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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon



The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 11)



Part 11/20

The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

We're continuing now in Romans 8 exploring our destination at the end of this long pilgrimage. We looked in our previous session, we focused on the statement that God, through the sacrifice of Jesus, put away sin that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who don't walk in the flesh but in the Spirit. And we then carefully analyzed what is the righteous requirement of the law and we came to a very simple but profound conclusion. It's summed up in one short word of four letters which is love.

Then we saw that love is supernatural, it originates through the new birth, it's fulfilled through the baptism in the Holy Spirit and it's worked out by a life of progressive obedience. We don't start perfect in love, we often fail and stumble. But all the time we're failing and stumbling our faith is being counted to us for righteousness. And what I didn't say in the last session I will just add now. In 1 John 4:7 John says:

"The one who loves is born of God."

In other words, there is a kind of love that can only come from the new birth. This is the supreme distinctive evidence of being born again, it's that kind of love.

Now we're going to go on in Romans 8 to verse 5 and we go from verse 5 through verse 17. Paul now focuses on the fact that there is a total opposition between the flesh and the Spirit of God. You understand by now that the flesh in this context doesn't mean our physical body but it means the nature we have received by inheritance from Adam. And its essence is summed up in one word which is rebel. You remember God dealt with the rebel on his side in Romans 6. As far as God is concerned, the rebel has been executed.

I need to point out to you at this point, otherwise you may be misled, what I am essentially seeking to unfold to you is what I would call your legal inheritance. You heard the people who say, "I got it all when I was born again." I'm sure you've met people like that. I say to them if you got it all, where is it all, let's see it. But, in a certain sense, what they say is true. Legally, they got it all, they were entitled to everything. But there's a vast difference between having it legally and having it experientially. That's really the nature of the Christian life, is moving from the legal to the experiential. I always illustrate this by the children of Israel

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moving into the Promised Land. In Joshua 1:2 God said to Joshua:

> "I am giving them the land."

In verse 3 he said:

> "I have given them the land."

From then on, legally the whole land of Canaan belonged to them. But experientially they didn't have one inch of it.

Dear Lord, help me. If they had been, shall we say, members of one type of church, they would have lined up on the east bank of the River Jordan, folded their arms, looked westwards and said, "We've got it all." But the Canaanites knew who really had it. You see? If they had been people that believe in the extra step, without naming anybody, they would have crossed the Jordan, lined up on the west bank, folded their arms and said, "We've got it all." But they still didn't have any more than they had when they were lined up on the east bank. Do you see what I'm saying?

God brought them into the Promised Land by two major miracles, the crossing of the Jordan and the destruction of Jericho. But from that time onwards they had to fight for everything they took. If they didn't fight, they didn't get it. And the same is true in the Christian life.

I'm unfolding to you the legal. But Paul here indicates very clearly it's one thing to have the legal, it takes a lot of determination, faith, patience, to move from the legal to the experiential.

Now that you've heard all this teaching, don't walk out of here and tell somebody "I've got it all." Let them see it, okay? It's much better that they should see you're so totally changed that they come up and say, "What changed you?" Then you can say, "Let me tell you." You see?

Now we're going to go into this opposition between the flesh and the Spirit. We're in Romans 8:5:

> "For those who are according to the flesh..."

Those who are operating in the realm of the flesh, let's put it that way.

> "...set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are operating in the realm of the Spirit, set their mind [or think the way] of the Spirit."

Really "set their mind" is not exactly the translation I would like. It's "they think like the flesh, the others think like the Spirit." But the difference is not just external, it's in the way they think. And you see, when God changes us he doesn't start from the outside, he starts from the inside. Religion starts from the outside. You've got to change your clothes, stop smoking, straighten out your hair, take off your make-up, or whatever else it might be. God doesn't start that way. Sometimes religious people get frustrated with him because he starts in the heart. And it sometimes takes quite a long while for what's happened in the heart to work out in all the details of external appearance. But when God has changed your heart and your mind, ultimately he'll change you. Whereas, if all you change is your external, that really hasn't accomplished very much.

So, the people who are operating in the realm of the Spirit think spiritually. The people operating in the realm of the flesh think like the flesh thinks. And then verse 6, this translation:

> "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace..."

I'm old fashioned enough to like the King James Version. "To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace..."

Now, you know whether you're spiritually minded or not. If you have life and peace, that comes from being spiritually minded. If you're still anxious, troubled and tormented and uncertain, you haven't yet moved into your inheritance. You're entitled to it but you haven't come into it. Verse 7:

> "...because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God..."

Again, I prefer the Old King James. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." That's very, very important. You have inside you an enemy of God. Your own natural mind is at enmity with God. This is very important because it really makes a big difference to what we do in Christian ministry. I hope I'll not be offending anybody when I say to my way of thinking, the majority of Christian seminaries today are educating the carnal mind. What they're educating is God's enemy. What they're producing is educated enemies of God. Now that's not true of all seminaries but in my opinion, it's true of the majority of seminaries today.

I remember Dennis Bennett telling us years ago when he went to the seminary in Chicago, his first lecture, the first thing the lecturer said was, "I want to tell you all I'm an atheist." That's not surprising. There's that kind of infiltration in Christian seminaries.

It's very much the same on the mission field in many areas. We take the less privileged, less well educated, we take them into schools and colleges, we educate them. But they've never been converted. What are we doing? Producing educated enemies of God. Very often, they're the people who kick the missionaries out. See? This is a deeply important truth. You may think I'm cynical but I'm talking about things that I've witnessed firsthand.

So inside you is an enemy of God. That's the important thing for you to realize.

Now, talking about the carnal mind in verse 7:

> "...it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so..."

That rebel cannot change. Not even God can change that rebel. What does he do to him? Put him to death, that's right.

> "...and so those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

As long as you're operating in your own natural ability and your unconverted condition, you may be very religious, very zealous, go to church and confession and whatever else it may be every day of the week. But you cannot please God. That's the bottom line.

What we need to notice is that this enmity, as I've already said, is in the mind. Consequently, to get right with God there has to be a change in our minds. Let me show you quickly two statements to this effect. Ephesians 2:3 talking about all the people of the world:

> "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh..."

Now we're used to that. Then it goes on:

> "...indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath..."

So it's not just the flesh but it's the mind that is at enmity with God.

Then in Colossians 1:21 Paul says speaking about those who have not been reconciled with God:

> "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds."

So true conversion absolutely demands a total change of mind and the proper scriptural word for that is repentance. The Greek word for repentance ?methanoya? means change your mind. It's not an emotional experience primarily, it's a change of the will and of the mind. It's described very clearly in Isaiah 55:7. Isaiah 55:7 is as good a description as you can find anywhere of repentance. I consider myself that repentance is probably the most neglected major doctrine of the Christian faith in the contemporary church. The condition of the church shows it. Isaiah 55:7:

> "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts..."

See? It's not just your way, it's your thoughts.

> "...and let him return to the Lord..."

Return is the Hebrew word for repentance.

> "...and he will have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Thank God he's waiting to have compassion and to pardon. But it's not enough to turn from our outward ways, we have to turn from our inward thoughts because they are in hostility toward God.

Romans 12:2, Paul says:

> "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

What's going to change us? When our minds change. See? So much of religion is just getting people to change externally and it doesn't work. But when your mind is changed, your external behavior will change automatically. So not being conformed to the world is not primarily a dress code, it's a change of the way we think. And some of the people who've got the strictest dress code have never had

their minds changed. I've lived with them. In fact, I've pastored them, I know.

Now Paul comes back, we come back to Romans 8, and the transition from the flesh to the Spirit. Verse 9:

> "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit; if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him."

I've always had some difficulty with that because I know some people who say and I believe them, they have the Holy Spirit in them, they act in the most carnal way. I mean, when Spirit baptized people are carnal, they're the most carnal of all and the hardest to deal with. But let me say who I understand this. You don't have to accept it. "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God really occupies all of you." See? People say how can a person who's baptized in the Spirit have demons if he's filled with the Spirit? Well I say lots of people who are baptized in the Spirit are not filled with the Spirit. There's lots of areas the Spirit hasn't taken over. Like when you pour water into a bottle, the water may begin to run over and there may be a lot of bubbles inside the bottle. A lot of quote, spiritual people have still got bubbles inside them. How do we know? Because the tree is known by its fruit. When it comes out in bitterness and sloppiness and unfaithfulness and criticism, that's not the fruit of the Spirit. Don't attribute that to the Spirit. The potential is there if you let the Spirit indwell you and control you.

Then it says if any man hasn't got the Spirit of Christ, he doesn't belong to him. He may belong to any church but he doesn't belong to Christ. What is the Spirit of Christ? Ask yourself. What are its marks? I would say first of all, meekness, humility, purity, honesty, love. Let's not boast about things we don't have. Let's set to work to get them while we have the time. You may think I'm cynical but I've been in this thing well over 40 years and I think I can say I've seen it all. I doubt that there's any kind of strange behavior or silliness that I haven't seen. If there is, I just hope God will prevent me from seeing it because I think I've seen enough.

I hope you understand what I'm saying now. I love the body of Christ, I'm jealous for the body of Christ. I want to see Jesus presented with a truly beautiful bride who is without spot or wrinkle, glorious and holy. And believe me, it takes a lot of faith at the present moment to believe that can happen.

I passionately believe in the restoration of Israel. I know lots of people don't but that's their problem, not mine. But I look at Israel and think what a mess! I mean, you don't know half the mess there is in Israel till you live there. Then I say to myself, "But God says all Israel will be saved." All Israel will rejoice in the Lord. All Israel will be justified in the Lord. I say, "God, I'm not going to look at people, I'm going to look at your word."

Then I live away from Israel, I look at the church and I think, "Dear Lord, you mean to say that that is going to become a beautiful holy bride? If I keep looking at the people, I can't believe it. I just have to look at your word."

Sometimes I wonder who has failed God worse. Israel or the church. We have to say about the church God has given us more, therefore what? He requires more from us.

Going on, verse 10.

> "And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness."

I'm giving you the King James Version which I think is more accurate in this case. So if Christ is in you, if you have truly received Christ and yielded to Christ, all right? Then the body is dead. What body? The fleshly nature. Not your physical body, you didn't die when you got converted, did you? But the spirit is alive. I prefer to say the spirit is life which is what the Greek says. The Holy Spirit provides a totally new life. The old life has come to the end and a new life has started, initiated by the Holy Spirit.

Now listen, here is really where we are at the legal and it's not always the experiential. Would you agree with me about that? I don't want you to walk out of here thinking you're more than you are. Okay? Because you'll go home and you'll create a lot of trouble for a lot of people. People will say if that's what happens to people who go to that conference, I'm not going. I don't want that to happen. I don't want you to walk out of here proud, self righteous. I don't want to walk out of here proud and self righteous myself! If there's one thing that's odious and alienates people, it's self righteousness. You know that? And God hasn't got one good word to say for it.

So this is the potential. When Christ comes into you, that old fleshly life dies. As far as God's concerned, on his side it's dead. You say how do I go on living? A new life is born into you by the Holy Spirit. A totally new life. Not an improved life, not a reformed life but a new life. I said earlier in this—it's not out of place to emphasize it again—

corruption is irreversible. And the key word that describes our carnal nature is corrupt. The old man, Paul says, is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. Now that corruption cannot be reversed. Take corruption in anything. Take a piece of fruit, a peach. It can be beautiful with that beautiful furry luster on it, it can just fresh and wonderful. But you leave it standing on a table in the kitchen for three days and come back and look at it. You didn't do anything to it but there was something inside it that caused it to decay. That's corruption. Well, you can put it in the refrigerator and you can go back after three days and there's very little visible change. But it's still corrupting, only slower. I say religion is a refrigerator. It slows up corruption but it doesn't stop it.

The only solution is a new creation. God isn't going to patch the rebel up, he isn't going to make him over again. He's going to put him to death and start anew. And that's what we have in Christ. If any man be in Christ, he is a what? New creation, that's right. That's totally logical. God is so practical, he's so down to earth. He doesn't try to patch us up, make us over again, reform us. He says, "I'll execute the old man and then I'll start something new which is totally of my heart." That scripture in 2 Corinthians 5:17 says:

> "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation; old things are passed away, all things have become new, [don't stop there] and all things are of God."

The new creation is totally of God. It's got nothing of the old creation in it. It's a totally new beginning. You see, if we really realize what we have in the new birth we'd get excited about it. But a lot of people use it as such a trite religious phrase and they haven't really any conception of what it is.

We've got to go on. Verse 11:

> "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

To me, that's the basic principle of divine healing. The same power that raised the body of Jesus from the tomb and set him at God's right hand is now working in our physical bodies. If you can really believe that, it will be the basis of faith for any kind of physical healing or miracle that you need.

Now, Paul comes to the application as usual.

> "So then brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh —for is you are living..."

And he's writing to quote, spiritual Christians. He says:

> "...if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

I once was for a short period an associate pastor of an Assembly of God church in Minneapolis. And one of my duties was to visit the sick in the hospital. And there were an awful lot of sick people. I said to myself, "How come? Here we are, we believe in divine healing, we've got all the scriptures. Why so many sick people?" And this is not a criticism or a condemnation of anyone who is sick. I said, "Lord, how come?" And he gave me this scripture. "If you live after the flesh, you'll die." They weren't lost souls but they were living much more in the flesh than in the Spirit. They spent much more time in front of the television than they did in front of their Bibles. Most of their conversation had got very little to do with God. They were living according to the flesh. And Paul says, quote, spiritual Christians, if you live according to the flesh, you'll die, because you're nurturing that thing in you which is corrupt. All you'll get out of it is corruption.

Let's go on quickly. So we have to put to death, we have to mortify, we have to refuse the demands of the flesh. We saw that already, we have to refuse our members to sin and yield our members to God and to righteousness. That's an exercise of the will.

Then Paul comes to this beautiful scripture:

> "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

I've dealt with that already, I can't go into it. That's the alternative, it's to be led by the Spirit of God. I want to say the Holy Spirit is a person, he's not a theological abstraction. He's not a little sentence at the end of the Apostle's Creed. He's a person and if you want to be led by him, you've got to cultivate a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. You've got to let him take you by the hand, you've got to listen to his quiet whispers, you've got to sense his gentle nudging. He's a very sensitive person. He's pictured as a dove and one thing about a dove is it's a timid

bird, it's easily scared away. The only person who never scared the dove away was Jesus because he had the lamb nature. The dove, I'm talking about John 1, the dove settled on the lamb. And if you want a real intimate, personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, you've got to cultivate the lamb's nature: meekness, purity and a life laid down in sacrifice.

Paul then says:

> "You've not received the spirit of slavery...but you have received a spirit of adoption."

You're not slaves any longer, you're sons. You're not motivated by fear, you're motivated by love and guided by the Holy Spirit.

(end session one)

Session 2

In our previous session we looked at the total opposition between the flesh and the Spirit. We saw that there's no reconciliation between them. And for that reason God's plan of redemption is to put to death the old fleshly nature and to bring into being a totally new nature by his Holy Spirit within us. Although God has made total provision for this, I pointed out to you that it has to be worked out in our lives. So we have to put to death the deeds of the body. That's not something that God does for us, he's given us the legal right, he's given us the authority and the power; we have to exercise it.

You know it says of those who are born through receiving Jesus in John 1, to them God gave authority to become children of God. It's very important to see that when you're born again, what you get is authority. You don't become any more through the new birth than you become by exercising the authority which God has given you. Authority is useless if it isn't exercised. So really, the new birth is just a potential, it's the opportunity to develop into something wonderful if you'll use the authority. But if all you do is keep telling everybody you're born again and never take any intelligent attempts to exercise authority in a scriptural way over the problems that confront you and the sins that still beset you in your own life, you'll make no progress at all.

Paul says we have to move out of one way of thinking, one area of living, the flesh, into a totally different one. We need the help of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is willing to help us. He comes to this conclusion. "For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these and these only are sons of God."

Then he reminds us in verse 15 of chapter 8 that we have not become slaves again, we haven't come under a spirit of slavery. And that's legalism. He's contrasting Sinai with Golgotha. Sinai, they were frightened, they backed off from the mountain. They said, "We don't want to hear that voice again." But God doesn't want to make slaves. He wants to make sons who are motivated by love and respect and who cry out "Abba, Father."

> "And in this the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."

Everyone that is born that is born of God has the witness in himself. If you don't have that witness, you need to check whether you're really born of God. I say that because I've been on mission fields with missionaries who didn't know what it was to be born again. They were sincere and good living people but it's quite different to have the supernatural testimony of the Holy Spirit that you are a child of God.

If the Holy Spirit tells you you're a child of God, it really doesn't matter what other people say. He's the one that matters.

Paul goes on in verse 17, and this is important:

> "If we are children, then we are also heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..."

I prefer to say joint heirs because according to the laws of inheritance, it doesn't mean that every one of us gets a little part of that inheritance but it means we all share the total inheritance together. That's a tremendous statement. We are heir to all that Jesus is heir to because we're his younger brothers.

But there's a condition and a lot of people don't ever read the condition. At the end of verse 17:

> "...if indeed we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified together."

Our inheritance depends on our willingness to suffer with him. You cannot become an heir of God without being willing to face suffering. If you reject the suffering, I don't believe you can claim your inheritance. We're heirs of God if indeed we suffer with him. There's a certain tendency in the church today to dismiss suffering as something that doesn't belong to the Christian life. I can't think where

people find that in the Bible, there are countless statements in the Bible that tell us the exact opposite.

Let's go on then and consider the nature and the purpose of suffering which is something that every one of us partakes of in some degree. Paul says now in the next verse:

> "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."

And coming from Paul, that's a rather impressive statement if you consider what he suffered. I want to read the list for a moment, it's found in 2 Corinthians 11:23 and following. He says this talking about people who claim to be servants of Christ:

> "Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes."

I understand that means 195 lashes altogether.

> "Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spend in the deep."

We don't need to go any further. The remarkable thing is in the same epistle, a little earlier on, he says "our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more eternal and exceeding weight of glory." So, what are you complaining about brother? How heavy is your affliction compared with Paul? And Paul said his affliction was a light affliction. Here in Romans he says the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed.

What made the difference with Paul was that he had a vision of the glory. If we lose the vision of the glory, we won't benefit from our suffering. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17:

> "Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more eternal and exceeding weight of glory while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, the things which are not seen are eternal."

So suffering will work God's purposes in you while you're looking at the things which are not seen. See? Paul had a vision of the unseen glory and nothing he suffered was worthy to be compared with the glory he saw in the future. But if we lose the vision of the eternal, we'll still suffer but we'll get no benefit from it.

Going back to Romans 8. Now he comes to one of the most profound passages, I believe, in the New Testament in the Bible. Verse 19:

> "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."

What he's saying, I understand, is this. We're not the only ones that are suffering. The whole creation is suffering because of our sin. Because it was man's sin that plunged creation into chaos and futility. Creation will not be redeemed until we are redeemed. So the whole creation is waiting for us. That's a tremendous statement. Let me read that again.

> "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."

For us to be revealed in our resurrection glory, that's what the creation is waiting for.

You see, I find that creation is a lot more alive to the promises of God than many Christians. I'd like to turn to two psalms briefly. Psalm 96:11–13.

> "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all it contains; let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the Lord, for he is coming..."

All nature is anticipating the coming of the Lord basically, except the church. The church is asleep. The trees are awake, the mountains are awake, the lakes are awake, the animals are awake and the church is sleeping. We're out of harmony with God and with creation.

Look again in Psalm 98:7–9.

> "Let the sea roar and all it contains..."

That excites me because Jesus said right at the end of this age, men's hearts will fail them for fear and for the things that are coming upon the earth, for the roaring of the sea. So as the Lord's coming in imminent, the sea is going to get so excited it's going to roar and frighten the unbelievers. That's something.

> "Let the sea roar and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands..."

Have you ever pictured the rivers clapping their hands?

> "...let the mountains sing together for joy..."

What's it all about?

> "...before the Lord; for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world right righteousness, and the peoples with equity."

All creation is longing for the Lord to come and put things right. You see, man was made the steward of the earth but after his fall man raped the earth. He's left the earth in many areas desolate, stripped, bare, exploited. And the earth is crying out to God, "How long are you going to let these people trample over us and tear us up and defile us and fill our atmosphere with that horrible pollution?" Can you picture that? See, the trouble with most of us is we're so self centered. You know, somebody said the typical prayer of the average church member is "God bless me and my wife, my son John and his wife. Us four, no more, amen."

Paul is drawing us into an experience where we empathize with the whole of creation. Oh, that our hearts would be enlarged.

Going on, verse 20:

> "For the creation was subjected to futility..."

The Old King James says "vanity." Emptiness. I think perhaps in a way the contemporary word would be frustration.

> "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 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."

Notice it's only when the children of God come into the freedom of their glory that creation will be set free.

Now look back for a moment in Genesis 3 and just see the root scripture here after man sinned. Genesis 3, God's pronouncement of judgment for the sin of man. Genesis 3:17;

> "Then to Adam God 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 because of you."

Have you ever pondered on that? Man was the steward of the whole earth, he was answerable to God. And his fall brought disaster on all that he was responsible for. See this principle of responsibility is one we run away from today. But the fact is we are responsible before God for certain things. Parents are responsible for their children. How many of you agree if parents fail, children suffer? They don't deserve it but it comes because of the failure of the steward who was over them. The same principle applies to the whole earth. God set Adam over the whole earth. He said you'll subdue the earth, you'll rule over it, it's under your stewardship. But when he fell, it brought a disastrous consequence upon the whole earth. See how much we're responsible for? It's a frightening thought, at least it is to me.

Now listen.

> "Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field."

What is the mark of the curse, the visible mark? Two things. Thorns and thistles. Who provided redemption from the curse? Jesus. Have you ever noticed that they gave him a crown of thorns and they gave him a purple robe which is the color of the thistle? That was God's attestation that Jesus was redeeming the earth from its curse. But the redemption will not come till man's redemption is complete.

Let's go back to 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. For we know..."

And this is another of those places where I think most of us don't know. But we should know.

> "We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now."

Did you know that? And listen, how do we respond to it?

> "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."

Let me ask you frankly, and I could ask myself the same question. Is that true of you? Do you ever have this experience of the Holy Spirit groaning within you not for some problem in your life but for the redemption of creation? Do you ever empathize with this creation on which we, men and women, brought such terrible consequences by our sins? And continue those consequences. We haven't acted as stewards of the earth, we've acted as exploiters of the earth. Our selfishness and our greed are rapidly ruining this earth. But we who have the first fruits of the Spirit should have a totally different attitude. We should have, I would call the word empathy with the earth with its groanings, sharing its groanings, sharing its longings. What is it longing for? Redemption. When will redemption come? When Jesus comes back. What will happen to us? Our bodies will be changed. That will be the redemption of our body.

You see, Paul says very clearly at the end of verse 23:

> "...waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

It is a heresy to teach that this will happen before the resurrection. At the resurrection our bodies will be redeemed.

I think I need to read to you Philippians 3. I look at your faces and I see that we're moving in an area that you're not really familiar with. You see, the end of the Christian life is not to get to heaven. That's just a stage in the journey. The end of the Christian life, the goal of the Christian life is the resurrection. And only then will our redemption be complete because then the redemption of our bodies will be complete. If all you're aiming to do is get to heaven, you're stopping short of the goal. Philippians 3:10–12. This is Paul's life aim.

> "That I may know him..."

You'd think Paul had never met the Lord, you know he had. But he said there's a whole lot more of the Lord that I don't know yet and I want to know it.

> "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection..."

How many of you can say amen to that? What about the next sentence?

> "...and the fellowship of his suffering..."

Can you understand that? That was his goal. See? Something is impelling me to warn you again and again if you think you're going to escape the suffering, you're going to escape everything. You'll miss it all. You'll not be an heir.

When I read this I think of something in my own life. Why did Paul want to share the sufferings of Jesus? Not merely his power but his sufferings. I think he didn't want Jesus to suffer alone. See, when my first wife died—which was now 13 years ago—I was due to go away for a conference. But at the last moment I canceled it. I didn't leave on the Friday, she died on the Sunday afternoon. I've always been so grateful that I was there. I could have gone to that conference, she could have died alone. But it would have been a terrible thing for me. I think if I can explain this to you, that's how Paul felt. He said, "I don't want Jesus to suffer alone. If he has to suffer, I want to be there with him."

See? What I'm trying to paint for all of us is a very different conception of what the Christian life really is. It's not the list of 17 blessings that you get, there's a lot more to it than that. So listen to what Paul says.

> "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death..."

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Letting my old man really experience the death which was accomplished in his execution on the cross.

> "...in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

What was his goal? Getting to heaven? No. Sharing in the resurrection from the dead. Getting to heaven is just a sort of resting stage on the journey. The goal is the resurrection.

Then he says this. And brothers and sisters, if Paul said this I wonder if we can say less.

> "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect..."

Are you further along the road than Paul was when he wrote those words?

> "...but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

What was he pressing on to? The resurrection of the body. Because, that's the completion of redemption. Jesus redeemed the spirit, soul and body but the fully outworked redemption won't be manifested till the resurrection.

Go to the end of Philippians 3:20–21.

> "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ..."

Is that true of you? Are you eagerly waiting for a savior?

> "...who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."

What's going to happen to our body when Jesus comes? It's going to be changed into the likeness of the body of his glory. At the present moment we have what the Greek says is a body of humiliation. It's the result of the fall.

Listen, there's a lot of things about our bodies that we don't need to go into detail, but they constantly humble us. You can wear the finest clothes and the nicest perfume, dear ladies, but if you get hot, you're going to sweat, is that right? Not just perspire but sweat. And you can eat the finest and most delicate food but in a little while you're going to have to go to the bathroom. How dignified can you be in the bathroom? Do you understand? We're in a body of humiliation. But when Jesus comes that's' all going to end and we're going to get a body like his. John says when we see him as he is, we shall be like him. I'm naive enough to believe it means what it says.

Now let's go back to Romans 8 quickly. So the whole creation is groaning in pains of childbirth until now. I want to direct you to some words of Jesus as quickly as I can, the Lord helping me. Matthew 19:28. I want to talk about this regeneration which is not just our personal regeneration but the regeneration of creation.

> "Jesus said to his disciples, Truly I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration..."

That means the rebirth.

> "...when the Son of man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

There is a rebirth coming which is the rebirth of creation. That's the redemption of creation.

And then Jesus said in Matthew 24:8 about the signs that mark the close of the age:

> "But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."

The birth pangs of what? The birth pangs of a new age and I'm not talking about the New Age Movement. I hope you know that!

Then he said in Luke 21:28:

> "But when these things..."

That's what he was describing in Matthew 24.

> "...begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Can you see? That's the climax. It's not just our personal redemption, it's the redemption of creation. And all creation is groaning in birth pangs, longing for that. We who have the first fruits of the Spirit, God's purpose is that we should be groaning together, that we should not be wrapped up in all our little personal problems and church quarrels. But that we should see the glorious vision of what God has in mind and we would give ourselves in prayer to bring it about.

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