

## Why do you groan?

Romans 8:18-27

July 23, 2023

The Word of the Lord from Romans 8:23: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

I very much enjoy being a homeowner, but I wish our house weren't so preachy. It preaches to me all the time. It has doors that don't quite seal right, so they need an extra push. The shingles on my garage are curled up, needing replacement. Cracks run through concrete on the patio and driveway. Bedroom doors creak and faucets leak. The fence had been in need of replacement for quite some time, and that was largely solved when it was replaced—by works, not by grace. I could go on, but you get the idea: that's just the way it is as buildings age.

They're not just getting old; according to Romans 8, they're preaching a sermon—a sermon that is entirely Law with no Gospel to be found. Remember, the Law tells you what to do—and I never run out of things to do around the house! Furthermore, the Law declares that the wages of sin is corruption and death: in the case of our house, that means that everything eventually is going to fall apart. Maintenance is required. Things don't stay in good condition by themselves, but it takes work to preserve them for as long as they can be preserved.

This is what our text means when it says that “creation was subjected to futility,” and that creation is subjected to the bondage of corruption. That's what it means when it says that all of creation groans.

All of creation is preaching this sermon to you. It's why your car needs a tune up and you need to replace the tires. It's why the shingles on your roof are starting to curl and the potholes need to be repaired year after year; it's why you need a new front end alignment or why your windshield might soon preach the law to you as well. It's why the bread in the cupboard and the leftovers pushed to the back of the fridge get corrupted with mold. It's why your clothes get holes, your shoes wear out and the hot water tank suddenly floods your basement. It's why appliances stop working and you've got that growing oil deposit on your driveway you're trying to ignore. All of this goes back to creation subjected to futility: instead of maintaining what it was made to be, it's falling apart. Instead of remaining whole, it is corrupted.

It's not just stuff on the outside, but it's inside of you too. You're part of creation, and it's not easy to stay healthy and energetic. The stuff you **can** control is difficult enough, like eating the right foods, making sure you get enough exercise, avoiding too much sun and toxic substances. Even then, though, you continue to age and those years of “experience” preach futility to you. The aches and pains build up no matter how careful you are, because **you're** wearing out, too. But then there's all the stuff beyond your control—cancers and auto-immune deficiencies, mental failures and various viruses and infections that come along and find you. Because you are part of creation, **you're** subject to corruption as well. Your body and health are preaching a daily sermon to you. And like my house, your body preaches only Law: you've got to work hard to maintain, but in the end it's futile.

Why is it like this? Paul's epistle to the Romans gives two answers.

The first is because of original sin. It goes back to Adam and Eve, created to be perfect and holy and in the presence of God—God, the Creator and Preserver. In the presence of God, Adam and Eve and all their descendants had eternal life, free from corruption and decay. But Adam and Eve chose to give into the devil's temptations: they turned from God, who creates and preserves; to sin, which only corrupts and destroys. Their sin did not just have consequences for them: as God created mankind to be one interconnected family of servants to each other, so their sin extended out to all of their descendants too. Not just their descendants, but now all of creation groans because it has been subjected to futility. Bad things don't just happen—they happen because of original sin; and while you and I weren't in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, the same original sin dwells within you and me.

But there's another important answer to the question, "Why it is like this?" Because while sin might have been the cause, God was the agent. Our text declares that all of creation is under this burden because God subjected all of creation to it. Remember what the Lord declared to Adam after sin came into the world? "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19). In other words, "Creation is subjected to futility and corruption because of you, Adam." It's because of man's sin that creation groans and corrupts. It's because of man's sin that the world is going to be ended one day.

Why has God done this? Because you **need** the sermon to be preached. You need constant reminders of the wages of sin in you and around you. The Lord wants you back with Him, back in His presence forever. If sin had no consequences until Judgment Day, you would just go your merry way and enjoy life until the hammer fell and you were lost forever. So, instead, the Lord daily preaches His Law to you that sin brings futility, corruption and death; and no matter how hard you work at maintaining yourself, you're going to die eternally.

This daily preaching of the Law isn't particularly welcome—but is it necessary? Absolutely, because sinners easily overlook their sin and believe there's nothing wrong. How often do you consider yourself a generally good person, rather than a poor, miserable sinner who deserves only God's wrath? How often, when things go wrong, do you find yourself claiming that you don't deserve to be treated so badly, when the truth is that you have earned nothing good from God at all? And despite this preaching of the Law, how many in the world simply fail to get the message? After all, the Law is there to show us our sin; but in the blindness of sin, many dismiss the corruption of creation as the way things are supposed to be naturally. Others, of course, fail to get the point and instead blame God for man's evildoing.

So creation groans, and you groan too. This futility and corruption are heavy burdens that are truly killing you. Ah, but while the Lord preaches the Law through creation, He also preaches His Gospel to you.

Did you catch why creation groans? It is groaning in the pains of childbirth. That takes us back to original sin, too; for as God cursed the ground for Adam's sin, He also cursed childbirth with the pains of labor. The most joyous moment—the arrival of new life into the world—would now be accompanied by pain and cries and groans. But! But those cries and groans would be followed by new life. And that is why creation groans, for it awaits the revealing of new life—not new life for creation, but new life for you. Creation eagerly longs for you to be revealed as sons of God.

Creation's groan-filled sermon of Law is there to point you to the Gospel. Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, became flesh. He came into this creation to redeem, to reverse the curse of sin. He did so by living a perfect life, free from sin and futility and corruption. And though He didn't have to die, He submitted to death on the cross: your death, the one that you're headed for. Not just death of body, but eternal death beyond any mercy from God. He was forsaken on the cross for your sin so that you might never be forsaken by God. Laid in the grave, though, He did not see corruption. He has not turned to dust and ashes—He is risen from the dead. Risen from the dead, He lives and reigns to deliver you, to raise you from the dead to a new heaven and earth that is free from sin and corruption and death forever.

This creation groans to point you to Christ. Every suffering, big and little, in this world is to say, "This world is dying and you are dying, so don't put your trust in this world! Confess your sins and cling to Christ who has died to deliver you to eternal life." Thus creation points longs for you to be revealed as sons of God. Now, you already are sons of God. All of you, male and female, are sons of God because the sons are the heirs, and you are heirs of the kingdom of God. God declared and made it so in your baptism. There, He marked you as His own and said, "For Jesus' sake, you are now My beloved son and an heir of My kingdom." It's already yours—it's just not revealed yet. Remember the pains of childbirth: the infant is alive for nine months in the womb before it is revealed to the world—then the new life is seen by all. For now, you're still in a sinful world, a corrupted creation. Your new life is hidden, but it is there. And in Christ, you have the sure and certain hope that heaven is yours.

So when you groan, it is not only out of suffering, but expectation. Our text declares, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits 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." We have friends who have adopted children overseas, and it's a process that doesn't happen very quickly. Imagine it from the child's perspective, living in an orphanage in a third-world country. The conditions allow you to live, but there's very little in the way of amenities or advancement. But then you hear the news: you're going to be adopted. The papers have been filed, the deal is done—all that's left for you is to wait for the day when you're delivered to your new home. Dear friends, that's you in Christ. The price has been paid for your adoption as sons already—it was paid with Jesus' own blood on the cross, and so you know the payment was sufficient to redeem you from your sin. The papers were "signed" at the font, for by water and the Word the Lord has written your name in His book of life. You belong to Him, and all that is left for you is to endure this creation with hope—hope that is certain, though unseen. The Lord will raise you up to eternal life, free from sin and disease and death. Your groans are not groans only of "When will this end?" They are tempered with, "I can hardly wait."

That waiting is difficult, because the groaning of creation is a powerful sermon of Law. If that is the only sermon that you hear, then you'll get the message wrong and be driven either to despair or anger at God. So it is not just you and creation that groan in our text: the Spirit groans, too: "Likewise," says our text, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as

we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” For the sake of Jesus, God has sent His Holy Spirit to you. By means of His Word and Sacraments, the Spirit continues to put forgiveness and faith and salvation into you. He continues to finish the sermon that creation starts: where creation preaches, “You’re going to die because of your sin,” the Holy Spirit concludes, “except that Christ has died for your sins and Christ is risen from the dead.” Thus He grants you grace for Jesus’ sake, as well as patience to endure. Therefore, rather than despair or anger at God, you pray. As long as you endure this corrupted creation, you commend yourself to Him. You declare to Him your needs and worries; and you know that—because He has already adopted you for the sake of Jesus—your Father in heaven will not fail to deliver you as He sees best for you. And you have no doubt that your prayers reach His ears, because the Spirit intercedes on your behalf with groanings too deep for words. He does this for you, because you are a saint: you are an adopted child of God, made holy for the sake of Jesus.

So though you groan, you groan in hope. Heaven is coming, and how good will it be? We conclude with the first verse of our text, where Paul writes, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” The sufferings of our present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Is Paul making light of your suffering? Is he saying it’s no big thing? Hardly: we’ve just heard of our need for the Spirit because we could not endure or hope on our own. Rather, no matter how terrible the wages of sin you encounter in this life, the glory of heaven is that much indescribably better. You simply cannot imagine how great and wonderful are the blessings of heaven and eternal life that await. But they are yours. They are yours because Christ has died to make you His.

They are yours because the Spirit safeguards them to you as He delivers repentance and grace by His Word. They are yours because you are forgiven for all of your sins.  
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.