

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 8:23-25

Student Notes

Paul's expansion on the theme of creation and God's children: Creation is waiting for the moment when God will renovate the earth and bring his children into a new, fuller state than they have seen before.

Verse 23: Paul changes the metaphors as he goes along: He moves from agricultural metaphors to commercial metaphors.

“Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body.”

“Not only so, but ourselves also” -- connects what Paul is about to say about humans to what he has just said about the created order. What happens to one happens to the other:

- Verse 22: The whole creation groaning.
- Verse 23: Believers are groaning.

Just as creation is waiting for the Sons and Daughters of God to be fully adopted into a new world – the Sons and Daughters are doing the same thing.

- Creation is waiting for God to renovate it.
- We are waiting for God to redeem our bodies

We are literally living out the “already, but not yet” phase of eternal life. God has started a process, but he is still working in us what he has envisioned. Five things Paul says to us.

1. “We Have The First Fruits Of The Spirit”.

Firstfruits refers to the beginning of the harvest – which served as the pledge

that the full harvest would follow in due time. In the Hebrew, the term *bikkurim* or "first fruits" has the same root word as "bekhor", or "firstborn."

In the Old Testament firstborn humans and animals belonged to God – and were to be dedicated to Him. In agriculture, the first grains to ripen each season were to be brought as an offering to God. (See: Ex. 23:19; 34:26, Num. 15:17–21; 18:12–13; Deut. 26:1–11).

Deuteronomy 26 shows a distinct relationship between firstfruits and deliverance. The ancient Israelites brought their firstfruits as a thanks offering to God – reciting how he had delivered them from Egypt and brought them safely to the Promised Land.

Firstfruits also represented the "first" of the full, anticipated crop for each year. It was an illustration of confidence in God's supply for his people.

What does Paul say we have received? "The firstfruits of the Spirit."

- Jewish culture: The Feast of Weeks celebrated the firstfruits, the beginning of the harvests.
- Greek culture: "Pentecost" – as in "The Day of Pentecost".

Paul harkens back to the Feasts of Weeks – reminding us that we have received the "firstfruits" of the Holy Spirit. He replaces the agricultural metaphor with something from the world of commerce: The gift of the Spirit is God's first instalment, deposit, down payment, or pledge which guarantees a future completion of the purchase.

It's still about deliverance and it's still about firstfruits, but in this case, it is God who is giving the firstfruits, not us.

2. "We Groan Inwardly": v. 23b

After saying that we have the "firstfruits" of the Spirit, he adds that, "we ... groan inwardly". Why? The earth and Christians have this inward longing because God's adoption and redemption are not complete.

Right now -- we have the firstfruits of the Spirit. It is the evidence and the reminder of the incompleteness of our spiritual restoration.

The reasons we groan: physical frailty and mortality. A parallel: 2 Corinthians 5:2 -- “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling.”

- Physical Frailty: Paul says that right now we are wearing a tent ... but we want to change out of it into our new body. Why? Because it isn't fragile, and it can't be destroyed.
- Our Mortality: We groan, longing for our redemption because we know our mortality. As in 2 Corinthians 5, this current body is mortal. In other words, sooner or later it is going to wear out by usage or die by disease.
- The Cycle of Temptation and Resistance: Paul uses the Greek word, “sooema”, which means, “our fragile body” but he also uses the word “sarx” – referring to our fallen nature. He's saying that one of the reasons we groan is because we want the cycle of temptation and resistance to end.

3. We Eagerly Await Our Adoption As Sons: v. 23c

Here we find Paul expressing the, “already and not yet”, principle once again. Verse 15: “For you didn't receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Ababa! Father!”

We have been adopted. We are in his family. Yet, we are waiting for the full realization of what that means.

- Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”
- 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet revealed what we will be. But we know that, when he is revealed, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is.”

On the horizon, both apostles see a deeper, richer, more mature Father-child relationship than any of us have with God right now.

4. In This Hope, We Were Saved: v. 24

“For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who

hopes for that which he sees?"

When Paul says we were "saved" he uses a very specific word and verb tense. The result is the confidence that we have been received a decisive freedom from our past sins – but it leaves it open ended.

We have forgiveness for our sins ... and freedom from the judgment of God – but as long as we are in this world – we will be encumbered by things like temptation, lack of understanding, spiritual opposition, and more.

5. We Wait For Our Hope With Patience: v. 25

"For we were saved in hope, but hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for that which he sees? But if we hope for that which we don't see, we wait for it with patience."

If we have confidence that God will indeed do all that he has promised, something is possible: Patience.

Peter's warning: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." -- 2 Peter 3:9

Paul: "But if we hope for that which we don't see, we wait for it with patience." -- Patience is only possible when we have absolute assurance that what we have been promised is, in fact, what we will receive.

- **The Balance:**

Some believers put so much emphasis upon the realization of these promises that they attempt to force every current event into a Messianic scenario. Others, have become so impatient about the promises that they have fallen to apathy and are focused on their current lives.

Paul's advice is the right balance: "Being confident of these things, we wait for them with both eagerness and patience." We can do this because we have chosen to believe God is faithful.

Next time: Paul shows us another ministry of the Holy Spirit that is compatible with our eagerness and our expectation.