

Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

The Whole Creation Groans...

Romans 8:18-28

While you were asleep last night, the whole world groaned in expectation of its ultimate fulfillment and redemption before God. The creation groaned. You groaned as a believer and the Holy Spirit Himself groaned on your behalf and, brothers and sisters, that was a good thing and that is what we are going to see this morning Romans 8:18-28.

Now there is a sense in which the bulk of Romans 8:18-28 is really just a parenthesis. You can see that, I think, by looking at verses 16-17 of chapter 8 and then glancing down to verse 28. In fact let's do just that. Look down at verse 16.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:16**...The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Now let me ask you, **"What is Paul's principal point in verse 16?"** And I really do want you to help me flesh out his principal point. So, what would you say is Paul's main point? Of course, his point is that we are God's children and that we don't, in fact, have any doubts about that because the Spirit of God bears witness to us subjectively that this wonderful objective proposition of sonship is not only true but that it is actually, really and truly, true for us. How wonderful that idea is. Now verse 17, Paul expands upon that same theme and even advances it.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:17**...Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Now what is Paul's principal point there? Well, the principal point is that this wonderful position we enjoy as God's children has a purpose and that that purpose is that we might be heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ. Now we all know what it means to be an heir. An heir is a person who receives property or blessing or benefits as a result of being related to someone else. But the question here in Romans 8:17, and I hope you'll forgive me for getting sidetracked for a moment, but I didn't really have a chance to discuss this last week...but the question here in Romans 8:17 is, **"Who is the heir? That is, who is receiving whom?"** Now I bring that up because there are two ways, more than two really, but two main ways to look the prepositional phrase **"of God."** It could be a subjective genitive describing God's possession of us, or it could be an objective genitive describing our possession of God.

Let me explain that further. Sometimes when you see a phrase like this, **"I do what I do for the love of _____."** You have to decide whether that person is doing what he does because he loves the thing in the blank or because he desires the thing in the blank to love him. If he is saying it is because he loves the thing in the blank, it is an objective genitive describing the **"object"** of his love. If he is saying that he wants the thing in the blank to love him, it is a subjective genitive describing the **"subject"** or person that he wants to love him.

Let me give you two examples to help you see what I mean.

I do what I do for the love of pecan pie.

Now you don't have to be a genius to see that I am talking about my love for pecan pie and not its love for me. In fact, pecan pies are terrified of me and for good reason. It is the object and I am the subject. So it's an objective genitive.

On the other hand, if I say...

I do what I do for the love of my wife.

I am more than likely talking about the other thing. In other words I may do what I do because I love her but I am probably talking about doing what I do so she will love me. I want her to do the loving. I want her to be the "**subject**" not the "**object**." I want to be the "**object**."

I do what I do for the love of pecan pie.

Objective (The pie receives the love.)

I do what I do for the love of my wife.

Subjective (The wife gives the love.)

Now I have digressed here to discuss this little bit of grammar because, I want you to be able to answer a question with me. Is God the heir? That is, does God receive us as an inheritance? Or are we the heirs in that we receive God as an inheritance? You can see, I hope, why that is an important question. Of course, both aspects can be true but here Paul clearly has one idea in mind over the other. You see the answer here is that we are the heirs of God in that we receive God as an inheritance ourselves.

Now imagine that.

It is true that we are His people but Paul's point here is that He is our God. He is our inheritance. Now there are those that don't like to hear teachers say we

receive God as an inheritance and I understand that. Certainly, we do not receive God as an inheritance apart from our relationship to Christ. But in Christ, we are heirs, joint heirs, and as joint heirs with Christ we glory in our inheritance of God. He is what we receive. Listen to what Robert Haldane writes:

God is the portion of His people; and in Him, who is **'the possessor of heaven and'** earth, they are heirs of all things...God is all sufficient; and this is an all-sufficient inheritance. God is eternal and unchangeable; and therefore it is an eternal inheritance, — an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. They cannot be dispossessed of it, for the omnipotence of God secures against all opposition. It is reserved for them in heaven, which is the throne of God, and where He manifests His glory. It is God Himself, then, who is the inheritance of His children.¹

Now, I mentioned early on that this section contains a parenthesis but also that I wanted you to get the larger view of the argument here. I said that you could see Paul's larger thought by looking at verses 16-17 and then looking down to verse 28. You see, in verse 16-17 Paul had been talking about our sonship and our being heirs. He did that in verse 16 and the first half of verse 17 and then he detoured in verse 17b to verse 27 to talk about suffering. Then in verse 28, he returned to his original idea of sonship and inheritance and finishes off his argument. Look down at verse 28.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:28...** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Now do you see what I mean? He was talking about our sonship and our being heirs of God in verses 16 and 17 and then he got sidetracked and began talking about suffering and then he got back on track and on his argument in verse 28 where he finished off his original thought.²

In fact, if you want to see the shortened form of his argument all you have to do is connect the first half of verse 17 to verse 28.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:17...**Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ... ²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the **firstborn among many brothers.**

Do you see the connection? We are children. We are heirs. We are the many brothers of the firstborn Son and God is moving us to be conformed to that firstborn Son's image and because of that we are secure, infinitely and eternally secure and the proof of that is that we have received an inheritance and God is that inheritance. And if that is not enough, God has given us His own Holy Spirit as a guarantee or earnest or down-payment of this glorious truth and that same Holy Spirit testifies with out spirit and tells us inwardly and subjectively, "**You know my child, all these things are true.**"³

Now all of that is true and praise God that it is true. It is true and we shall enjoy the fruit of those great truths for all of eternity. But here's the thing. They are true in God's mind and intentions and that means they are true positionally but they are not yet. They will be but that are not yet at least not yet fully. You see the Christian lives in the "**now**" with his heart and mind set on the "**not yet.**" That is what the write of Hebrews meant when he said that Abraham and all the saints of old were men and women of faith looking for city whose founder and maker is God. You see the Christian is not content with live here. The Christian lives suspended in one sense between what is and what will be. Now it is the fact that these promises of God are true and yet not true in their fullness that makes up the bulk of the Paul's digression, parenthesis or sidebar.

Now what I want to do for the next few minutes is take up the content of this parenthesis and focus in on what it says and why what it says is of such importance to us as Christians. Now to do that, we need to go back and take a look at the second half of verse 17.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:17**...Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Now you'll notice, I think, that there is a conditional element. That conditional element starts with that little phrase "**if indeed**" in the NIV. It is the same in the NAS and if you are reading the ESV it is even a little more ominous. It reads, "**...provided we suffer with him.**"

Now the question is, "**What does that mean? What does that say about what a Christian ought to expect in terms of suffering in this life?**"

Do you see why that question is an important question?

Certainly, if you limited your understanding of Christian suffering to what you saw taught on television, you might come away with a completely unrealistic or a completely unbiblical view of Christian suffering. Now, I suspect you know what I am talking about but let me be clear about it. What you see taught on television concerning the "**victorious Christian life**" and the complete lack of sickness or poverty or even failure is nothing more than wicked, deceitful men appealing to the baser instincts of fallen, depraved humanity. It is wicked. It is deceitful and it is wrong. In that regard it is like men selling snake oil and preying upon the helpless. We do indeed enjoy "**victorious Christian living**" but the "**victorious Christian life**" we experience is in the midst of suffering and not

apart from suffering. Now it is because of that that I really like Ray Stedman's description of this section in his commentary on Romans. He says Romans 8:17 is a description of the **"hurts and the hallelujahs"** of the Christian life.⁴

Now because all that is true and because there is so much erroneous teaching regarding suffering let's take a minute and discuss what Paul means by what he says here.

The first thing I want you to notice is that whatever he is talking about is in relationship to the union with we have with Christ.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:17**...Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory

You see in Greek it's very easy to change a word to express partnership. All you have to do is add the little Greek prefix $\sigma\upsilon\nu$ to a word and it is just about the same as adding the English word "co" to a word. Anyway, Paul does that three times here in verse 17.⁵ First he says we are **"co-heirs."** Then he says that that we **"co-suffer"** with Him and the result of that is that we will **"co-share his glory."** And this is Paul's point. We are not heirs; we are not sufferers; we are not glory sharers apart from Him.

The second thing I want you to notice is that we suffer now and glory later. I think this particular aspect is more abused by television preachers than almost any other aspect of the Christian life. You see they say, **"Enjoy the glory now. Savor the dominion of the Christian faith now. Claim victory over creation now."** But Paul doesn't seem to know anything about that. For Paul, the Christian life is glorious but it certainly involves a measure of suffering and pain.

You can see that clearly I thinking the fact that the verb here for co-suffering is a present tense durative verb. The idea is that we keep on continually sharing in his sufferings now and the result of that will be that we will one day be made to share in His glory in actual fact.

The third thing I want you to notice is that suffering extends to everyone who is a joint heir with Christ.

Listen to what Charles Hodge has to say about this suffering:

Those who suffer with Christ suffer as he did, and for his sake. They share in the sufferings of Christ. We suffer as Christ suffered, not only when we are subject to the opposition of sinners, but in the ordinary sorrows of life in which he, the man of sorrows, so largely shared. We are said to suffer with Christ, *ὡς*, *in order that* we may be glorified together. That is, the design of God in the affliction of his people, is not to satisfy the demands of justice, but to prepare them to share in his glory.⁶

And John Calvin says much the same:

There are many interpretations of this passage, but this is the one I approve over all others, **“We are co-heirs with Christ, provided, in entering on our inheritance, we follow him in the same way in which he has gone before.”** Paul mentions Christ intending to offer us this encouragement, — **“God’s inheritance is ours, because we have been graciously adopted as his children; and that it may not be doubtful, its possession as been already conferred on Christ and we are His partners. Therefore, we ought to remember that Christ came to this inheritance by the cross and that we must come to it in the same manner.”**⁷

Now starting in verse 18, Paul draws a conclusion about our suffering based upon the larger truth of the fact that we will one day share in Christ’s glory.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:18**...I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Now I love the way Paul states his point here. It is not just that our present sufferings are impossible to compare to our future glory, a glory that will be revealed in us. Rather it is that they are so inconsequential that they are not even worth bringing up in the same conversation and you know, I know exactly what Paul means here. In my family, there has always been a long stated tradition of underplaying any injury or pain suffered by anyone. My grandfather downplayed every injury my father ever had. My father downplayed every injury I ever had. I downplayed every injury my son ever had and we all did that by saying the exact same thing and I am betting that my son can give you the famous Browning line without even having rehearsed it. You see when someone gets hurt in our family we always say, **“I have had worse injuries on my eye.”** Now you see that was our way of saying, **“Its not that bad. You’ll live. Be tough.”** And there is a sense in which Paul is doing the same thing but his reasoning is completely different. You see Paul is saying, **“Yes, it is bad but it is really nothing to compare with what is on the other side.”**

And that is the same idea found in 2 Corinthians 4:16-17.

NIV 2 Corinthians 4:16...Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

You see the notion there is that of scale, a balance beam scale. Paul is saying if you take all of our suffering and you put it over on one pan and then you take the eternal weight of glory and put it on the other pan, the scales doesn’t just tip down on the side of glory, it slams down. That is the same thing Paul is saying here in Romans 8. He is saying that it is impossible to fathom the glory we’ll

share with Christ in heaven. There is no comparison between what we will experience in glory and what we suffer here in this age.

Oh how I think we ought to remind each other of these things. Oh how I think we ought to be quick to remind each other of the glories of heaven, of what really matters in the end. You see we become disillusioned because we are so earthly minded.

I remember reading a biography of Charles Spurgeon once. I don't remember if it was Dallimore's biography or someone else's but it had this wonderful little observation someone made of Spurgeon. Spurgeon's church, The Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, used to finance several orphanages and Spurgeon used to go down and visit them from almost weekly and whenever he did he would take a pocketful of pennies or of candy and pass them out to the kids. Anyway, once Spurgeon went down to visit the orphanage and the director there told him that there was a young boy dying of tuberculosis, I think, and Spurgeon went in to see him. The man that related the incident went in with Spurgeon to watch him with the young boy and Spurgeon said, **"Laddie, the doctor says you haven't long to labor at your breathing. The doctor says that that you haven't long before you'll be going off to heaven but what the doctor hasn't told you is that heaven is a wonderful place."** And the man telling the story said Spurgeon sat there with that little boy for the next hour and talked and talked about the glories of heaven and the glory of seeing the face of Christ and the glory of being free from pain and suffering. I remember the story because I remember that the man telling the story remarked that he left that little boy's room extraordinarily sad, extremely sad that he couldn't change places with that little boy, not just because

the boy was so young but also because Spurgeon's description of the glory of heaven made him yearn to go there.

Now what I want you to see in the remaining verses before us this morning is that there is a sense in which all of creation groans in frustration for this great day of deliverance, for this final culmination of glory. Now the way Paul puts it is exceedingly wonderful. You see, Paul says that the suffering that now exists in the created order, the suffering that now exists among believers, the suffering that is witnessed by and pleaded for by the Holy Spirit Himself is something akin to the suffering that a mother feels in bearing her children.⁸ You see for the Christian the pain is no less real than for the non-Christian but the Christian understands that even though life hurts now it is moving toward something glorious and because of that the Christian can endure things, all kinds of things, everything that comes his way. Now, that doesn't mean that the Christian is a stiff-lipped Stoic who never cries out under the weight of his suffering. No, it doesn't mean that at all. You see the Christian cries out but he cries out in a different manner. He cries out like a woman in labor longing for her pain to come to an end and longing for the joy of what comes when the pain is over. He is like the woman whose groans and sobs are mixed with an infinite amount of hope and expectation. Now for you to get the full impact of what Paul is saying I want you to focus on his repeated use of the word **"groaning."** You see in the next three sections, Paul uses the word **"groan"** three times. Now this word is wonderful word. It is the word στενάζω and it is used to describe that involuntary sound that comes out of a person when they are faced with a sad or bad situation. Stephen uses it in the book of Acts to describe the response of God's oppressed people to their sufferings down in Egypt.

^{NIV} **Acts 7:34**...I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

Anyway, Paul uses this word "groan" in verse 22, verse 23 and verse 26. Look first at verse 22 where he uses it of creation.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:22**...We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Then look at verse 23, where he uses it of believers.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:23**...Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Then finally look at verse 26 where Paul uses the same word to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit on our behalf.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:26**... 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.

Now let's take a minute and consider what Paul means when he talks about the groaning of creation. Look at verse 19.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:19**...The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Now when Paul uses this word "groan" of creation he is not talking about believers. We know that because he mentions believers specifically in the next

paragraph and because believers are the **“righteous sons of God that will be revealed.”** We know he is certainly not talking about righteous angels because they have not been subjected to frustration and we know he is not talking about fallen angels because they certainly have no desire to see the righteous sons of God revealed because they know what will happen when they are.

You see what Paul is talking about here is the sub-human animate and inanimate creation.⁹ What he is saying is that trees and rivers and mountains and meadows have been subjected to frustration. What he is saying is that lions and tigers and elephants and earthworms have been subjected to frustration. What Paul is saying is that the biggest ecological disaster in the history of the world was not Chernobyl, Three Mile Island or even the Exxon Valdez. The biggest single ecological disaster in the history of the world was the fall of man in the Garden of Eden because it was that fall that led to God subjecting creation to frustration in the first place. And you see it was God who subjected creation to frustration. It was not of its own choice but bound up by God to remain frustrated until the time of the revelation of the sons of God. Now I know of course that Paul's point is figurative. Paul is personifying creation.¹⁰ Mountains do not feel. Streams and rivers do not feel. Lions and tigers and elephants and earthworms cannot articulate their frustration. But creation is bound up, kept from being the glorious thing it ought to be, it can be, it will be at the unveiling of the sons of God.

Of course, it is not just creation that groans. We too groan under the weight of expectation. Look at verse 23.

^{NIV} Romans 8:23...Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope

that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Now there are two questions raised in this passage. First, what does Paul mean when he uses the term **“firstfruits?”** Secondly, what does Paul mean when he says we were **“saved in hope?”**

“Firstfruits” refers to the first fruit to become ripe or ready to harvest. It was always considered the most valuable and most precious in the sight of farmers. Of course, it wasn't limited to just fruit. **“Firstfruits”** could refer to wheat, or barley or grapes or any crop of any kind. Whenever I think of **“firstfruits”** I think of my dad. My dad used to have a giant **“blackberry bush”** on his farm, made up of dozens of blackberry vines, and every year starting in June, he would go down everyday and check for ripe blackberries. He was always anxious to get the first blackberries of his vine and when he finally picked his first berries he would call me and he would say, **“Ate my first blackberry today. They'll be ready in four or five days, so you better come.”**

Paul says here that we have the **“firstfruits”** of the Spirit and what he means by that is that we have just the first aspect of blessing that we shall enjoy from God. In one sense, the indwelling Holy Spirit is like the first fruit off that blackberry vine. It is really just a hint of all that is to come and we, under the urging and guidance of the Spirit of God, groan for the completion of all God will give us and that completion will occur when we are formerly adopted as sons in our glorified and perfected bodies.

You can see exactly the same kind of thought in 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul uses a clothing metaphor to describe the same thing. There he refers to the Holy Spirit as a down payment or deposit of what is to come.

^{NIV} **2 Corinthians 5:1**...Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Now let's look at that phrase, **"we were saved in hope."** Now obviously, Paul isn't referring to **"having been saved by hope"** as opposed to **"having been saved by faith."** No, what he is referring to is that even in our initial justification we knew that there was element or aspect of our salvation that was, as yet, unfinished. We knew even from the start that there was a **"now"** and that there was also a **"not yet."**

Listen to John Stott:

We are to wait neither so eagerly that we lose our patience, nor so patiently that we lose our expectation, but eagerly and patiently together. Yet it is hard to keep this balance. Some Christians overemphasize the call to patience. They lack enthusiasm and lapse into lethargy, apathy and pessimism. They have forgotten God's promises, and are guilty of unbelief. Others grow impatient of waiting. They are so carried away with enthusiasm that they almost try to force God's hand. They are determined to experience now even what is not available yet. Understandably anxious to emerge out of the painful present of suffering and groaning, they talk as if the resurrection had already taken place, and as if the body should no longer be subject to weakness, disease, pain and decay. Yet such impatience is a form of presumption. It is to rebel against the God of history, who has indeed acted conclusively for our salvation, and who will most assuredly complete what he has begun, but who refuses to be hustled into changing his planned timetable just because we do not enjoy having to go on waiting and groaning.¹¹

Now there is one sense in which that could be discouraging but Paul pushes that discouragement aside by reminding us that believers have the Spirit of God in them and that that same Spirit is also groaning out to God praying for us and communicating to God all our needs and ensuring our well-being.

^{NIV} **Romans 8:26...** 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. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

You know in the ancient world, there were a lot of mystery religions where people believed if they could just say the right words or just invoke the right name or the secret name of God, all would be well.¹² In fact, much of what you see today in the **“word of faith movement”** is just a return to that sort of thing. Paul rushes to remind us that that is not the case for us. We may groan. We may long for completion but we are certainly not abandoned. The Spirit of God indwells us and when we are frustrated or impoverished in our prayer life, the Holy Spirit is right there praying for us with either **“words that are unspoken”** or with **“words that cannot be spoken.”** You see, that is the basis for our hope. That is the encouragement that keeps us going and because that is true, we know that God cares for us and will work everything out for us and so we are confident. We are confident in our God; we are confident in our ultimate redemption; we are confident even in our groaning.

¹ Robert Haldane, *Commentary on Romans* (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group) 1999. Romans 8:17.

² Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* in the New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 508. “This passage develops the reference to suffering and glory in v. 17b, continues the overall theme of assurance that dominates chap. 8, and brings us back full circle to the opening paragraph (5:1-11) of this major section of the letter. Although “glory” is mentioned only three times in vv. 18-30, it is the overarching theme of this passage. Occurring at both the beginning (v. 18) “the glory that shall be revealed in us”) and at the end (v. 30—“these he glorified”), this concept frames these verses, furnishing us with an important indicator of Paul’s central concern. This “inclusio,” the noticeable shift at v. 17b from the Christian’s present status to his future inheritance, and the parallels between vv. 17-30 and 5:1-11 show that vv. 18-30 comprise a coherent unit of thought, whose focus is eschatological glory.”

³ NIV **Ephesians 1:13**...And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.

⁴ Ray C. Stedman, “The Agony and the Ecstasy” taken from the series *From Guilt to Glory – Explained*. Preached October 31, 1976 at Palo Alto Bible Church. “This verse links together two things that we probably would not put together: sufferings and glory – hurts and hallelujahs. They belong together, and you find them together in almost every passage of Scripture that deals with the suffering of the Christian.”

⁵ Archibald Thomas Robertson, “The Epistle to the Romans” in *Word Pictures In the New Testament Volume 6: Epistles of Paul* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 375.

⁶ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*. See 8:17.

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*. See 8:17.

⁸ F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1977; reprint 1994), 173.” Paul may have in mind the current Jewish expectation of ‘the birth-pangs of the Messiah’ – the time of distress which would usher in the messianic age (cf. Mk. xiii. 8, NEB ‘the birth-pangs of the new age begin’). If so, he regards all mankind, and indeed creation as a whole, as sharing in these birth-pangs and looking forward to the joy which will follow them.”

⁹ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans: Volume 1, Introduction and Commentary on Romans 1-8* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975; reprint, 1992), 411-2.

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans Volume 2: Reign of Grace, Romans 5-8* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 871.

¹¹ John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News For the World*, (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 243-4.

¹² C.K. Barrett, *Romans: The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 168. "But even in the present we are not abandoned. In the same way, the Spirit also helps us in our weakness. Paul proceeds to an example of the Spirit's aid. We do not even know what are the proper prayers to offer, but the Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf with groans that do not need expression in speech. Why does Paul choose this example? Possibly because prayer is the most elementary of religious duties: we are so weak that we do not even know how to pray. This may be the correct answer, but a different one will account for more of Paul's words, some of which recall the language of gnostic religion. Man does not know the secret prayers which alone can give him access to God; when he has been initiated, the divine Spirit speaks through his mouth the correct formula, which may never be communicated to, and indeed would not be understood by, the public. It is certain that Paul does not mean what the Gnostics meant; for him, prayer is no formula, nor are men saved by repeating unintelligible words, He borrows at most the notion of an indwelling God described as Spirit, and so introduces the notion of prayer as the Spirit's activity. The Spirit actually makes intercession for us."