

## “Groaning Together”

Sure, I've been obedient to God as part of his creation but it hasn't been easy. Some say I am the most glorious of created things and even if that's true, my glory has shined only on a minority of the godly. The truth is for every godly person I shine, I must still shine on thousands of enemies of God. You know who I'm talking about; your world is filled with them. The unrepentant murderers, adulterers, thieves; some of the most shameful people you can imagine. To them, the most unworthy; the most evil creatures, I have given my best and will continue to do so until the end of the age. Of course, if I had my way, only those who deserve what I have to offer would benefit because I'll be honest with you- some days giving to an imperfect world what God created me to give to a perfect world actually pains me. Oh I remember the perfect world; I remember it like it was yesterday. Everything was just as our Father designed. Everything was working as it was created to work. There was no sin; there was only harmony. It was perfection. But then one day in that garden, the garden I was shining brightly on in my full undiminished glory, everything changed. And when I say everything, I mean everything. So many think that Adam and Eve's sin only hurt them. Don't get me wrong, it did hurt them and consequently it hurt every person born from that day forward. But it also hurt me, the sun and the rest of us here in God's creation. Adam and Eve's sin corrupted it all. But that was then and this is now. I still sigh and groan but I along with the rest of God's creation are compelled to carry on. We'll continue to do what God put us here to do but the truth is we wait with eager longing just as I suspect you do for the day when everything will be right again; the day when perfection is once again attained.

Now perhaps my little monologue seemed “over the top” in some of your minds. Me personifying the sun as affected by Adam and Eve's sin may sound ridiculous but I ask you to think about this. The heavens are part of God's creation are they not? “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” says Genesis 1. We confessed earlier in the first article of the Apostle's Creed that “We believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” But even so, I admit it's hard to make a connection between the heavens not performing how God created them to perform- we kind of take what we get. But what about the earth?

It not hard to see that this created world in which we live is not performing the way God created it to be, is it? Record cold, record heat, drought, floods, hurricanes, tornados, pollution, earthquakes and on and on. But we generally separate the affects of sin on creation from the affects of sin on humanity don't we? Most of our teaching and preaching connects Christ's death and resurrection to the forgiveness of *our* sins- forgiveness that makes *our* fallen relationship with God whole and secure once again. It is also generally centered on how we are to live as his redeemed children in love and service to our neighbors. And while we should be preaching and teaching about who we are in Christ and what that means in our relationships with other people, according to the scriptures, there's more to the redemption story. According to the scriptures Christ died and rose from the dead for the redemption of all of creation and together we wait for his return. We wait until the day our resurrected bodies and souls will be reunited living under Christ's authority in the new sinless creation where the heavens and the earth will once again function the way God created them to be!

But this is such a different way of thinking isn't it? It may be for some of us but the truth is that in addition to those with faith in Christ, creation itself will be redeemed with his return.

St. Paul clearly states this in our Epistle reading from Romans. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" he writes. Adam subjected creation to futility or to use another word, *ineffectiveness*, and this subjection as far as creation was unwilling. But just like you and me, all of creation has hope to be set free from its bondage and obtain the freedom only Christ can provide.

Paul makes such a powerful statement here personifying creation as longing for the day of Christ's return to free it from the effects of sin. And he really drives home his point in verse 22, where he says, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." Wow! The "pains of childbirth," I'm not even going to touch that! This is quite the metaphor Paul uses to make the point that all of creation longs for the day when

the salvation that has already begun in God's children will be completed when Christ returns.

We all long for that day, don't we? In verse 23, Paul says it's not only the creation, but we ourselves, who groan inwardly as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. In other words until the day of Christ all of creation groans together.

But we have hope. Paul says in this hope we were saved. We can't see this hope but we wait for it and we wait for it with patience. We know that one day all will be right once again but until that day, how do we live as part of this groaning creation? What is our responsibility towards it?

Let's go back to Genesis 1. God made us in his image. We are the only "creature" God created in his image and with that uniqueness comes a unique responsibility. Genesis 1 describes this responsibility in terms of subduing the earth and exercising dominion over "the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." This in no way is a mandate to exploit the earth to satisfy our human greed but it is an expectation that human beings will use the earth wisely and govern it with the same sense of responsibility and care that God has toward the whole of his creation.<sup>1</sup>

He calls us to care for this world, which is so vitally important for us to understand. Time and time again, God said of his creation in the first chapter of Genesis, that "it was good." If it was good to God, then we have a responsibility to treat his creation in ways that don't diminish his delight or the glory of his work. And even though sin has caused this world to not function at full capacity, he still needs us to hear its groaning and do what we can to care for it while at the same time embracing the promise of its renewal.

So while we groan together awaiting Christ's return what should we do? Should we all become environmental activists or global warming enthusiasts? No, some of those practices can actually diminish our place in the created order by elevating the earth above our unique position of being created in God's image.

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<sup>1</sup> ESV Study Bible Note (Crossway): Gen.1:28

But I do think we should have our eyes and ears open to the sights and sounds of God's creation.

The truth is so many of us rarely make it outdoors for an extended period of time. We go from our homes to the car to the office or school back to our homes without hearing anything but the radio or our cell phones. So maybe we begin by making an intentional effort to get outside. Because in order to be aware of the complexity of God's creation including the groans, we need to be out experiencing it!

It can be as simple as taking a walk outside without the earphones. Maybe first thing in the morning or last thing at night, take a stroll outside and just listen to the wind in the trees or the birds singing. Get outside and learn about the different species of plants, animals, and trees in this great state of ours. Take a hike, ride a bike, plant a garden. Visit the farmer's market. Be intentional about buying locally the fruits and vegetables of the season.

We should also educate ourselves about environmental issues especially on a local and state level not only from a political perspective but more importantly from a biblical perspective. We should look at both sides when there is controversy and always remember creation is not ours; it belongs to God and we have a responsibility to him. A good place to do that is at our upcoming "Creation Care Symposium" here at Hope in November.

Look, in no way am I suggesting we all become tree-huggers or environmental fanatics. And in no way am I suggesting we are intentionally doing anything wrong in regards to creation. I'm only saying we need to live with an awareness that God created us to live in a unique relationship with Him, our fellow creatures, and all of creation. Yes, we will continue to groan together longing to be set free "from the bondage of decay." But that day will come. Christ will return and when he does all of creation will be restored to complete perfection. That is his promise and our hope. Until then let's be aware of our responsibility and intentional in our care. In Jesus' Name. **Amen.**