

# Romans 8:19-22

- God and the Pandemic I -

- The creation groans -

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## Introduction

- ❖ COVID-19. A first wave. A second wave. Pandemic. (Partial) Lock-down. Schools are closed. Travel is limited. Air-traffic was almost halted. Hospitals in some countries are overwhelmed by patients. Some don't even make it to the hospital and die. People in nursing-homes suffer. Businesses are being closed. People lose their jobs. In some countries church services have been banned or are being held with limited attendance. The enemy is unseen, a virus. People wear mouth-masks to prevent spreading the virus. Social distancing is a must. Infected people are being quarantined for fourteen days.
- ❖ The apostle Paul wrote about suffering in Romans 8. Although he primarily focused on suffering under persecution, sharing in the sufferings of Christ, it is possible to take a wider view. In Romans 8:19-22, he wrote about the creation, which is subjected to frustration and decay by God. A pandemic shows this frustration and decay worldwide.
- ❖ How do we react to this worldwide crisis? With fear? Trying to find an answer to the question: "Why"? "What does God want to teach us?" "Does God have a plan?" Perhaps it is better not to look for answers. N.T. Wright wrote: "Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. It's Not Supposed To."<sup>1</sup> Is it possible to rephrase this title into: "Christianity Offers Some Answers To the Coronavirus, Being Called To Do So." Not answers in a theoretical sense, but in a religious and practical sense. Wright points to Romans 8:26, 27 when he writes: "St. Paul speaks of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, N., The New Testament in Its World., & Pandemic, G. A. (2020, March 29). Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/>

Holy Spirit ‘groaning’ within us, as we ourselves groan within the pain of the whole creation.” This is only possible when Christians have hope (Rom 8:24, 25) and persevere therein.<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ This outline and the outline of Romans 8:28 but can be used together or separately.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Letter to the Romans. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a “stand-alone”. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

## Context

- ❖ An overview of the Letter to the Romans. This overview serves also as a summary of the contents of this letter.

<b>Greetings and Introduction (Rom 1:1-17)</b>	
Romans 1:1-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Greetings, Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:1-10)</li> <li>B. Plan to visit the Romans and to share the Gospel with them (1:11-17)</li> </ul>
<b>The righteousness from God (Rom 1:18-8:39)</b>	
Romans 1:18-3:20	<p>The wrath of God against all unrighteousness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Of this world (1:18-32)</li> <li>B. Of the Jews (2:1-3:8)</li> <li>C. Conclusion: The Jews and the Gentiles are alike under sin (3:9-20)</li> </ul>

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<sup>2</sup> See also Wright, N. T. (2020). *God and the pandemic: A Christian reflection on the coronavirus and its aftermath*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Romans 3:21-8:39

The righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ:

- A. To which the Law and the Prophets testify (3:21-31)
- B. Abraham was justified by faith (4:1-25)
- C. Through faith we have been justified and are reconciled with God (5:1-11)

The contrasts:

- D. Death came through Adam, life came through Christ (5:12-21)
- E. We are dead to sin, and alive in Christ under grace (6:1-14)
- F. We are slaves not to sin but to righteousness and to God (6:15-23)
- G. In the mind a slave to God's law, in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin (7:1-25)

The children of God:

- H. The Spirit has set us free from sin. He has made us children and heirs of God (8:1-17)
- I. As his children, we share in the suffering of Christ, and will share in his glory (8:18-30)
- J. There is nothing that will separate us from the love of God in Christ (8:31-39)

**What about Israel, the chosen people of God? (Rom 9:1-11:36)**

Romans 9:1-11:36

- A. Not all Israelites came to faith in Christ (9:1-29)
- B. Because they pursued righteousness by works (9:30-10:21)
- C. Did God reject Israel? By no means! (11:1-32)
- D. Glory to God (11:33-36)

**Live according to the Gospel (Rom 12:1-15:13)**

Romans 12:1-15:13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Renew your mind (Rom 12:1-21)</li> <li>B. Submit yourself to the authorities (Rom 13:1-7)</li> <li>C. Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:8-14)</li> <li>D. Accept each other in Christ (Rom 15:1-15:13)</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose, Plans, Greetings (Rom 15:14-16:27)</b>	
Romans 15:14-16:27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Purpose of the letter, his plans to visit Rome and Spain (Rom 15:14-33)</li> <li>B. Greetings to different groups and individuals (Rom 16:1-16)</li> <li>C. Final words and greetings from (Rom 16:16-27)</li> </ul>

- ❖ An elaborated overview of Romans 8:17-39:
  - This passage consists of two parts:
    - Romans 8:17-30. The apostle contrasts the present suffering with the future glory of Christ. He concludes this part with an assurance of the Christian hope.
    - Romans 8:31-39. By a series of rhetorical questions, the apostle assures the readers that really nothing, whatever will happen, can separate us from the love of Christ (and His glory). These rhetorical questions strongly affirm the point the apostle Paul wants to make.
  - The first part is characterized by the following words:
    - Suffering:  
sufferings (verse 18); weakness (26) – sons/children of God  
frustration (20); bondage to decay (21) – creation
    - Hope:  
eager expectation (19); in hope (20); groaning, as in the pains of childbirth (22) – creation  
groan inwardly (23); wait eagerly (23), in this hope we were saved (24) – sons/children of God  
groans that words can not express (27) – the Spirit
      - Note the groaning of the creation, the sons of God, and the Spirit.
    - Salvation and Glory:  
liberated (21); brought into the glorious freedom of the sons of God (21); the

sons of God to be revealed (19) – creation  
 redemption of our bodies (23); adoption as sons (23) – sons/children of God

<b>The children of God, co-heirs with Christ</b>	
present - suffering	future (promise) - the Christian hope and glory
<p><sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings</p> <p>I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing</p>	<p><sup>18</sup> in order that we may also share in his glory.</p> <p>with the glory that will be revealed in us.</p>
<i>The creation and the sons of God (verse 19-22)</i>	
<p><sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation</p> <p><sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it,</p> <p><sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.</p>	<p>for the sons of God to be revealed.</p> <p>in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.</p>
<i>We ourselves as the sons of God (verse 23-25)</i>	
<p><sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly</p> <p><sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope we wait for it patiently.</p>	<p>for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.</p> <p>for what we do not yet have,</p>
<i>The Spirit and the sons of God (verse 26-27)</i>	

<sup>26</sup> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

*Conclusion and first Assurance (verse 28-30)*

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

<sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined

<sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

for the good

to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

*Second Assurance (verse 31-39) - a series of rhetorical questions*

<p><sup>31</sup> What, then, shall we say in response to this?</p>	<p><i>(Nothing!)</i></p>
<p>If God is for us, who can be against us?</p>	<p><i>(Nobody!)</i></p>
<p><sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?</p>	<p><i>(Yes, he will!)</i></p>
<p><sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.</p>	<p><i>(Nobody!)</i></p>
<p><sup>34</sup> Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.</p>	<p><i>(Nobody!)</i></p>
<p><sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?</p>	<p><i>(Nothing!)</i></p>
<p><sup>36</sup> As it is written:  <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”</p> </p>	
<p><sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.</p>	
<p><sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,</p>	
	<p>will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.</p>

## Form and structure

### ❖ Romans 8:19-22.

	<p><sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.</p> <p><sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.</p> <p><sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.</p>
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## Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

### ❖ Date of writing

- "Romans was drafted in the winter of 56–57 c.e. or the early spring of 57"<sup>3</sup> and was sent from the Corinth or Cenchrea (Rom 16:1, 2) which was in the vicinity of Corinth. The letter was probably carried by Phoebe to the city of Rome.

### ❖ The City of Rome and the Letter to the Romans.<sup>4</sup>

- "An extensive building program paid by" Emperor Augustus "and his wealthy supporters transformed Rome into a gleaming city of marble that grew to house a million people. Under his loyal son-in-law Agrippa, a new aqueduct was built along with numerous public fountains; temples were restored; public gardens, baths, and theaters were erected; and the city administration was reorganized with fire brigades and police protection; enhanced grain deliveries to Roman citizens were also provided. All of these

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<sup>3</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 18).

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is a summary of Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 47, 48).

improvements served to demonstrate that the golden age of peace and plenty had finally arrived."

- "Of more direct relevance for the situation of Paul's Letter to the Romans were the reigns of Claudius (41–54 c.e.) and Nero (54–68 c.e.)." "Claudius continued the process of urban development with the creation of a new harbour for the grain trade, the improvement of the roads and aqueducts, the reorganization of the court system, and the creation of an imperial bureaucracy consisting of slaves and freedmen/women who administered the affairs of the empire in areas where the emperor had direct control."
- "Nero came to power with the pledge to restore the role of the Senate and the rule of law, and was celebrated for ushering in a golden age." "At the time Romans was written, the Nero administration was providing an exemplary form of government and law enforcement, despite the profligate personal habits of Nero himself—an aggressive bisexual who enjoyed stalking the streets of Rome with his crowd of sycophants demanding sexual services from passersby and 'indulging in brawls and petty thieving.' The combination of Paul's denunciation of immorality (*Rom 1:25-32*) combined with the command to respect governmental agents as the source of law and order (*Rom 13:1-7*) may derive in part from these peculiar circumstances."
- "A crucial element in understanding the situation of Christian congregations in Rome is the crowded urban environment. At the time of Paul's letter, most of the population in Rome lived in the upper levels of 'multistory tenement houses' or in the rears of shops, while the nobility and the wealthy citizens of Rome occupied lower floors of these buildings or in mansions in the better parts of the city."<sup>5</sup>
- "The large Jewish community in Rome had played a major role in the formation of the Christian congregations prior to the time of Paul's letter."<sup>6</sup>  
"Julius Caesar granted the right of Jewish communities to follow their own laws, which was confirmed by the Senate in 44 b.c.e. and later by Augustus and Claudius. The 'right to live according to Jewish Laws and Customs' included permission to have meetings for worship and meals together, to organize a communal life, the right not to give bonds on the Sabbath, to have kosher markets, and to send funds to the Jerusalem temple."<sup>7</sup>  
"Although there may have been others, there is solid evidence of at least eleven synagogues in Rome; the word συναγωγή (*synagogue*) may refer to congregations rather than buildings."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 53).

<sup>6</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 55).

<sup>7</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 56).

<sup>8</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 57).

## Exposition

### Verse 17-18 summary

- ❖ See for a detailed outline above.
- ❖ (Rom 8: 17, 18) We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. We share in his sufferings (of Christ) and we will also share in his glory. This is a statement of faith.
  - The suffering Paul refers to, is primarily referring to persecution and oppression at the time of writing. He uses words like resistance (who can be against us; 31); charges against (33); condemnation (34); trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword (35; we face death all day long; 36). See also 1 Corinthians 4:9–12; 2 Corinthians 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:24–27; Hebrews 11:35–38.<sup>9</sup>
    - **suffering = “πάθημα”**: 1. **that which is suffered or endured, suffering, misfortune**<sup>10</sup>
  - In contrast to this suffering, Paul ascertains that God will justify (33), and he will graciously give us all things (32). And whatever happens, no one and nothing will separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our saviour (38, 39).
  - The glory is the glory of God. Jesus prayed: “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” (Jn 17:24). “It is closely related to the Hebrew sense of כבוד / δόξα as innate weightiness, honor, beauty, fiery presence, splendor, or power.”<sup>11</sup>
  - For the role of suffering in other religions, philosophies and the experience of modern man, see below (Application: suffering). It is important to study other worldviews concerning suffering.
- ❖ Some preliminary remarks:
  - First, the sufferings and the glory belong together indissolubly as they did in the experience of Christ, they will do in the experience of his people.
  - Secondly, the sufferings and the glory characterize the two ages, this age and the age to come. The suffering of this age is contrasted with the glory of the age to come, the glory of God.

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<sup>9</sup> Utley, R. J. (1998, Vol. Volume 5, Rom 8:18).

<sup>10</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 747).

<sup>11</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 510).

- Thirdly, the sufferings and the glory cannot be compared.
- Fourthly, the sufferings and the glory involve both God’s creation and God’s children. Paul writes from a cosmic perspective.<sup>12</sup>
- ❖ **“the glory that will be revealed in us.”** **“The glory will be *revealed*, not created.** The implication is that it is already existent, but not apparent.”<sup>13</sup> This is explained in the following verses.
  - Verse 19: **“the sons of God** to be revealed.”
  - Verse 21: “the glorious freedom of **the children of God.**”
  - Verse 23: “our **adoption as sons**, the redemption of our bodies.”
    - This glory is the result of the redemption of our bodies, which are no longer subjected to suffering, to death and to decay (2 Cor 4:17). See also 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

#### Verse 19

- ❖ **“The creation” = “κτίσις”:** b. the sum total of everything created, *creation, world*.<sup>14</sup> In verse 19: “the whole creation below the human level (animate and inanimate).”<sup>15</sup>
  - The creation displays the invisible qualities of God: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Rom 1:20). The creation of created things became an object of worship: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom 1:25).
    - The comparison of Romans 1:20, 25 and Romans 8:19-22 is interesting. **The creation became an object of worship by man and was subjected to frustration by God.**
- ❖ **“waits in eager expectation”.** The creation is personified as a mother. See also the **“pains of childbirth”** (Rom 8:22).

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<sup>12</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (2001, p. 237-238).

<sup>13</sup> Morris, L. (1988, p. 320).

<sup>14</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 573).

<sup>15</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 573).

- “eager expectation” = “ἀποκαρδοκία”: signifies confident expectation. The basic idea is that of stretching the neck, craning forward,<sup>16</sup> looking into the future.

❖ **“for the sons of God to be revealed”**

- See also 1 John 3:2: “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and **what we will be has not yet been made known**. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Their sonship “is veiled and their incognito is impenetrable except to faith. Even they themselves have to believe in their sonship against the clamorous evidence of much in their circumstances and condition which seems to be altogether inconsistent with the reality of it.”<sup>17</sup>
- Louw and Nida suggest the following translation: “for creation awaits with eager expectation for God to reveal his sons”.<sup>18</sup> “to be revealed” is a *divinum passivum*.
- The “**sons of God**” share in the sufferings of Christ so that they also share in his glory (Rom 8:17). Then also their bodies will share in the redemption (Rom 8:23).
  - This revelation of the sons of God will happen when the adoption as sons will be completed when their bodies will share the redemption.
  - **Emperor Augustus**  
The title Son of God was also applied to Emperor Augustus and some of his successors. Many deceased Emperors were deified by the senate or their successors. The main differences are: the sons of God are revealed by God and not by successors. The revelation of a Roman Emperor as a “son of God” didn’t involve the “redemption of the body.”

Verse 20, 21

❖ **“For the creation was subjected to frustration”**

- The Greek word order is as follows: “**For to frustration, the creation was subjected.**” “**For to frustration**” is emphasized.
- “**For**” introduces the reason why the creation is waiting in eager expectation. The creation is suffering too.

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<sup>16</sup> Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004, p. 410).

<sup>17</sup> Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004, p. 412, 413).

<sup>18</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996, p. 295).

- After discussing different possible explanations, Cranfield concludes that “**frustration**” denotes “the ineffectiveness of that which does not attain its goal.” The creation cannot fully glorify God while the sons of God haven’t been revealed yet.<sup>19</sup>
  - The Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) uses the same word in the introduction to Ecclesiastes: “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’”<sup>20</sup>
    - The Jews living in Rome were probably familiar with these expressions.
    - The erosion of the natural environment is not a modern-day phenomenon. Deforestation by the Romans caused already problems.<sup>21</sup>
  - Referring to Ecclesiastes 2:1-17, Jewett and Kotansky comment: “The basic idea is that the human refusal to accept limitations ruins the world. By acting out idolatrous desires to have unlimited dominion over the garden, the original purpose of the creation—to express divine goodness (Gen 1:31) and reflect divine glory (Ps 19:1–4)—was emptied. As in Ecclesiastes 2:1–17, **it is the drive for fame, prestige, and immortal achievement that evacuates the goodness and glory of the creation and piles up endless frustrations in the human interaction with the natural environment**, symbolized in Genesis by the “thorns and thistles” (Gen 3:18).”<sup>22</sup>
- ❖ **“not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it”**
- “Not by its own choice” or “not through its own fault.”<sup>23</sup> This also implies that this “frustration” was not part of the creation.
  - God has subjected the world to frustration. Cranfield quotes E. Gaugler: “**because of the judicial decision pronounced by God on account of Adam’s sin.**”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004, p. 413, 414).

<sup>20</sup> Ματαιότης ματαιότητων, εἶπεν ὁ Ἐκκλησιαστής, ματαιότης ματαιότητων, τὰ πάντα ματαιότης, (Ecc 1:1,2); τῆ γὰρ ματαιότητι, (Rom 8:20).

<sup>21</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 513).

<sup>22</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 513).

<sup>23</sup> Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004, p. 414).

<sup>24</sup> Cranfield, C. E. B. (2004, p. 414).

- “It seems likely that Paul has in mind the abuse of the natural world by Adam and his descendants.<sup>25</sup>
- ❖ **“in hope”** (See also Romans 5:2).
  - The creation is personified. And there will be an end to this frustration, nature will be restored to its original beauty and glory:<sup>26</sup>
- ❖ **“that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay”**
  - Genesis 3:17-18: “To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ ‘**Cursed is the ground because of you**; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.’” (See also Genesis 4:12.)
    - Nature is enslaved, “locked into an unending cycle, so that conception, birth and growth are relentlessly followed by decline, decay, death and decomposition.”<sup>27</sup>
- ❖ **“and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God”**
  - Note the contrast **“bondage” <> “freedom.”**
  - **“glorious freedom of the children of God.”** This is the freedom of Christ.
    - “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. **When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory**” (Col 3:3, 4).
    - “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body**” (Philip 3:20, 21). The glorious freedom implies a complete transformation. See 1 Corinthians 15:35-49.
  - **“brought into”**

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<sup>25</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 513).

<sup>26</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 514).

<sup>27</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (2001, p. 239).

- By God. He will transform this world into a new world. “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isa 65:17; see also Revelation 21:1-7).
- Christ will rule in heaven until “the time comes **for God to restore everything**, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Acts 3:21).

#### Verse 22

##### ❖ **“We know”**

- **“we”** is inclusive: Paul, his companions and his readers, the church at Rome.

##### ❖ **“that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth”**

- See also John 16:21: **“A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come**; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.”
- Matthew 24:6-8: “You will hear of **wars and rumors of wars**, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”
  - In this case, **wars and rumours of wars** are included.

##### ❖ **“right up to the present time.”** This is the time of writing this letter.

- Verse 22 brings together the past, present and future. The creation is groaning up to the present time (present), it has been groaning (referring to the past), as in “pains fo childbirth” (the future promise).<sup>28</sup>

#### Verse 23-39 (summary)

- ❖ (Rom 8:23-25) In Romans 7:24 Paul exclaimed: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” Again, he writes: “we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Because of the Christian hope, we wait patiently for the realization of Gods promises. He children of God already received the firstfruits of the Spirit as a mark (Eph 1:13, 14). He is the Spirit of the sonship. And by him, we cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:14, 15). The Spirit also testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.
- ❖ (Rom 8:26-27) “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”

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<sup>28</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (2001, p. 241).

- “weakness” = “**ἀσθένεια**”: 3. **lack of confidence or feeling of inadequacy, weakness.** Of Paul’s *self-effacement, timidity* (1 Cor 2:3). Also in a sense of *helplessness*. It can also refer to a lack of spiritual insight and a fragile feeling of hope.<sup>29</sup>
- The Spirit of God searches the hearts of the believers. He knows the fears, the anxieties, the uncertainties, the questions. The Spirit knows the will of God. He intercedes and prays in accordance with God’s will. By writing this, Paul assures all those who devoted their lives to God, to trust him in all circumstances.
- The Spirit as the Paraclete, see John 14:16-17.
- ❖ (Rom 8:28-30) For a detailed explanation and discussion, see Romans 8:28.<sup>30</sup>
  - God has a plan, a purpose. He has glorified, those he has called. And he is working together with them for the good.

#### Verse 31-39 Summary

- ❖ (Rom 8:31-35) Paul poses a series of rhetorical questions. He doesn't answer them but expects his readers to give the answers: "nothing" and "nobody" – will separate us from the love of God in Christ.
- ❖ (Rom 8:36) At this point, he is quoting Psalm 44:22. The apostle might have chosen this Psalm because its content reflects the situation at the moment of writing this letter to the Romans.
- ❖ (Rom 8:37-39) Despite these circumstances, Paul affirms that the children of God are more than conquerors and not victims. He concludes this part of the letter with assurances, which tends toward a doxology.

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<sup>29</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 142).

<sup>30</sup> (n.d.). Christian Library. Retrieved from [https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/word/Romans 8.28.pdf](https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/word/Romans%208.28.pdf)

## Application

### The point of Lament

- ❖ The point of lament, woven thus into the fabric of the biblical tradition, is not just that it's an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. The mystery of the biblical story is that God also laments. Some Christians like to think of God as above all that, knowing everything, in charge of everything, calm and unaffected by the troubles in his world. That's not the picture we get in the Bible.
- ❖ God was grieved to his heart, Genesis declares, over the violent wickedness of his human creatures. He was devastated when his own bride, the people of Israel, turned away from him. And when God came back to his people in person—the story of Jesus is meaningless unless that's what it's about—he wept at the tomb of his friend. St. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit “groaning” within us, as we ourselves groan within the pain of the whole creation. The ancient doctrine of the Trinity teaches us to recognize the One God in the tears of Jesus and the anguish of the Spirit.
- ❖ It is no part of the Christian vocation, then, to be able to explain what's happening and why. In fact, it is part of the Christian vocation not to be able to explain—and to lament instead. As the Spirit laments within us, so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell. And out of that there can emerge new possibilities, new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope. New wisdom for our leaders? Now there's a thought.

**N.T Wright:**<sup>31</sup>

### Praise

- ❖ Praise Christ, because he has saved us, and is the Lord of Creation. All things have been subjected to him. See also Ephesians 1:3-12.
  - The winds and the waves obey him (Mt 8:27).
  - His authority and the healings are a sign that the creation will be liberated and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Wright, N., *The New Testament in Its World., & Pandemic*, G. A. (2020, March 29). *Christianity Offers No Answers About the Coronavirus*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/>

<sup>32</sup> Gunton, C. E. (1992, p. 20).

- Study the relation between Christ and the Creation: John 1:1-5; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-4.

Colossians 1:19-20:

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

- ❖ Be grateful for faith, the adoption of sons, the justification and glorification in which all believers share. See also Romans 8:14-17.

#### We know

- ❖ Stress the importance to study the word of God concerning the creation, and the present condition of mankind.

#### That the creation

- ❖ The creation was submitted to frustration (Gen 3:17-19). The creation was meant to glorify God, to show his wisdom (Ps 19:1-4), goodness, and creativeness (Gen 1:31). The creation was not given to mankind to exploit this world for his own sake. “By acting out idolatrous desires to have unlimited dominion over” the creation, “the original purpose was emptied. As in Ecclesiastes 2:1–17, it is the drive for fame, prestige, and immortal achievement that evacuates the goodness and glory of the creation and piles up endless frustrations in the human interaction with the natural environment, symbolized in Genesis by the ‘thorns and thistles’.<sup>33</sup>
  - This results in:  
Natural disasters, such as plagues, drought, flooding.  
**Climate change.**  
There are natural causes, but also disasters caused by man.
  - Paul used the words “frustration,” “bondage,” and “decay.” Indeed, this is the experience of mankind.
- ❖ The revelation of the children of God, also means that Christians show compassion to those who suffer, and offer help, and pray for the creation and all people (1 Tim 2:1-5).
- ❖ The future glory is depicted in images in Revelation 21, 22.

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<sup>33</sup> Jewett, R., & Kotansky, R. D. (2006, p. 513).

## Suffering:

- ❖ Suffering, or pain in a broad sense, is an unpleasant experience and might be associated with the perception of harm or threat of harm. The opposite of suffering is often defined as pleasure or happiness.<sup>34</sup> But the apostle Paul opposes suffering to glory, the glory of God.
- ❖ Although the apostle Paul doesn't apply "suffering" to "the creation", the "groaning of the creation" results in suffering of man, individual or collective suffering. It is important to study the different views on suffering.
- ❖ A summary on the different views can be found at Wikipedia.<sup>35</sup> Study these concerning the local religious and cultural circumstances.
  - Classical philosophy: Epicureanism and Stoicism. Their philosophies were prominent in the New Testament era.
  - Modern Western philosophy.
  - Hinduism and Jainism.
  - Buddhism.
  - Islam.

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<sup>34</sup> Suffering. (2020, September 28). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffering>

<sup>35</sup> Suffering. (2020, September 28). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suffering>

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