Every pain we suffer down here is but a groaning that awaits a future reward. Every believer has this hope of glorification within him and this is what keeps us going.

Romans 8:24

Look at verse 24: "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? The word hope is *elpis*, which in the believer's vocabulary means "joyful expectation"—it is certain, never uncertain. Back in verse 5 of chapter 5 we learned that "our hope" will never disappoint: "and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The Holy Spirit living in us assures us of that. As Paul says in Ephesians "the Holy Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14).

Paul explains that hope is not based on what you can see, but on what you expect to see: "but hope that is

seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?" Our salvation was planned by God in ages past. It was bestowed to us in the present. It is now characterized by hope for its future completion. We walk by faith in what God has said.

Remember back in chapter 1, verse 17, we read, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous man shall live by faith." In saying this he really explains what hope is. If we could see what we are going to be like and what the wonder is of what is to come, then why hope? It is in the midst of the valleys that are dark and full of pain and suffering that our hope comes alive in us and we know that one day it will be worth it all!

Romans 8:25

Romans 8:25: "But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." Paul is simply stating a truth about what hope is. If you already have something, then you don't hope for it. We don't have our "glorified" body yet, but we earnestly hope for and expect it one day.

In fact, our hope is so sure that "with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." We willingly bear up under whatever comes, expectantly awaiting our glorified bodies. We bear up under the suffering, and pain and everything else that goes along with this fallen body and living in this fallen world because we have a certain hope, and we know without any doubt that what God promised, He will perform one day!

Look at two verses that tell us this. Philippians 1:6: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Then look at 1 Peter 1:13: "Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Creation groans; we as believers, who have the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, groan. And all of this "groaning" is setting the stage for the event of the "revelation of the sons of God."

But notice that our Divine Resource, the Holy Spirit, also groans. Now, it is here that we see the marvelous resource the Holy Spirit really is. The world does not have this. Look at Romans 8:26: "And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

The difference is that His groaning is for our benefit: "And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness." "In the same way" refers back to the believers and creation groaning for the redemption from the corruption and defilement of sin. The word used here and translated "helps" is *sunantilambanomai*, *sun*—together with, and *antilambanomai*—to support or to help. It means to assist someone, to give help or aid to someone. What a beautiful picture. The Holy Spirit is there to give us support as we groan.

Then Paul says the Holy Spirit helps "our weakness." Our weak human condition is such that we do not know how to pray as we should. We are so weak, and utterly helpless without the help of the Holy Spirit, we have no clue how to pray. It is the Holy Spirit that comes to our aid as we cry out to God. We are filled with imperfect perspectives, finite minds, human frailties. We don't even know what we need, or how to pray for it. We are in such great need for the Holy Spirit to come to our aid.

But, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." When we come before the Father with our intention to pray, but with our weakness of not knowing how to pray, the Spirit comes alongside and becomes our prayer partner. His groanings are different. He too groans, but in a dimension we can never hear or understand, only accept by faith.

His groanings are "too deep for words." This has nothing to do with any so-called prayer language that some people say it does. The term for "words" is *alaletos*. It is the word meaning to "make noise." The Holy Spirit's groaning is not able to be expressed with human sounds or words. In fact, we never hear this. This is the intimate communication between the Father and the Spirit.

Romans 8:27

Then in verse 27 Paul tells us, "and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." You see, the Holy Spirit always knows how and what to pray. And when we open our mouth without knowing how to pray, the Holy Spirit takes over. Then "He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is." God the Father is the One who searches the heart. Look at some verses in the Old Testament that show us God knows what is inside our hearts:

1 Samuel 16:7: "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'"

Proverbs 15:11: "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD, How much more the hearts of men!"

Psalm 139:1-2: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar."

But God also "knows what the mind of the Spirit is." The word here is *iseido*—to know intuitively. The Father knows exactly the mind of the Spirit because they are one. To show that the will and the mind of the Spirit is one with the will and the mind of the Father, Paul says, "because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Paul's statement appears at first unnecessary because we all know God is one. But, since this is a mystery, we must accept it by faith.

The point is that the Spirit comes to our aid as we don't know how to pray, and as He groans with us to the Father, the Father knows what His groanings mean because the Spirit is praying according to His will.

Well, the Holy Spirit "groans" in us as we endeavor to pray, and He translates our pain into requests that God already knows. What a salvation!