The Creation Groans

Paul's thought on "groaning" starts in the last half of Romans 8:17. It is related to suffering. But Paul is quick to point us toward the Millennium and eternal state. The glory of God.

> **Romans 8:17b … (**we are**) fellow heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.**

Suffering while walking according to the Spirit results in "joint suffering." What follows are four "γαρ" or "for" statements to explain this glory. Initially this explanation is applied to the creation. By starting with creation, Paul gets our attention. The logical question is why bring in the creation when he is in the midst of teaching about "walking according to the Spirit?" By doing this he does get our attention. But, he is taking us back to the first chapters of Genesis. Why we suffer starts in the Garden of Eden with the fall of Adam and Eve. As a result of that fall, the earth was cursed by God. But God has a plan which was also stated in Genesis chapter 3. The first gospel is given there as something the human race can have confident expectation in. Through an anthropopathism the earth itself is anxiously waiting for its freedom from the current fallen state and associated cursing/suffering.

> **Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**

"We begin with that explanatory use of the postpositive conjunctive particle *γαρ*. The genius of the Apostle Paul always comes into the picture because no one ever used more connective particles or

conjunctive particles. Paul had that great ability to not just come up with superior thought to everyone else, but to connect that superior thought to other superior thoughts so that the entire formation of the christian way of life becomes apparent, and the use of these connective particles is an extremely important factor in the interpretation of the Pauline epistles, as well as certain other sections of the Word.[1]"

In verse 18, Paul emphasized that suffering Christians endure while walking according to the Spirit is insignificant when standing face to face with future glory. Paul, in the next verse, picks up on the future aspect of glory. But he applies it to the entire creation, the entire material universe.

Looking again at Romans 8:19-22, I questioned why Paul includes "the creation." We are in the midst of an explanation of the spiritual life of the believer when Paul plops "the creation." This forces us to consider when creation began and how was it corrupted. It reminds us that dam's sin affected not just himself but the entire creation.

> **Romans 8:19 For (**Greek γαρ**) the anxious longing of <u>the creation</u> waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.**
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> **Romans 8:20 For (**Greek γαρ**) <u>the creation</u> was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope**
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> **Romans 8:21 that itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.**
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> **Romans 8:22 For (**Greek γαρ**) we know that <u>the whole creation</u> <u>groans</u> and suffers the pains of**

1 R. B. Thieme, Romans series tape 78 lecture 3.

childbirth together (literally suffers together) until now.

Let's outline this argument before getting into the details.

Verse 17: Adult sons/Mature believers are joint sufferers with Christ which allows them to share in Christ's glory. The context of this chapter is "walk according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1 & Romans 8:4)

Verse 18: (For, *gar*) This suffering of mature believers/adult sons is insignificant when considering the glory that results.

Verse 19: (For, *gar*) The creation eagerly expects the revealing of the sons (adult sons huios). This is huge. The adult sons have produced glory via walking according to the Spirit. Creation is looking forward to this revealing.

Verse 20: (For, *gar*) Implied why? Because creation itself is cursed as a result of Adam's sin followed by God's judgment and curse on creation.

Verse 21: Which leads to a freeing of creation from the curse following the revealing of the adult sons of God.

Verse 22: (For, *gar*) Summary of current situation is that creation groans (?moans?) as a result of the current status.

> **Romans 8:19 For (**Greek γαρ**) the anxious longing of <u>the creation</u> waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.**

First, when Paul mentions "creation," what does that include? Paul modifies creation in verse 22: "the whole creation." This forces us back to the creation in the book of Genesis:

> **Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

The heavens (plural) and the earth. The heavens, in the Bible, includes three heavens. Listen to Merrill Unger from his Bible dictionary:

"Scriptures evidently specify three heavens, since "the third heaven" is revealed to exist (II Cor. 12:2). It is logical that a third heaven cannot exist without a first and second. Scripture does not describe specifically the first and second heaven. The first, however, apparently refers to the atmospheric heavens of the fowl (Isa. 2:18) and clouds (Dan. 7:13). The second heaven may be the stellar spaces (Cf. Gen 1:14-18). It is the abode of all supernatural angelic beings. The third heaven is the abode of the Triune God. Its location is unrevealed. Until this present age it has not been entered by any created being angelic or human. It is the divine plan at present to populate the third heaven. It is a place (John 14:1-3). It is called "glory" (Heb. 2:10). Those who enter it will be perfected forever (Heb. 10:14) and made partakers of Christ's fullness (Col. 1:19) and which comprehends the very nature of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). The Apostle John was called into heaven (Rev. 4:1). The Apostle Paul was caught up to the third heaven (II Cor. 12:1-9). He was prohibited, however, from revealing what he saw and heard. Heaven is a place of

beauty (Rev. 21:1-22:7), of life (I Tim 4:8), service (Rev. 22:3), worship (Rev. 19:1-3) and glory (II Cor. 4:17)[2].”

Creation waits eagerly. Paul is pointing to the future. The adult sons of God will be revealed after the Judgment Seat of Christ in the Millennium. They will return to earth to rule with Christ.

> **2 Timothy 2:11 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (**salvation**)**
>
> **2 Timothy 2:12 <u>If we endure, we will also reign with Him</u>; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; (**rewards**)**
>
> **2 Timothy 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (**eternal security**)**

In a couple of verses Paul has taken us from the beginning of Genesis to the ending of Revelation. So creation starts with God creating it and continues into eternity. The whole creation.

> **Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.**
>
> **Revelation 21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.**

2 Unger, M.F. (1971). *Unger’s bible dictionary*, (Seventeenth printing.). Chicago: Moody Press. p463

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle (literally "tent"**) of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,**

Revelation 21:4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Revelation 21:5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

Waits eagerly. This is a single word in the Greek that means "waits eagerly." This looks forward to what God is going to do. For Paul, this must be an important word since he uses it three times in Romans 8. Here in this verse, creation waits eagerly.

Creation. Not just humans. Not just the earth. But "creation." Some translate this as the "material universe."

When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden and for a lack of a better word, "cursed" with a perishable body and no human spirit. At the same time, creation, in particular, earth was cursed. At the end of the Millennium there will be a new perfected heaven and earth (Revelation 21).

Genesis 3:17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the <u>ground</u> because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.

Ground. Depending upon context, this Hebrew word has a spectrum of meanings stretching from "soil" to "land" to "country." It is from the same root word as "man" or "Adam." Here the ground is contained in the whole earth.

Isaiah 24:1 Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants.

Isaiah 24:2 And the people will be like the priest, the servant like his master, the maid like her mistress, the buyer like the seller, the lender like the borrower, the creditor like the debtor.

Isaiah 24:3 The earth will be completely laid waste and completely despoiled, for the LORD has spoken this word.

Isaiah 24:4 The earth mourns *and* withers, the world fades *and* withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away.

Isaiah 24:5 The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws,

violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant.

Isaiah 24:6 Therefore, <u>a curse devours the earth</u>, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

...

Romans 8:20 For (Greek γαρ**) <u>the creation</u> was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope**

Futility. The word means futility, vanity, emptiness, purposelessness, transitoriness[3]. This is an important word here in this context. It points to the fall of man which caused the futility of creation. Biblehub has a good paragraph on this.

"Strong's Greek 3153 describes the state of frustrating emptiness that results whenever a person or a system is severed from the purpose for which God created it. The term embraces moral vanity (Ephesians 4:17), cosmic frustration (Romans 8:20), and the hollow promises of false religion or philosophy (2 Peter 2:18)[4]."

In a single word, Paul has captured the essence of the fall as it applies to creation pointing at the loss of purpose of creation. Let us follow this logically and you'll see what I mean.

First, man did not have to work to farm.

3 Arndt, W.F. and Gingrich, F.W. (1969). *A Greek-english lexicon of the new testament and other early christian literature : A translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's griechisch-deutsches worterbuch zu den schriften des neuen testaments* ... Chicago: University Of Chicago Press. P 496

4 https://biblehub.com/greek/3153.htm

> **Genesis 2:16 The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;**
>
> **Genesis 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."**

Here the garden provided food for man without effort.

But after the fall, God curses the ground so that man now has to expend effort to farm.

> **Genesis 3:17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground (**Hebrew "adamah"**) because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.**
>
> **Genesis 3:18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field;**
>
> **Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."**

In Romans 8:21 Paul says that creation will be set free from corruption. Indeed, he is looking forward to what John eventually wrote in

Revelation. Although it was not yet written, Paul was clued in to many things that he did not write.

> **Revelation 22:1 Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,**
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> **Revelation 22:2 in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (**No more working for food**)**
>
> **Revelation 22:3 There will <u>no longer be any curse</u>; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;**

This is what creation is looking forward to. "There will no longer be any curse."

Hope. Remember, the Greek word means "confident expectation." Though the earth is currently cursed, God will in the future restore the earth to the "new earth." We who are saved by faith look forward to a creation that is blessed. Having been justified/saved in the past we now look forward.

> **Romans 8:21 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.**

Glory. We will be glorified with Christ in the future. Jesus mentions that in His High Priestly prayer in John 17.

> **Romans 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.**

Groans. This is from a word group meaning to sigh, to groan. I see it as an expression of emotion. If the creation groans, it has been characterized as a living being. So the groaning would be like an anthropopathism. It has a prefix that means "with." So it is to grown with. The question then is groan with whom or what? My suggestion is that the creation is made up of many parts. Each of the parts groans in unison.

> **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.**

Waiting eagerly. The second use of this word which indeed means to "wait eagerly." In this case, we, believers in Jesus Christ, wait eagerly. One pastor suggested this is like a little kid in eager anticipation of opening presents on Christmas day.

Groan within ourselves. This suggests it is an inaudible groaning. We think it.