

STRUCTURAL LAYOUT OF Romans 8:22–27

- 22 οἶδαμεν γὰρ
ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν·
- 23 οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες,
ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἱοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν.
- 24 τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώμηθεν·
ἐλπίς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλπίς·
ὃ γὰρ βλέπει τίς,
τί καὶ ἐλπίζει;
- 25 εἰ δὲ ὁ οὐ βλέπομεν ἐλπίζομεν,
δι' ὑπομονῆς ἀπεκδεχόμεθα.
- 26 ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα συναντιλαμβάνεται τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ ἡμῶν·
τὸ γὰρ τί προσευξώμεθα καθὼς οὐκ οἶδαμεν,
ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ὑπερεντυγχάνει στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις·
- 27 ὁ δὲ ἐραυνῶν τὰς καρδίας οἶδεν τί τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος,
ὅτι κατὰ θεὸν ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἁγίων.

Homiletical Work for Preaching Romans 8:22–27

Opening:

Pre-Introduction:

Sub-Introduction:

Main-Introduction:

Exegetical Need: Hope

Exegetical Subject: Futility

Exegetical Purpose: To endure with hope through encounters with futility by experiencing the Spirit's help in prayer.

Exegetical Idea: Paul explained to believers how to live with hope in futility.

Exegetical Outline:

- Paul explained the encounter with futility on two levels (8:22–23).
 - The creation groans under the futility.
 - Paul now begins the second section of the pericope as noted by the explanatory conjunction *γάρ* preceded by the verb of cognition, *οἶδαμεν*. Unlike the first instance of this construction in verse 18, the verb is first person *plural* indicating that the following content was familiar and commonly known at least to the Christian Church and possibly on a broader level to all humanity. The previous section addressed the *expectation* of God’s children and the creation—specifically, that the approaching glory will far outweigh the present suffering. Now, the *experience* of God’s children and the creation is introduced. As communicated so succinctly in the tension statement of 8:17 and in Paul’s belief statement of 8:18, the future expectation is more glorious than the present experience. Here, the present experience is expounded followed by a conclusion and applications for *enduring* the present *experience* with hope for the *expectation*.
 - The content of what is generally known about the present experience of the personified creation is, “that the whole non-human creation groans together and suffers labor pains together until now.” The present experience of the creation is one of lament and intense pain. Isaiah writes, “The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth . . . Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt” (Is. 24:4–6). The personification of the non-human creation reaches its climax here. It is viewed in a united condition of groaning and lament,¹ just as one would enter the sorrows of another who was in distress.
 - The meaning and nuances of the term *συστενάζει* are straightforward. When the prefix is present, the verb may describe literal or figurative lamenting that takes place together with another person or entity (e.g., the parts of the non-human creation). A definition of *lamenting, mourning or groaning together with* is suggested. Paul’s use of the term in context of Romans 8:22 reflects a unique (Spirit-driven) twist of rhetoric when compared to the common pessimism of his day. The pessimistic view was, however, not necessarily altogether a reflexion of actual conditions, for the common attitude of Greek and Roman antiquity toward the course of civilization was pessimistic. Nestor in the *Iliad* had seen a decline in his own lifetime; Hesiod canonized the golden age, the loss of innocence, and the progressive deterioration of morals, security, and happiness . . . Stoicism preached cycles of creation and destruction of the world . . . There was thus a literary commonplace about decline which might

¹ See APPENDIX A for a word study on the verb *συστενάζω*.

be adapted to many aspects of life.² Paul does not leave the destiny of the creation in the despair of *συστενάζει* and *συνωδίνει*. Rather, God has interwoven the eternal destiny of the creation with the redemption of God's children. Just as the children of God will experience the redemption of their physical bodies through resurrection and escape their groaning, so will the creation be made new and set free from its lament and decay. Hope rather than lament is the destiny of the creation.

- Further, creation is personified as a woman suffering the intense pains of labor. The verb *ὠδίνω* is used 22 times in the LXX and three times in the NT (Gal. 4:19, 27; Rev. 12:2) exclusively to describe labor pains. The prefixed form is not found in the LXX and only here in the NT. The *συν-* prefixed verb typically receives an intensification of the verbal idea (cp. Wallace, 160 on Romans 8:16). The common lament and pain of the creation takes place *until now*. The prepositional phrase raises an interesting concept that places us on the brink of the eschaton. Matthew 24:8 employs the noun *ὠδίνων* and says about the preceding tragedies of vv. 1–7, “All these are the beginning of labor pains.” The creation is now in labor, and the prepositional phrase urges us to get ready for it is about to give birth.
- We groan under the futility.
 - Verse 23 correlates the groaning of the creation to the groaning of God's children, “and not only this, but also we ourselves having the firstfruits, namely the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we await adoption—the redemption of our bodies.” The first-person plural pronoun *ἡμεῖς* is a nominative functioning in contrast—that is, the creation is not alone in its groaning, but we also groan. The pronoun is modified by the attributive participle phrase, “having the firstfruits, namely the Spirit.” The genitive *τοῦ πνεύματος* functions epexegetically to the head noun *τὴν ἀπαρχήν*. There are various subcategories of “firstfruits” in the NT (see Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; 16:15; 2 Thess. 2:13; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4); however, here in Romans 8:23, the Spirit, or the present ministries of the Spirit (cp. Cranfield), is the specific example of “firstfruits,” which, as has been demonstrated in Romans 8:15, is relevant to the adoption.
 - The children of God share in the groaning of the creation. The arena of this experience for the believer is *ἐν ἑαυτοῖς*.³ We groan within ourselves as we await adoption. The adverbial participle *ἀπεκδεχόμενοι* functions temporally—we groan while we wait. “Adoption” is understood here in a relationship of

² George Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World: 300 B.C.–A.D. 300* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 447–48.

³ Jewett, *Romans*, 518.

apposition to “the redemption of our body(ies).” In Paul’s metaphor, *υιοθεσία* represents the eschatological reality of the Christian’s severance from his or her old family and head of family and joining to his or her new family and head of household, which will be finalized at the redemption of our bodies but is also a present spiritual reality for Christians because of the reception of the Holy Spirit (8:14–16) and because of the resurrected mediator, Jesus Christ.⁴ Here, as the shared experience of lament and the interwoven expectation of both the non-human creation and God’s children reach their climax, it is the future aspect of our adoption (i.e., the redemption⁵ of our bodies) that is in view. Compare Ephesians 1:14; 4:30; Hebrews 11:35. The object of this redemption is the body. We do not expect redemption *from* the body, but rather we eagerly expect the transformation of the body for a bodily life suited for a new, non-groaning creation.

- On Adoption
 - **Retention or Omission of *υιοθεσιαν* in Romans 8:23:** A number of significant Western witnesses omit *υιοθεσιαν* from Romans 8:23.⁶ The text in P46 is incomplete, but the reconstruction suggests that there was not enough space for the term to have been included originally.⁷ Codex Bezae also omits *υιοθεσιαν*. However, the genealogical solidarity of the Western omission is incomplete for several Latin codices (ar, b, mon), the Vulgate and two Syriac versions (sy^p and sy^h) retain the term. The reading of the text is more widely distributed geographically having no less than two witnesses represented in each text-type. Further, the inclusion of the term is supported by the Alexandrian (unless P46 is viewed as Alexandrian) and the Byzantine traditions with solidarity. Metzger further adds that it was “a word that copyists doubtless found to be both clumsy in the context and dispensable, as well as seeming to contradict ver. 15.”⁸ Building on Metzger’s internal observation, the term’s placement in the context positions it in simple apposition relationship with the accusative *τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν*, which at first glance appears to represent two distinct concepts. Fitzmyer and Jewett opt for

⁴ See APPENDIX D for an argument for the inclusion of the term *υιοθεσία* and APPENDIX E for a word study on the term.

⁵ Zerwick notes that Chrysostom understood the redemption communicated by this particular Greek word to convey the idea of complete redemption because of the prefixed *ἀπό*. See Max Zerwick, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples*, Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici (Rome: Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 45, fn 11.

⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 457.

⁷ See Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, eds., *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 2001), 210.

⁸ Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 457.

the omission of the term in verse 23, although Fitzmyer concedes that both a realized sense and a future sense of our sonship are reasonable.⁹ Jewett understands the addition in verse 23 as an irreconcilable discrepancy with verses 12–15.¹⁰ The strong external support for the inclusion of *υιοθεσίαν* calls for retention of the reading of the text. Also, the inclusion of the term does create a more difficult syntactical-conceptual feature in verse 23 making it the harder reading without being nonsensical. Thus, the reading of the text should be maintained.

- **On the Meaning of the Term:** Drawing conclusions about the background material influencing Paul's concept of *υιοθεσία* and about the time of our adoption has proven challenging. The answers to both questions play a significant role in defining the term, which is the goal of this appendix. Therefore, decisions are made (humbly) here regarding these two questions so that a clear picture is painted in the mind of the reader regarding *adoption* in the commentary on verse 23 above in the exegetical. Regarding background, Paul was a man with a multifaceted bio. The Roman *adoptio* procedure should be understood as the primary influence upon Paul's use of *υιοθεσία* because (1) the familiar adoption practiced by the Julio-Claudian emperors (2) Paul's employment of *υιοθεσία* in letters to "communities directly under the rule of Rome" (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph. 1:5) and (3) Paul's own life and experience as a Roman citizen. Further, Paul applies the concept of adoption to Israel in Romans 9:4, but the OT is void of any such language. Thus, while adoption could have flowed out of Jewish ideas of sonship, election, inheritance and the anointed one(s), Israel's customs and Scriptures serve together as a secondary background for Paul's formulation of adoption theology. The Greek procedure no doubt contributes to Paul's thinking as well; however, the nail in the coffin for this custom as the primary influence is that the adoptee did not sever ties with the former family or head of family, which causes a theological problem. The Roman *adoptio* procedure does not provide us with a one-to-one correspondence, but it is the *most* similar parallel to Paul's theological metaphor of adoption. "Principally, adoption constituted on the one hand a break with the old family and on the other a commitment to the new family, along with all its attending privileges

⁹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 510–11. Also see Roger L. Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006).

¹⁰ Jewett, *Romans*, 505. The New Jerusalem Bible is the only English translation to my knowledge that maintains the omission.

and responsibilities.”¹¹ Although the Pauline metaphor shares continuities to the Roman practice, there are also discontinuities that are distinctly characteristic of Paul’s theological metaphor of adoption. For example, the eschatological “already/not yet” aspect of Paul’s adoption theology represented in Romans 8:15, 23 and Galatians 4:4–6 is nowhere to be found in the Roman procedure; however, Paul clearly sees the ministry and reception of the Spirit as directly related to the present and future adoption of Christians. Also, Ephesians 1:5 indicates that Jesus Christ serves as the mediator through which Christians receive their predestined adoption. While the Roman *adoptio* procedure involved the “signatures of seven witnesses required by Roman law in the certification of all documents,”¹² the Roman system did not require a mediator. Now, a definition is needed that is capable of succinctly communicating the continuities between Paul’s metaphor and the cultural procedure of adoption and the unique Christian distinctions belonging to Paul’s theological metaphor. Therefore, one is proposed here, which should be employed both in the reader’s understanding of *adoption* in the above translation and in the above commentary. In Paul’s metaphor, *υιοθεσία* represents the eschatological reality of the Christian’s severance from his or her old family (the sons of disobedience and slavery) and head of family (which theologically could be both Adam and Satan) and joining to his or her new family (the Christian Church) and head of household (Jesus Christ as the head or the Father as the one to whom all things return), which will be finalized at the redemption of our bodies but is also a present spiritual reality for Christians because of the reception of the Holy Spirit and because of the resurrected mediator, Jesus Christ. The indwelling of the Spirit in the Church and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are two examples of future expectations that have been thrust into the present, which are accompanied by future expected spiritual blessings, such as adoption.

- Conclusion: The eschatological pause in Paul’s discussion of the present blessings of salvation is intended to explain the tension between present suffering and future glory by explaining the shared expectation and experience of God’s children and the creation. The creation looks forward to the revelation of the sons of God when their adoption will be finalized and their redemption fully realized because its own redemption is wrapped up in this expectation according to the one who subjected it to

¹¹ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 69.

¹² Ibid., 68–9.

futility based on hope. Both the creation and the children of God experience a shared lament until the day when present labor pains give birth to a new creation.

Transition: The importance of verses 24–25 to application cannot be ignored. How does the Christian live in the tension of present suffering while awaiting future glory? How do we keep our gaze on future freedom when what we see in our present experience are the prison bars of our fleshly cages? What do we do when we are shaken by the creation's slavery, that is its decay, when the cold hand of death sneaks upon us and snatches the very breath away from those whom we love? What is the answer to my wondering about how long I must await the redemption of our bodies? How long must my children await it? And those with whom I share the intimacy of Christian fellowship? How long till we see the purposefulness of the creation restored that it may be unhindered in its desire to radiate the glory of God? Verses 24–25 offer us with a common answer, yet an answer that is right. Although it is a hard answer by which to live, the Christian knows in the depth of his soul that it is true because it is consistent with the experience of the Lord Jesus and because it is testified to him by the indwelling Spirit whom he has received. We have been saved *with hope*. This is not a hope that is visible yet—for who hopes for what he sees? Rather, if we hope for what we do not yet see, then endurance is present to assist us as we await our unseen hope. The answer, which we both love and hate, is *to endure*. It is the hard way of the Lord Jesus; it is the point of resolution for the tension between the present suffering and the future glory. Endurance as we await the unseen hope is the reason we have received the Helper, the Holy Spirit, for without him we cannot endure. It is as the apostle wrote earlier in his epistle,

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Therefore, let us endure for the unseen hope as we walk amid the tension of *experience* and *expectation*. Even more, may God grant us by his Spirit a spirit of joy as we endure, and may we be found faithful, just as the Lord Jesus.

- Paul explained the endurance toward hope in salvation (8:24–25).
 - We were saved in hope. The hope is yet unseen. Excursus on “hope”:
 - Elpis in the Classical Period
 - It means primarily **a hope or expectation of a positive outcome**. It is used of the hope of the Peloponnesian navy,¹³ the hope of Pericles that his sons (Paralus and Xanthippus) would mature out of their lack of

¹³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.89.

wisdom and maturity,¹⁴ and the hope beyond hope of a timid soldier delivering bad news to a king in Sophocles' *Antigone*.¹⁵

- It can refer to **one's object of hope**, as when the Plataeans requested the Spartans to assist them, "So that we Plataeans, after exertions beyond our power in the cause of the Hellenes, are rejected by all, forsaken and unassisted; helped by none of our allies, and reduced to doubt the stability of our only hope, yourselves."¹⁶
- It can relate to **the reason hope or believe**. Typically, it is some truth that stimulates hope or faith.
- Negatively, it appears be able to represent **anxious thoughts about the future**, as it does on the lips of the Athenian in Plato's *Laws*, "And that, besides these two, each man possesses opinions about the future, which go by the general name of 'expectations'; and of these, that which precedes pain bears the special name of 'fear,' and that which precedes pleasure the special name of 'confidence.'"¹⁷
- Elpis in the Greek Septuagint (LXX)
 - Primarily, it means the "confident expectation of something desirable"¹⁸ (Hos. 2:18; Zeph 2:15). **Deut. 24:14–15** says, "You must not oppress a lowly and poor servant, whether one from among your fellow Israelites or from the resident foreigners who are living in your land and villages. You must pay his wage that very day before the sun sets, for he is poor, and **his life depends on it**. Otherwise, he will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin" (NET).
 - Within this, it can refer to **the object or basis for such an expectation** (Isa. 24:16). Here, it is hope in the Righteous One.
 - However, it can also negatively convey **the expectation of something undesirable, or ominous** (Isa. 28:19), "lest it also take away your covenant of death. And your hope regarding Hades will not remain; if a rushing storm comes, you will be trampled down by it. When it passes by, it will take you; early, early in the day it will pass by, and at night it will be an evil hope; learn to hear" (Isaiah 28:18–19 [NETS](#)).
 - Second, it can also refer to "a sense of security with no danger or attack in view."¹⁹

¹⁴ Plato, *Protagoras*, 328d.

¹⁵ Sophocles, *Antigone*, 330.

¹⁶ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 3.57.

¹⁷ Plato, *Laws*, 644c.

¹⁸ Muraoka, *A Greek-English lexicon of the Septuagint*, 225.

¹⁹ Muraoka, *A Greek-English lexicon of the Septuagint*, 225.

- Psalm 15:8–10 says, “I constantly trust in the LORD; because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. So my heart rejoices and I am happy; **my life is safe**. You will not abandon me to Sheol; you will not allow your faithful follower to see the Pit” (NET).
- Also, Ezekiel wrote, “The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the earth will yield its crops. **They will live securely** on their land; they will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hand of those who enslaved them. They will no longer be prey for the nations, and the wild beasts will not devour them. **They will live securely, and no one will make them afraid**. I will prepare for them a healthy planting. They will **no longer be victims of famine in the land and will no longer bear the insults of the nations**” (Ezekiel 34:27–29 [NET](#)).
- Elpis in the New Testament
 - It can mean “**the looking forward to something with some reason for confidence respecting fulfillment, *hope, expectation***.”²⁰
 - Consider Romans 4:18: “**Against hope Abraham believed in hope** with the result that he became *the father of many nations* according to the pronouncement, ‘*so will your descendants be*’” (NET).
 - In our passage, Romans 8:24, this is the suggested meaning from BDAG. They add this, “*we are saved (or possess salvation) only in hope/anticipation (not yet in reality)*.”²¹
 - This usage particularly pertains to matters of Christian expectation and spoken of in God’s promises.
 - As seen previously, it can also refer to “**that which is the basis for hoping, (*foundation of*) *hope***.”²²
 - Paul wrote, “For **who is our hope** or joy or crown to boast of before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not of course you?” (1 Thess. 2:19 NET).
 - “From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and **of Christ Jesus our hope**” (1 Timothy 1:1 NET).
 - Again, as in previous Lexicons, it can convey, “**that for which one hopes, *hope, something hoped for***,”²³ that is, the object of hope.

²⁰ [BDAG](#), s.v. “ἐλπίς,” 319.

²¹ [BDAG](#), s.v. “ἐλπίς,” 319.

²² [BDAG](#), s.v. “ἐλπίς,” 319.

²³ [BDAG](#), s.v. “ἐλπίς,” 319.

- Once again, our passage in Romans 8:24 is referenced under this nuance: “*something hoped for, when it is seen, is no longer hoped for*=**one cannot hope for what one already has**.”²⁴
- Another instance in which the term is used in this way is Colossians 1:5, “Your faith and love have arisen **from the hope laid up for you in heaven**, which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel that has come to you” (NET).
- Summary on Elpis
 - All three periods convey ἐλπίς as **a forward looking, confident expectation in positive fulfillment**.
 - While two of the periods suggested that there can be **a negative nuance, such as anxiety about the future**, that doesn’t seem to be conveyed in our text.
 - All three periods also saw that the term could stand for the **object** of one’s hope.
 - All three periods also understand that the word can emphasize the **foundation, basis, or reason** for the hope or expectation.
 - The LXX writers alone used the term specifically to communicate “**a sense of security with no danger or attack in view**.” Psalm 15:9—“my life is safe.” Ezekiel 34:28—“They will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.”
 - BDAG located our verse in either (1) confident expectation of positive fulfillment and/or (2) the object of our hope. Probably, the first nuance is implied for the first use of hope in Romans 8:24, “For in this confident expectation
 - Wallace wrote about the dative form of “in hope” in our text, “A good passage upon which to test this is: τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν (Rom 8:24). Does Paul mean to say “We are saved by hope” (instrumental), “in hope” (locative), or “to” (or “for”) “hope” (dative)? If the case is [pure] dative, hope is, in a sense, personified and becomes the end of salvation rather than a means to that end. If the case is locative, hope is regarded as the sphere in which salvation occurs. If the case is instrumental, hope is considered as a means used in saving men.”²⁵
 - Douglas Moo seems to dismiss options one and two that Wallace lists as grammatically possible. He interprets the first “in hope” as “with hope,” an associative meaning, that is, the assertion that “we were saved” is

²⁴ BDAG, s.v. “ἐλπίς,” 319.

²⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: an Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 140.

qualified by the “ever present companion of this salvation”—hope.²⁶ He sees both an objective sense—that for which we hope—and a subjective sense—our attitude of hope that endures until eschatological salvation is fulfilled.

- With this information, here’s a translation of 8:24–25, “For we were saved with an attitude of confident expectation of fulfillment. Now, the object of hope that is seen is not an object of hope. For who has an attitude of confident expectation for what he sees? But if we have an attitude of confident expectation for what we do not see, we wait for it (object of hope) with patience.”
- Compare to 8:20, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope/with an attitude of confident expectation of fulfillment.” Therefore, if God subjected creation to futility in association with hope toward fulfillment, then, of course, those who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, not only groan with creation, but also possess an attitude of hope toward fulfillment. Therefore, there exists in the sons of God both a groaning because of God-subjected futility and a hope because of God-indwelling expectation.
- The fruit of this Spirit-indwelling hope is endurance/patience/perseverance in the context of God-subjected futility.
 - Endurance can mean, “**the capacity** to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.”
 - Or, it can mean, “**the act or state** of patient waiting for someone or something.”
 - I believe here we are speaking about the result of the Spirit-indwelling **capacity** to bear up in futility, which leads to acts of patient waiting in our various circumstances of encounter with futility.
- It may be the right time to ask the question, “God, why, why did you subject the creation to futility, causing us to have this creation and creature encounter with futility?”
 - I believe our text gives us a very good answer to what only appears to be problematic.
 - The root of sin from the beginning was in essence trusting in creatures and creation to deliver objects of hope apart from the Creator and his word.
 - God displays his wisdom by subjecting creation to futility, so that whenever his human creatures try to hope in created things, they always, always encounter futility. They never satisfy. They never meet expectations. They never truly

²⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 521–22.

reach that positive fulfillment for which we long. Instead, we must look beyond or outside creation for hope.

- It is the Holy Spirit who straightens the aim of our hope. He turns it toward our adoption. He turns it toward the redemption of our bodies. He straightens the aim of our hope, safety, and security so that it is only focused on God and his Son, Jesus Christ.
- Therefore, every encounter with God-subjected futility is in reality a tremendous grace that we would not be deceived again by placing our hope in creation, but in the Creator!
- So, we hope for him who we do not see and all the great wealth of his presence. We wait for him who is our hope with patience.
- Paul explained the experience of the Spirit's help in prayer (8:26–27).
 - The Spirit groans in intercession for us.
 - The Spirit helps in our weakness.
 - We should understand this weakness contextually. It accounts for the weakness we face in bodies not yet redeemed. It is the weakness we encounter in our experience of futility during our endurance toward hope.
 - We need his help, because we do not know how to pray.
 - As we experience futility and endure toward hope, it can be difficult to know exactly how to pray.
 - Moo writes, “What Paul apparently has in mind is that inability to discern clearly God’s will in the many things for which we pray . . . This inability to know what to pray for cannot be overcome in this life, for it is part of ‘our weakness,’ the inescapable condition imposed on us by our place in salvation history. Therefore, Paul does not command us to eradicate this ignorance by diligent searching for God’s will or by special revelation. Instead, Paul points us to the Spirit of God, who overcomes this weakness by his own intercession . . . our failure to know God’s will and consequent inability to petition God specifically and assuredly is met by God’s Spirit, who himself expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God.”²⁷
 - The Spirit himself intercedes.
 - The Greek words used to describe this groaning are στεναγμός, συστενάζω, and στενάζω. These Scripture references help us gain a sense of what is meant by this word "groaning" in Romans 8:26.
 - In the Greek Old Testament:

²⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 524–26.

- “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your *labor pains*; with pain you will give birth to children. You will want to control your husband, but he will dominate you” (Genesis 3:16 NET).
- “God heard their *groaning*, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Exodus 2:24 NET).
- “When the LORD raised up leaders for them, the LORD was with each leader and delivered the people from their enemies while the leader remained alive. The LORD felt sorry for them when they cried out in *agony* because of what their harsh oppressors did to them” (Judges 2:18 NET).
- “I am exhausted as I *groan*; all night long I drench my bed in tears; my tears saturate the cushion beneath me” (Psalms 6:6 NET).
- “Because of the violence done to the oppressed, because of *the painful cries* of the needy, I will spring into action,’ says the LORD. ‘I will provide the safety they so desperately desire” (Psalms 12:5 NET).
- “I am numb with pain and severely battered; I groan loudly because of *the anxiety* I feel. O Lord, you understand my heart’s desire; my *groaning* is not hidden from you” (Psalms 38:8–9 NET).
- “For my sighing comes in place of my food, and my *groanings* flow forth like water” (Job 3:24 NET).
- “those whom the LORD has ransomed will return that way. They will enter Zion with a happy shout. Unending joy will crown them, happiness and joy will overwhelm them; *grief and suffering* will disappear” (Isaiah 35:10 NET).
- “You have said, ‘I feel so hopeless! For the LORD has added sorrow to my suffering. I am worn out from *groaning*. I can’t find any rest” (Jeremiah 45:3 NET).
- “Let all their wickedness come before you; afflict them just as you have afflicted me because of all my acts of rebellion. For my *groans* are many, and my heart is sick with sorrow” (Lamentations 1:22 NET).
- In the Greek New Testament:
 - “Then he looked up to heaven and said with a *sigh*, “Ephphatha” (that is, ‘Be opened’)” (Mark 7:34 NET).
 - “I have certainly seen the suffering of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their *groaning*, and I have come down to

rescue them. Now come, I will send you to Egypt” (Acts 7:34 NET).

- “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how we should pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible *groanings*” (Romans 8:26 NET).
- In the Apostolic Fathers:
 - “Because of the misery of the needy and because of the *groaning* of the poor I will now arise, says the Lord. I will place him in safety” (1Clement 15:6 AF-E).
 - “Beware, therefore, you who exult in your wealth, lest those in want *groan*, and their groaning rise up to the Lord, and you together with your good things be shut outside the door of the tower” (Shepherd 17:6 AF-E).
- In sum, the Spirit steps into our human groaning with his intercession. As he steps into his intercession for our weaknesses, he is burdened with expressions of great concern and stress. He is burdened with our painful cries, our agonies, our exhaustion, their intensity, our anxieties, the adversity, the multifaceted and multidimensional face of the human condition, oppression, and suffering encountered in futility. The Spirit climbs under this burden of our weakness, and he groans for us in intercession. And he is experienced in this. Remember, the Spirit indwelled the Lord Jesus and has indwelled every Christian and church, in every culture, in every place, and in every age.
- The Spirit communicates his aim to God.
 - He who searches hearts could be the Father or Jesus (Rev. 2:23).
 - He who searches hearts knows the aim of the Spirit.
 - The word “aim” refers to the faculty of fixing one’s mind on something, so a way of thinking, a mind(set), an aspiration, something strived for, or an aim.
 - He who searches hearts knows the aim of the Spirit because of the Spirit’s intercession for the saints.
 - Intercession is to appeal or plead to God on behalf of another. Moses so clearly exhibits this during his year’s leading the Israelites.
 - The Spirit’s intercession for the saints is according to the will of God.
 - I see here a trinitarian parallel—the one searching hearts looks for God’s will, the Spirit’s aim, and then here emphasis on intercession in accordance with God’s (the Father’s) will.

- Now, we have spoken of our inability when it comes to knowing God's will, but also, the word of God, which came by the Spirit, gives us some ability to pray in accordance with the Spirit's aim and will of God.
- What isn't always clear is the exact application of the will of God in the experience of futility toward the expectation of fulfilled hope so that endurance is produced in us. This is what the Spirit knows how to accomplish for the saints.
 - The Holy Spirit is not only able to help us in the burden of our weak spiritual insight, but also, he can carry the burden to the goal—to the place in which we are conformed to the image of Christ.

Transition: Friction illustration

Theological Tension: When hope presses against/beyond the futility, it produces endurance.

Theological Truth: The Spirit uses this endurance to accomplish his aim for us.

Theological Purpose: To endure toward hope by the Spirit.

Transition:

Homiletical Need: Spirit-Helped Hope

Homiletical Subject: Prayer as the Context for This Helped Hope

Homiletical Purpose: To Experience Endurance from the Spirit's Aim in Futility

Homiletical Idea: Endure Futility with Helped-Hope in Prayer.

Homiletical Outline:

- Offer Descriptive Prayers.
 - Describe the futility.
 - Describe the weakness.
 - Describe the ignorance.
- Hope Ahead in Prayer.
 - Identify the future expectation – redemption of the body.
 - Believe in the basis for your expectation – Christ's resurrection.
 - Cultivate an attitude of expectation – wait with eager endurance.

- Approach the Helper in Prayer.
 - Bring your descriptive prayers into contact with your future hope.
 - Be honest before the one who searches hearts.
 - Know the revealed will of God: Saved, Sanctified, Spirit-filled, Spreading the Word, Submissive, Sacrificial, Suffering with Endurance, Service.
 - Trust the Spirit to intercede according to his aim.
- Thank God.
 - Thank him for the grace of a futility-subjected creation that leads you to him.
 - Thank him for the future hope we have in Christ about the redemption of our bodies.
 - Thank him for providing patient endurance.
 - Thank him for the Helper, the Holy Spirit.
 - Thank him for the Spirit's aim.

Conclusion:

Summary:

Closing Comment:

NOTES:

APPENDIX A: Study of συστενάζει in Romans 8:22

Classical Period (before 330 BC)

While the non-prefixed form (στενάζω) appears frequently,²⁸ the compound form containing the prefixed “συν-” is rare. In Euripides’ play entitled *Ion*, a boy and his mother are separated and reunited— between which their destinies and the schemes of the gods unfold. During the story, a Tutor (i.e., the *Πρεσβύτερος*) counsels Creusa, the mother. As she contemplates and hesitates sharing her experience with the Tutor, he assures Creusa, “ὡς συστενάζειν γ’ οἶδα γενναίως φίλοις”; that is, “I know how to mourn generously with friends.”²⁹

Koine Period (330 BC - 330 AD)

²⁸ For example, see Aeschines, “Against Ctesiphon,” Collections, Texts and Research, trans. Charles Darwin Adams, *Perseus Digital Library*, 2010, §3.259, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0002%3Aspeech%3D3%3Asection%3D259> (accessed December 22, 2010). The same can be said throughout each period—the non-prefixed form appears frequently and the compound form rarely.

²⁹ Euripides, “*Ion*,” Collections, Texts and Research, trans. Robert Potter, *Perseus Digital Library*, 2010, 935, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Eur.%20Ion%20935&lang=original> (accessed December 22, 2010); Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, “A Greek-English Lexicon: συστενάζω,” Collections, Texts and Research, *Perseus Digital Library*, 2010, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aalphabetic+letter%3D*s111%3Aentry+group%3D170%3Aentry%3Dsustena%2Fzw (accessed December 22, 2010).

The analysis of Bickerman places *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* in “the first quarter of the second century” or possibly “the last decades of the third century” B.C.³⁰ The Testament of Issachar 7:5 states, “I joined my sighs with any person in distress, and I shared my bread with the poor, I never ate alone.”³¹ Thus, there is continuity of use between the two periods—*lamenting together with* a person or persons.

LXX (3rd - 1st Century BC)

The prefixed form, *συστενάζω*, does not occur in the LXX. The non-prefixed form, *στενάζω*, occurs 26 times.³² Almost always the term is used literally or figuratively to describe emotional lament in light of circumstances, “Did I not weep for those whose day was hard? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?” (Job 30:25), and “[the one punished by the Lord] sees with his eyes and groans as a eunuch groans when embracing a girl” (Sir. 30:20) [brackets mine]. However, 4 Maccabees 9:21 appears to employ the term in relation to physical anguish, “Although the ligaments joining his bones were already severed, the courageous youth, worthy of Abraham, did not groan.” The absence of the prefix allows for the verb to describe (1) personal groaning for oneself or (2) groaning for someone else when an object is provided. However, the *together* nuance is dropped when the non-prefixed form is employed. **INTENSIFICATION.**

NT (1st Century AD)

The compound *συστενάζω* appears only once in the New Testament—Romans 8:22—“*οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν*,” which is “For we know that the whole creation groans together and suffers labor pains together until now.” Here, the non-human creation *laments together* because of its futile and frustrated condition. The non-prefixed form appears six times³³ in the New Testament, and it has three nuances: (1) a physical sigh (Mk. 7:34); (2) the groaning of the inner person (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2, 4); and (3) a description of complaining between Christians (Heb. 13:17; James 5:9).

APPENDIX B: Study of *υιοθεσιαν* in Romans 8:23

Classical Period (before 330 BC)

I found no evidence of the term being used in this period.

Koine Period (330 BC - 330 AD)

³⁰ Elias J. Bickerman, “The Date of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69, no. 3 (1959): 260.

³¹ *The Greek Pseudepigrapha* (OakTree Software, Inc., 2009). The non-prefixed form occurs three times in the Apostolic Fathers: *MPoly.* 2:2; 9:2; *Shep.* 17:6. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the term refers to physical groaning, that is a groan that is verbally uttered, and in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the term describes an internal groaning of the poor.

³² See 1 Mac. 1:26; 4 Mac. 9:21; Job 9:27; 18:20; 24:12; 30:25; 31:38; Wis. 5:3; Sir. 30:20; 36:25; Nah. 3:7; Isa. 19:8; 21:2; 30:15; 46:8; 59:10; Jer. 38:19; Lam. 1:8, 21; Eze. 21:11–12; 26:15–16.

³³ See Mk. 7:34; Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2, 4; Heb. 13:17; James 5:9.

In the writings of Diodorus of Sicily (I B.C.),³⁴ a cognate is used—*υιοποιήσασθαι*—in the story of Hera’s *adoption* of Heracles. The adoption follows the deification of Heracles by Zeus who then persuades Hera to make Heracles her son. Hera did take Heracles as her son, and it is reported that Zeus “enrolled him among the twelve gods but that he would not accept this honour; for it was impossible for him thus to be enrolled unless one of the twelve gods were first cast out; hence in his eyes it would be monstrous for him to accept an honour which involved depriving another god of his honour.”³⁵ The least that can be gained from the meaning of the term in this context is that *adoption* involves a change of a son’s status so that he gains certain rights and privileges. In this context, Heracles’ adoption is followed by *deification* initiated by Zeus, and Zeus bids him worthy to participate in the company of the “twelve gods.” These privileges are bestowed upon Heracles because of his adoption and new identification as the son of Hera.

The Oxyrhynchus fragment 1206 is a rare extant record from 335 A.D. of a private *adoption*, and it sheds further light on how the term was employed in the culture.³⁶ A married couple [Heracles (not the same as in Diodorus) and Isarion] entered into a contract of adoption in which they gave their two-year old son to Horion, “who promises that the boy shall be his heir.”³⁷ There appears to have been no familial affinity, and the record is void of any stipulations regarding food, clothing, etc; instead, such stipulations are replaced by “the negative guarantee that the boy should not be repudiated or reduced to a state of servitude.”³⁸ Thus, the two-year old boy is *adopted* by Horion, made a full heir, and given the guarantee that he will receive the benefits of being the heir of his new father.³⁹ In fact, the sole reason for the adoption is heirship, not fatherlessness, poverty or some other rescue from despairing circumstances.

LXX (3rd - 1st Century BC)

The term *υιοθεσία* is not used in the LXX. Burke concludes that while the concepts of *sonship* and *inheritance* are clearly present in the Old Testament as descriptions of God’s relationship with Israel as God’s son,⁴⁰ Paul’s idea of *adoption* is not grounded in the culture or theology of Israel:

The evidence for adoption as a legal procedure in the Old Testament is dubious to say the least. Moreover, in the event of a childless couple, other mechanisms were in place in Israelite society that

³⁴ Diodorus, *Diodorus of Sicily*, trans. C. H. Oldfather, vol. 2, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 468–69.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Arthur S. Hunt, ed., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912). This papyrus fragment is fifty years older than P. Leipzig 28, which is published in *Archiv* iii. pp. 173 and in *Chrestomathie*, p. 406 by Mitteis. Also, see 1208 and 1214.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ What is not mentioned here is an important difference between the Pauline concept of adoption and the practice of adoption in the Greek culture. In the Greek tradition, the *adoptee* did not sever ties with his old father and family. For further discussion on the competing background options, see Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 46–71.

⁴⁰ See Ex. 4:22; Deut. 7:6ff.; 14:1–2; Hos. 11:1–10.

obviated the need for adoption, such as the levirate marriage. Also, polygamy while permitted by God but obviously not the ideal, was another means of having an heir . . . In short, “the Old Testament laws contain no directives about adoption,” and even if the notion of adoption was known in Old Testament times, it had “little influence on daily life.”⁴¹

NT (1st Century AD)

Paul alone uses *υιοθεσία* among the New Testament (NT) writers. Roman adoption (specifically, the *adoptio* procedure) serves as the primary background to the Pauline use of the term in Christian theology for these reasons: (1) the familiar adoption practiced by the Julio-Claudian emperors (2) Paul’s employment of *υιοθεσία* in letters to “communities directly under the rule of Rome” (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph. 1:5) and (3) Paul’s own life and experience as a Roman citizen.⁴² Some think that the reference to the adoption which belongs to the Israelites in Romans 9:4 should be understood as a Pauline comment on God’s relationship with Israel rather than a concept communicated in the Old Testament (OT) and exegeted by Paul.⁴³ However, if this is the case, what is to be said about “the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises”? While there is no linguistic connection between the NT and the OT regarding *υιοθεσία*, God’s relationship with Israel as described by sonship, election, inheritance and even God’s unique relationship to the anointed kings of Israel provides enough parallels so that Paul would not have felt it inappropriate to apply the Roman sociolegal practice of *adoptio*⁴⁴ when speaking of the people of God. Thus, to speak of adoption with regard to Israel in Romans 9:4 is not a violation of theological structure or limitations.

The other two passages in Romans (8:15, 23) on the one hand share something in common, but on the other hand, they have traditionally been understood to communicate two different aspects of the Christian’s adoption. Romans 8:15 and 23 both speak of the Spirit in connection to *adoption*: (1) *πνεῦμα υιοθεσίας* (v. 15) and (2) . . . *τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υιοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν* (v. 23). Both verses confirm that the Christian has received or possesses the Spirit, and verse 23 adds that we have “the firstfruits of

⁴¹ Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, 201. Burke evaluates the Pauline concept of adoption in light of Jewish, Greek and/or Roman sociolegal and religious backgrounds. He proposes the Pauline concept to most closely aligned with Roman adoption. This is contradictory to the notable work of James M. Scott in his dissertation entitled, *ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Divine “Adoption as Sons” in the Corpus Paulinum*.

⁴² Ibid., 46–71.

⁴³ Ibid., 49–50.

⁴⁴ There were two methods of adoption in Roman practice: (1) *adrogatio* and (2) *adoptio*. The former is the older of the two procedures, and it only involved male adoptees. “[It] denoted the adoption of a person who was *sui iuris*: namely, not under the legal power or authority (*potestas*) of his father.” The process called for the involvement of an official investigation that assessed both the receiving family and the family losing a member. “Essentially, the person adopted lost *patria potestas* over his own children, and both he and his offspring came under the *potestas* of the adoptive father.” The latter—*adoptio*—“involved the adoption of a male *alieni iuris* (one under the legal power and authority of another), which was much more satisfactory socially and sacrally than adoption of a male *sui iuris*, because it meant that no family or its religious cult was being wiped out.” See Ibid., 67–70.

the Spirit.” These two verses have traditionally been put at odds with one another—verse 15 teaching that our adoption is complete and present and verse 23 teaching that adoption is partial with future expectation of completion. If not at odds, then they have been employed to teach an “already/not yet” idea—verse 15 communicating “the already” and verse 23 “the not yet”.⁴⁵ However, do not both passages together teach the “already/ not yet” concept? It may be that adoption is a reality for those who possess the Spirit, and that the extent of the adoption is dependent upon the extent of the Christian’s experience of the Spirit (present and future). However, in both verses, it is the *Spirit* who has been received—not adoption. Verse 15 teaches that we have received the Spirit from whom adoption comes,⁴⁶ not that we have received adoption. Verse 23 confirms this—“we also groan within ourselves as we await adoption—the redemption of our bodies.” Here, not only are we described as waiting for adoption, but also “adoption” is placed in apposition to “the redemption of our bodies.” Therefore, Paul’s epistle to the Romans teaches that Christians have received the Spirit, and through the Spirit, we wait eagerly for our adoption, that is, the redemption of our bodies. Thus, Paul in Romans posits the future resurrection of the righteous as the day in which the legal transaction of our adoption will take place.

Now, although Romans seems to suggest a purely future adoption, Galatians 4:4–6 clearly teaches that adoption—in some sense—is a reality now. Galatians 4:6 actually seems to reverse the order of things learned in Romans 8:15, 23. In Galatians, we are sons, and because we are sons, “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” In Romans, we received the Spirit as we awaited our adoption, but here, we receive the Spirit because we are sons, which implies that we have received adoption! In Ephesians 1:5, Paul writes, “he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.” Other than revealing that our adoption was included in the eternal plan of God through Christ, Ephesians does not further enlighten us regarding the “already/not yet” conundrum.

⁴⁵ Some commentators reject the inclusion of *υιοθεσία* in verse 23 because they are unable to reconcile the two; for example, see Jewett, *Romans*, 505, 518–19. Also see APPENDIX D. For the “already/not yet” interpretation, see Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 520; Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 474–75.

⁴⁶ Jewett takes a similar interpretation of the genitive, and he calls it a genitive of purpose; see Jewett, *Romans*, 498.