



Conducted by
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Romans 8:22. "Paul says that, *'the whole creation has been groaning together in travail until now.'* What does he mean?" (Revised Standard Version)

This month we return to the question with which I began in the last issue, but to which, for lack of space, I was unable to give adequate attention.

It is wise, when encountering a difficult verse of scripture, to put it in its proper context; read what goes before it and what follows. When we do this with this verse in **Romans 8**, we find that the chapter proclaims the believer's confident hope, in a manner that stands in glorious contrast with the bleak hopelessness which runs through **chapter 7**, especially in verses 7 to 24.

Romans 7 - A chapter of Law and Death.

This chapter deals with Law - all *kinds* of law. But Paul is particularly concerned with the law of sin, and he describes the despair of the man whom, he describes as *'captive to the law of sin'* (v.23).

The despair of the man is clearly heard in the cry in verse 24; *'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?'*

The word, 'wretched' - *'talai pores'*- describes one who has been reduced to weariness by hard-labour. In fact, the latter part of the word - *'poros'* - is the word for 'callus,' bringing to mind hands roughened with exhausting toil, and we find it again in the word *'porosis'*, for 'hardness,' or 'callousness,' in **Mark 3:5**.

The man's wails of agony strikes us with even greater force when Philip Dodderidge, quite accurately, uses the phrase, *'this dead body,'* because it suggests that Paul is very probably alluding to an extremely gruesome form of punishment which, in ancient times, was known to have been inflicted on those guilty of murder.

There is a great deal of evidence to show that the murderer was sometimes bound to the corpse of his victim; hence the question in that verse.

In the following lines, Virgil, the Greek poet, describes this punishment as it was imposed by one particularly cruel Greek King.

*"The living and the dead at his command
Were coupled, face to face and hand to hand;
Till, choked with stench, in loathed embrace,
The lingering wretches pined away and died."*

If you think that this was horrid and uncivilized behaviour, let me remind you that,

in the reign of Richard 1st, the famous 'Richard the Lion-heart' beloved of film-producers, a law was passed relating to the Crusades, which governed those who sailed to the Holy Land. It stated that. "*He who kills a man on shipboard shall be bound to the dead body and thrown into the sea; if a man is killed on shore, the slayer shall be bound to the dead body and buried with it*".

So, no matter how we look at them, the words of Paul vividly depict the hopelessness and misery of the sinner, who finds himself bound to a burden from which he sees no release.

Romans 8 - A chapter of Grace and Life!

But then, in total contrast, **Romans 8** declares the liberty which the Christian has in Christ. '*There is no sentence to be served!*' literally, '*No penal servitude*' for those in Jesus Christ! (vv. 1-2). We have received the Spirit who adopts us and Who bears witness with our own spirit that we are the children of God. This means that we have become joint-heirs with Christ, providing we are prepared to suffer with Him in order to share His glory. (vv. 15-17).

This thought of suffering then leads Paul to acknowledge that, at this present time, suffering is the common experience in life (v. 18). But he quickly tells us it is nothing - not worth mentioning! - in view of the glory which is to come.

At the present time, we, who already possess *spiritual life* in Christ, are waiting for what he describes as '*the redemption of our bodies*' (v. 23).

A Complete Redemption!

It is about this consummation of the divine plan of redemption that he writes in vv. 19 to 23 of the 8th chapter. At the present time, '*the creation waits with eager longing*.' I use this rendering of v. 19 because I believe it is easier to understand than the one we find in the 'A.V.'

The word '*creation*' is defined by Thayer, as '*the sum and aggregate of all created things*.' It refers to the whole of nature; everything we see around us, and all that lives. The world of creation is waiting for something to happen '*with eager longing*.' This last phrase is the translation of just *one* word, and it is a word which presents a very vivid picture. Its meaning becomes clear when we break it up into its three constituent parts, which are; '*apo, kara, dokia*.' That is '*apokaradokia*.'

The word '*apo*' means '*away*,' '*kara*' means '*head*' and '*dokia*' means to '*watch*.'

Put the three parts together and we have a picture of someone, stretching out his head - straining his neck - to watch, in eager expectation of some great event.

Now, we know that when God made everything, it was '*very good*,' and perfect Man lived in a perfect environment (**Gen. 1:31**). But says Paul, creation is '*groaning*' up to this present time (v. 23). That word reveals that *this* is not the world as God meant it to be, and is waiting for a change, and '*agonizing*' as it waits.

But it is a hopeful agony, similar to that of a woman who is expecting the birth of her child. She endures suffering in anticipation of the joy that is to come.

We see this from Paul's use of the word '*travail*' in verse 22.

For What are we Waiting?

What is it for which creation is waiting so eagerly? Look again at verses 19 and 21. All creation is '*longing for the revealing*' - ('*apokalutis*' - '*revelation*') - '*of the sons of God*,' which means the Lord's Return.

And what does the creation expect? To '*obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God*' which will complete the redemption of believers at His Coming.

I use the phrase 'complete the redemption,' because we already enjoy a partial redemption as forgiven children of God. But there is a '*salvation*' yet to come (**Rom.**

13:11), and we are now awaiting *'the redemption of our bodies'* (v. 23).

The Comprehensive effects of Sin.

According to **Gen. 3**, when God imposed punishment on all three involved in that first sin, Adam, Eve and the Serpent, He made it clear that the consequences of their disobedience were not limited to themselves alone. The earth itself was affected.

Because of them the ground itself was cursed and would no longer produce freely, as it had previously done. Furthermore, what had been a pleasant occupation would now become *'toil'*, and Adam was told *'By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread . . .'*"

Yet, there was a glimmer of hope. The message of the Bible is one of *'Generation, Degeneration and Regeneration'* and it records that God spoke of a time when the effects of sin would be cancelled forever. The destruction of sin and Satan himself, would come through *'the seed of the woman'* (**Gen. 3:15**), who would make possible mankind's redemption.

God had warned Adam that disobedience would affect him in two ways (**Gen. 2:17**). The penalty imposed on disobedience would be death, both spiritual and physical. The Hebrew text reads, *'dying, thou shalt die.'*

The first and immediate consequence of their sin was that they died *spiritually*. The root meaning of the word *'death'* is 'separation.' Spiritually, Adam and Eve died instantly. They were separated from God by their sin, and banished from the Garden, we understand that they no longer had fellowship with Him, or free access to Him.

Furthermore, the process of *physical* death commenced. Sickness and suffering, which they had never experienced before, affected their physical bodies.

They began to age, until, as God had warned them, they died and their bodies returned to the ground out of which they had been formed.

But, thanks to the grace of God, His plan of Redemption includes salvation on two levels, so to speak.

First; it embraces the instant restoration of Man's spiritual relationship with God, because it makes possible a new, vibrant life, which brings him back into fellowship with God.

Second; it promises the cancellation of the effects of sin on Man's physical body, when, at the resurrection, *'this mortal shall put on immortality'*, as Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth, in that glorious **1st Corinthians 15**.

Our Glorious Hope

It is for this that both believers in Christ - and Creation itself - is waiting.

At the Second Coming, the redeemed soul of the believer will be united with his raised and renewed body, we *'according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'* (**1st Peter 3:13**).

It is for this glorious day - which is surely coming! - that even 'creation groans' stretching out in eager anticipation!

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