

Is it right to groan?

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[0 : 00] Well, today we're going to continue our study on Romans and we've come to the section here from verse 22 to 25.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved, now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes, for what he sees, but if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Now as we said when we were reading this passage, in Romans chapter 8 Paul gives this wonderful summary of the blessings that are ours through faith in Jesus Christ and Romans 8 is just a wealth of riches in terms of gospel blessings.

But a couple of weeks ago we came to verses 19 to 22 and we noticed that Paul in a way almost went off at a slight tangent and he started talking about the creation.

[1 : 16] He highlights the fact that creation is longing for the revealing of the sons of God. And here Paul is making us think about the great story of the universe as a whole, the fact that the universe was originally made to be a wonderful home for humanity but that has been spoiled by the curse of sin and now creation is subject to futility.

It's no longer fulfilling the purpose for which it was made. But the good news of the gospel for the creation is that when Jesus returns the whole of the universe will be restored, there will be a new heaven and a new earth where the children of God can live forever in the perfect environment that God has created for them.

So we saw that two weeks ago, Paul gives us this amazing teaching about God's great plans for the universe. But very quickly Paul comes back to his main theme and focuses once again on the blessings that we enjoy through our union with Christ.

You can see that in verse 23, he very quickly moves from creation back to ourselves, not only the creation but we ourselves. The refocus returns to all those who are trusting in Jesus.

And at the heart of what Paul is saying in these verses is the glorious truth that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, then you have an amazing future ahead of you.

[2 : 56] That's what he highlighted back in verse 18. He says, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Even though we face sufferings and hardships now, which you all do, these are not worth comparing. They are worth their tiny in comparison to the amazing, glorious future that God has for us.

And that means that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian, then you have got so many reasons to be really, really excited.

And never forget that. Never forget that if you put your trust in Jesus, the future is absolutely thrilling. God has got so much for us.

Just think about some of the things that we have to look forward to. You can think about the great aspects of life. Think about going out and enjoying the beautiful landscape of Scotland.

[3 : 58] We look at our country and it's absolutely stunning. It's hard to appreciate it all and in so many ways we don't have the time to take it all in and to appreciate it.

But we love to go and explore the world and to see the beauty of it on those occasions when we get the opportunity to do it. Now all too often we don't have enough time and even a lifetime is not enough to take it all in.

But in the new creation you will have all eternity to explore the wonders of God's new creation.

You will have the time and the energy and the opportunity to take it all in and to enjoy it as many times as you want.

You think of another great part of life now. You think of enjoying a wonderful time with your family. Everyone together, everyone happy. It's fantastic when we have these opportunities and yet in this life all too often these times are short and they are only temporary.

[5 : 10] And I often find that when I'm with family members who are maybe getting older I find myself thinking how many more times will we be together because you know that there is an end.

But in the new creation we will never ever have that worry. We will be together not just as friends but as family as brothers and sisters in Christ and it will be amazing.

We will be together and the shadow of separation will never ever be hanging over us. And above all when you think of the new creation you can think of being in the presence of God himself.

Now sometimes in our lives just now there are moments where God can come close in a special way. It's pretty much impossible to describe but there are times when I'm sure probably every one of you has maybe just sensed God's presence in your life in a remarkable way.

Sometimes it's maybe when we're listening to a sermon or speaker, someone giving their testimony. Maybe sometimes when we're singing and worship together. Maybe sometimes when we're reading the Bible or when we're praying either on our own or with other people.

[6 : 29] There are moments when God seems to come close in a special way and these moments are rare, very rare but they're amazing and God brings a peace that passes all understanding and there is nothing that can compare to knowing the closeness of God's presence.

But the amazing thing about the new creation is that moments like that will not be rare. That'll be what every moment is like because we will be with God.

And I can't even begin to describe how utterly brilliant that will be. And all of this is emphasising the fact that being a Christian, trusting in Jesus is incredibly exciting.

And Paul uses a great phrase to describe that. He talks about the first fruits of the Spirit. The first fruits is a great word. It's basically describing that which gives you a foretaste of what is going to come.

First fruits of the harvest, it's telling you what the rest of the harvest is going to be like. So the blessings of the Holy Spirit in our lives now, the joy and the peace and the hope and the love that God the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts, it is absolutely amazing but it's only a taste.

[8 : 02] It's just a taste and a guarantee of what lies ahead. The future is incredibly exciting because God has promised so much to us.

And please recognise that that's what being a Christian gives you. That's what putting your trust in Jesus will bring into your life. You can all be part of that.

You can all have that as your future and all God asks of us is just to trust him. And if you do, then your future is really, really exciting.

However, I am sure that for many of us there's times in life when we're not bursting with excitement.

And there's times when our experience now can be very, very hard. And that's one of the great things about the Bible. The Bible gives us all of these wonderful promises but at the same time the Bible never, ever pretends that the blessings of the future mean that life today is a breeze.

[9 : 14] And that's what Paul reminds us of in these verses that we have before us now. And here we see that alongside our excitement there is a struggle and a battle as we go through life.

That's why as Christians we look to the future and at one level yes we are excited but at the very same time we groan.

And that's a really, really interesting word that Paul uses. The word groan basically means to complain or to sigh. In other words, I think it's implying a wish that things were different.

And as you can see there, it's an inward focused action. And I'm sure we all know how that feels. You're confronted by something difficult and you say to yourself, oh man, this is hard and I wish it wasn't like this.

And that raises a really interesting question and a really important question. As Christians, is it okay to groan?

[10 : 30] Is it okay for us to groan? Well, I suppose in some ways the answer to that question depends on what we mean by groaning.

Because if by groaning we mean complaining bitterly about our circumstances or about other people or about events that are taking place around us, then it's not okay. Because as Christians

we are commanded to be content and we're commanded not to grumble.

We're not to moan, we're not to dwell on the negative, we're not to have a critical spirit and yet all too often we slip into these traps. But as I'm sure we know, doing that, being negative about other people or about our circumstances, being critical, it serves to hurt others and it makes us miserable and above all it dishonors God.

As Christians we should never ever ever be moaners, we should never moan. But at the same time Paul seems to be saying that as Christians we do groan.

So what does he mean by that? Well, at the heart of what Paul is saying is the fact that in terms of our salvation there is what we call an already not yet balance.

[11 : 49] So as Christians we are already saved, we are already born again, we're already forgiven, we're already adopted but at the same time we are not yet home.

We are not yet fully restored to the image of Jesus. We are not yet free from the presence of sin and from the struggle and pain and tears of life.

And as a result of this already not yet balance, on the one hand we look ahead with great excitement to what lies ahead but on the other hand we groan because we long for that day to come.

Paul is saying that we groan and it all arises out of this already not yet balance. And in verse 23 Paul identifies what we groan for.

He says, as we eagerly, we wait eagerly for adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies.

[12 : 54] Now what is Paul saying here? Because that's the kind of verse that is very easy to be confused by. Because here Paul talks about adoption and redemption as if they haven't happened.

And yet just a few verses ago Paul has said that we are children of God and we are free implying that these things have happened and if you go to Galatians you'll see the same thing.

Paul says that we have been redeemed and that we have been adopted which is why he says you're no longer a slave but a son. So if we have already been adopted and if we have already been redeemed what's Paul talking about here?

What does he mean? Well, let's think about that together for a wee minute. In that statement Paul is highlighting two big doctrines that lie at the heart of the Christian faith.

That's the doctrine of redemption and of adoption. Now adoption describes the fact that when anyone becomes a Christian you are adopted as a child of God.

[14 : 09] In other words you're brought into God's family. So God is your Father. Jesus Christ is your elder brother. Every other believer is your brother and sister and the Holy Spirit is working in you to develop the family trait of holiness that should characterise God's children.

Adoption refers to the idea of buying someone out of slavery. It's very much a marketplace concept so you can imagine going to a first century slave market where you see somebody who is under the grip of a tyrannical master and unable to free themselves.

You can go along and you can buy that slave. You can pay a price so that they're no longer under the tyranny of their old master and you can either have them as your own slave or you can actually grant them freedom so that they're no longer anybody's slave.

And so both of these things lie at the heart of Christianity. In fact redemption and adoption go hand in hand in terms of our salvation because redemption tells us what Christianity takes us out of because in our natural state we are slaves to sin.

Redemption takes us out of that and adoption tells us what Christianity brings us into. It brings us into God's family.

[15 : 40] In other words redemption deals with what you wear. Reconciliation tells you what you now are as Paul says you're no longer a slave you're a son.

And so these two work together bringing us on a wonderful journey out of slavery and into God's family.

So these two doctrines are really really important in terms of Christianity but if you think about these two things a wee bit more you'll see that both adoption and redemption have got two aspects to them.

And in terms of both adoption and redemption we can identify what we can call a legal and a practical element.

Now we'll start with the legal element that applies to both redemption and adoption and this just makes this I hope is just fairly straightforward it's fairly simple.

[16 : 47] If you think about it when a child is adopted even if we were to adopt a child into our family it would be a government official that would make the pronouncement that this child is now legally the son or the daughter of their adoptive parents.

So from the moment that that pronouncement is made the child becomes part of a new family. Likewise when a slave is brought there's a legal aspect to that because a transaction is made and the moment that transaction is made the slave is no longer the possession of their previous owner they're no longer under the power or authority of that master they belong to the new owner they are his.

There's a legal aspect to both of these things and that's exactly what happens when we are united to Jesus Christ by faith.

A legal change takes place. We are officially legally adopted as the children of God and we are fully and irrevocably delivered out of slavery.

Our old master has absolutely no legitimate claim over us. There's this great legal element to the gospel message and it's easy to think well that all sounds really really complicated and it can almost sound a bit official but you know what the truth is it's absolutely wonderful and the legal aspect of adoption and redemption should bring you huge comfort because so often we are plagued with doubts because of our feelings because of our feelings because of our experiences.

[18 : 39] So when we mock up we think that God's commitment to us will diminish. When we make mistakes we think that it will reduce God's affection towards us.

When we struggle we think that God's fed up of us and would want to keep his distance from us. We can so easily feel all of these things as a result of the mistakes and weaknesses and struggles of our lives.

The legal aspect of the gospel tells you that all of that is absolute rubbish.

That whole idea that the fact that you are weak and that fact that you struggle will make God want nothing to do with you it is theological rubbish and that's confirmed by this legal aspect of the gospel because the truth is if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian then God's commitment and dedication towards you is so great that your status as a redeemed and adopted child of God is confirmed and guaranteed by God's law and that means it is irrevocable.

And as a result your feelings and your weaknesses and your insecurities are totally irrelevant to the question of whether or not God is committed to you.

[20 : 08] Totally irrelevant. We look at ourselves and we so often think God would want nothing to do with me but God looks at us and he says you are mine no matter what.

And so from the moment you trust in Jesus you are legally permanently and irrevocably God's you are his precious precious child.

There's this great legal element but secondly there is a practical element to both redemption and adoption.

So again this makes sense from life. When parents are adopting a child they wait for the legal announcement from the government official but then they don't think to themselves oh well that's great we've got the bit of paper we can head home and we'll just leave the child there.

They would never do that. They would their great goal the whole point of what they're doing is so that they can take the child home and love that child and care for that child and look after them in every way that they can.

[21 : 23] Likewise if somebody was redeeming a slave way back in the days of the New Testament they don't just make the purchase and then say to the slave well stay with your old master and keep working there.

The great purpose of redemption is that the slave can now throw off his chains and leave the tyranny of that old master and never ever ever go back because both adoption and redemption bring wonderful practical changes in a person's life and the great point that Paul is making is that exactly the same applies in the Gospel.

Yes there is a legal aspect to it all and that's the foundation on which it stands but that legal aspect always leads on to the practical element.

Indeed the legal step is not the main goal. It's essential but it's not the main goal. The goal is the practical step. So God does not adopt you because he wants a piece of paper saying that he is your legal guardian.

God adopts you because he wants to take you home and he wants to hold you in his arms and love you and cherish you forever.

[22 : 38] And God does not redeem you because he wants to buy an army of slaves for himself. He redeems you because he wants you to be free and he wants you to enjoy the most wonderful life for all eternity.

And in terms of the already not yet balanced that we were talking about, the legal aspect of this is the already part.

The legal side has happened. Our union with Christ means that we are adopted and we are redeemed and that's been fully confirmed and it is absolutely guaranteed.

But the practical element is not yet complete because right now we're not home and right now we are not fully redeemed.

In our future we will be brought home and there we will be conformed to the image of Jesus himself and that will mean that we are fully and completely taking our place as the adopted children of God.

[23 : 59] We will be what God wants us to be. We will be like Jesus bearing the image of God as we were originally made to be and we will be where God wants us to be in his new creation where righteousness dwells.

And in our future we will be fully redeemed because now it is just our souls that are free.

We have been delivered out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light. Our souls are free and saved but our bodies aren't.

Our bodies are still facing bondage and that's the reason why we die.

Our souls will go to heaven when we die but our bodies will decay in the grave.

[25 : 00] It's only when Jesus returns that our bodies will be raised and they will be transformed to be like the glorious body of the resurrected Jesus himself.

Then we will have both spiritual and physical redemption. Always remember that when the Bible looks to the future it is looking to the future in terms of spiritual and physical.

That's why when it talks about heaven it says there will be no more what? No more pain.

Physical pain will be gone. And Paul longs for that day. That's why he says that I'm groaning for the redemption of my body.

His body that was getting older and weaker. He was looking forward to that great day when body and soul will be reunited in perfect eternal redemption.

[26 : 09] And all of that is reminding us that the final goal of the Gospel is in the future. And that will be an amazing day and that is why now we groan.

We don't groan out of a negative discontentment. We groan because we know that this world is not where we really belong. Because the place where we really belong is with our Father in heaven.

And that's why when God takes you to be with himself it's going to feel like coming home. We have a wonderful future.

And that's what Paul talks about in verses 24 and 25. He says we've got this amazing hope. And as he says that hope is not seen because who hopes for what they already have.

It makes perfect sense. Paul is just being logical. We look forward to this. We hope for it. And for that reason we have to wait for it with patience.

[27 : 20] That the heart of the Christian faith is this balance of already and not yet. I want to close with just two lessons, two points that arise from this very briefly.

First of all, we are being reminded that life right now is not what we wanted to be.

Life right now is not what we wanted to be. So yes, we are to be content and we strive to be content every day. But we are content with life now in the knowledge that there is something better ahead of us if we are trusting in Jesus.

So right now your body might be giving you a lot of trouble physically or maybe emotionally because a mental state and a physical state are completely linked.

Free or mentally you might be straining and creaking under the pressure of life.

[28 : 28] But one day if you are trusting in Jesus your body will be restored and forever you will be free of the decay that you are facing now.

This is the kind of thing that when you are young you don't tend to think about because when you are young you think you are pretty invincible. But I am sure for so many of you here you are so aware that your bodies aren't bulletproof and the gospel gives us this hope of a restored body.

But sometimes the struggles of this life aren't just in terms of physical pain, maybe you are suffering in terms of your relationship with other people, maybe people have hurt you, maybe even in the past week people have hurt you, people might have let you down, people might be hostile to you, maybe you are lonely, maybe you feel isolated, maybe you just feel a huge lack of self worth. You look at what you wanted to achieve in life and what you have achieved in life and you think it's just not turned out the way I want it, I have mucked up and we can feel so heavy on ourselves because of other people or because of our own mistakes and errors.

We can feel isolated and hurt. Here we are being reminded that if you trust in Jesus one day God will bring you home into his family and there you will never be lonely and you will never be hurt again.

[30 : 17] And maybe now your body causes you frustration because of your struggles with sin and that's something we all struggle with but in our future we are going to be conformed to the image of our Savior Jesus Christ and the presence of sin in our hearts and in our lives will be gone forever.

So yes, right now life is not what we want it to be but if you trust in Jesus your future will, your future will be everything that you want it to be and so much more and that's why right now we have to wait and right now we have to be patient.

So that's the first thing, life now is not what we want it to be but the second thing I think is even more amazing and that is the fact that right now life, your life is not what God wants it to be.

Now what I mean by that is this, you think about life as a Christian, you think about wanting to follow God in your life, you think about wanting to pray to him every day, to serve him in your life, to walk closely with God.

That's a wonderful way to live your life but do you know the amazing thing is that that's not enough for God.

[32 : 00] What you are right now is not enough for God. So yes, if you put your trust in Jesus, an amazing change has happened in your life, you are forgiven, you are adopted, you are redeemed, you are alive but God wants more, God wants you closer, God wants you safer, God wants you better, God wants you with him forever.

And the wonder of that future is so great that you shouldn't just be excited, you should be groaning, longing for all that God has for us.

And that's what God wants you to have, that's what the Gospel is all about, that's why God sent his son, that's why Jesus died and rose again so that all the riches of God's kingdom would be poured out on you.

And God grant that we'd all just put our trust in him. Let's pray.

Father, we acknowledge that you are such a generous, gracious, kind and loving God and we thank you so, so much for everything that your word promises us and we can acknowledge Lord that now already we have so many blessings and yet the incredible thing is that there's not yet because there's more to come and we look to that future with eager longing, with groaning Lord for the day when you will bring us home to be with you and all the awfulness of this world will be gone and all that is good will be renewed and we will be able to be with you as the people that you want us to be and oh God we pray that every one of us will be part of that and that every one of us would hear your voice saying come and take your place in my kingdom.

[34 : 38] Lord please, throw us all in and be at work in your midst. In Jesus' name.