

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. (Romans 8:23)

We, as New Testament believers, “groan” along with creation. We who possess “*the first fruits of the Spirit*” (God’s divine engagement ring) “groan” because we are “*waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.*” In other words, we “groan” because we live in bodies that will die, bodies housing the power of sin. We learned earlier that the new self (the new man—the real us—our soul and spirit) is already redeemed, perfect, holy, blameless, and more. Our bodies are not yet redeemed, for they are mortal and will one day return to dust! Think about this truth for a moment. At the point of physical death, our brains will die, and our ungodly habit patterns will become extinct. Only then will the power of sin cease sending thoughts into our minds, thoughts that sometimes deceive us into believing that error is truth. Thus, only after our physical bodies cease operating will we be perfected in our behavior.

Paul taught that the phrase, “*our adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:23), points to “*the redemption of our body.*”

“...waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” (Romans 8:23)

This truth proves that the day we receive our glorified, immortal bodies will be the day we are adopted in the fullest sense. We will then be holy, perfect, and blameless, in spirit, soul, and body—not just in spirit and soul as in the present. All church saints, the church having begun in Acts 2, will receive their glorified bodies (and the “*adoption as sons*”) at the Rapture of the church (1Thessalonians 4:13-17). Also, the phrase, “*adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:23), is a major player in properly defining “*predestined*” in Romans 8:29-30!

Some theologians argue that “*our adoption as sons*” occurred when we were justified/saved. The verse cited for support is Galatians 4:5:

in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:5)

This argument seems valid at surface level. Yet, when studied in depth, we find that “*receive*” is in the subjunctive mood in the Greek—making it impossible to pinpoint the timing of “*the adoption as sons*” using this passage alone. However, Romans 8:23 reveals the timing as being when we receive our glorified bodies—totally negating the idea that “*the adoption as sons*” occurs at justification/salvation.

Don’t misunderstand. We became “*sons*” of God at the point of justification/salvation:

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:6-7)

The Galatian believers became “sons” when they were justified/saved. Becoming a son, however, is quite different from experiencing the “*adoption as sons*” of Romans 8:23. Hence, becoming “*a son*” of God through justification/salvation (Galatians 4:6-7) is not equal to the “*adoption as sons*” of Romans 8:23—when we will receive our resurrected bodies.

Still, some “theologians” would argue that the “*adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:23; Galatians 4:5) occurs at the point of justification (salvation) due to Paul’s words regarding “*a spirit of adoption as sons*” in Romans 8:15:

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15)

The phrase, “*have received*” (Romans 8:15), is an aorist, active, indicative verb—pointing to past action as well as reality of action. All New Testament believers “*have received a spirit of adoption as sons*”—which occurred when we were “*born again*” (John 3:3-8) of God’s Spirit (justified/saved). This “event” is quite different from the “*adoption as sons*” addressed in Romans 8:23 and Galatians 4:5—where we receive our resurrected bodies. We do not yet inhabit resurrected bodies, proving that receiving “*a spirit of adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:15) at the point of justification/salvation is unequal to receiving the “*adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:23) at the Rapture of the church.

One final passage regarding “*adoption*”:

who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, (Romans 9:4)

Paul, while referring to the nation of Israel, mentions that she has been adopted: “*...to whom belongs the adoption as sons...*” This passage does not teach that all Jews are saved, for in the same chapter (verses 1-3) Paul speaks of his grief associated with Israel’s overall spiritual ineptitude. Many Jews have died void of spiritual regeneration, suffering the consequence of eternal punishment. The phrase, “*the adoption as sons*” in Romans 9:4 points to God’s choice (election) of Israel to prepare the way for the Messiah—a very special office (or position) within His overall strategy for man, a calling she has grossly disregarded. This allows us to understand the context of Deuteronomy 7:6;

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:6)

The fact that Israel was “*chosen*” as “*a holy people to the Lord*” has nothing to do with where the individual Jews who make up the nation will spend eternity. Many Jews have rejected the office (function) to which the nation was called—due to rejecting God’s holy Son, Jesus the Messiah. Yet, God’s call was so great upon the nation that He put his name upon the sons of Israel:

And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:27 KJV)

Individuals can be called (named) to a special office (position, or function) within God's strategy for man and choose to reject that calling—a fact established to a greater degree when we arrive at Romans 8:28.

We can then conclude that the phrase, "*adoption as sons, the redemption of our body*" (Romans 8:23), points to that day when New Testament believers receive their resurrected bodies at the Rapture of the church. Paul's use of the pronouns "*we*" and "*our*" in Romans 8:23 add amazing insight to verses 27-30 of Romans 8. Much fun awaits us when we arrive at those passages.

As we transition into the remainder of Romans 8, remember that our brains, which store our ungodly habit patterns, will vanish along with our physical bodies—since the brain is part of the body. In fact, we will possess new, immortal brains void of ungodly habit patterns once we receive the "*adoption as sons*" of Romans 8:23, "*the redemption of the body.*" The behavior exemplified through our bodies will then match who we have been in spirit and soul (holy and blameless saints) since the point of justification/salvation! What an amazing, omnipotent, omniscient, wise, and loving God we serve!!!

Thinking through our Findings

God makes our souls and spirits holy and perfect at the point of justification, even though our behavior will not be perfected until after the death of our physical bodies. Our behavior is not who we are, but that who we are consists of what God makes our souls and spirits into at the point of justification (salvation). We will continue to commit acts of sin so long as we are in our earthly bodies. Sinless perfection is impossible this side of heaven, yet many areas of weakness can be overcome through God's indwelling power. Thus, the ungodly habit patterns, stored in the brain, actually decrease in intensity as we mature in the faith. We must think long and hard on what we are addressing here, for it is the absolute key to victory.

Let's take what we gleaned from Romans 6:6 and attach it to our latest findings. Suppose that the old self (sin nature) remains alive in a New Testament believer—that it was wounded but not eradicated when we were justified (saved). This false assumption would create a theological nightmare, for our souls and spirits would be part evil and part holy under such an arrangement—the old self being evil and the new self being holy. Consequently, we would not be able to enter into God's presence at the point of physical death.

Hence, the eradication of the old self through God's act of justification is a necessity. Physical death cannot remove the old self, for the old self is not part of the body. The old self is soul and spirit (who we were before we were saved), for we received a new soul and spirit at the point of justification. Only the cross is capable of eradicating who we used to be, thus "*our old self was crucified with*" Christ (Romans 6:6). The "*old self*," therefore, was eradicated at the point of justification, rather than at physical death.

Saved by Hope

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. (Romans 8:24-25)

Thus, “...*in hope we have been saved...*” (Romans 8:24-25). This truth ties in perfectly with 1Timothy 1:1:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope; (1Timothy 1:1)

Paul verifies that Jesus (Who we cannot presently see—Romans 8:24) “*is our hope*” (1Timothy 1:1). Thus, “*in hope we have been saved*” (Romans 8:24), Jesus being our “*hope*” (1Timothy 1:1). The “*hope*” supplied through Christ provides incentive to “*wait*” for what God has promised, in fact, to “*wait*” for the unseen.

“*Hope*” is enhanced through realizing that our present suffering will one day be exchanged for glory beyond our current ability to comprehend. “*The first fruits of the Spirit*” (Romans 8:23), which we now possess as believers, assist us as we “*groan*” (Romans 8:23)—while living in bodies that house the power of sin. Consequently, the remedy to current suffering is a proper view of the “*unseen*” (2Corinthians 4:17-18; Hebrews 11:27). Paul wrote, “*Set your mind on the things above, and not on the things that are on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2), for “*...our citizenship is in heaven*” (Philippians 3:20). From this vantage point we are to view “*the things*” that touch our lives.

We are growing, so be encouraged!

The Intercession of the Spirit

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; (Romans 8:26)

Has there been a time when you needed to pray, but couldn't? You tried to say the words, but they just wouldn't come. Or have you prayed and “felt” like your words were meaningless and empty? If so, astounding news is on the horizon! Paul says that during these seasons, in fact at all times when we pray, “...*the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*”

Amazingly, Paul, the man used mightily of God, the man who wrote (and understood) more regarding the “*mystery*” (Ephesians 3:3; Colossians 1:26-27) of the gospel than any of the apostles, viewed himself as incapable of praying as he should (notice his use of “*we*” in verse 26). Yet, he exhorted the church at Thessalonica to “*pray without ceasing*” (1Thessalonians 5:17), confirming his unwavering commitment to the matter. Knowing Paul's thoughts encourages me greatly, for I doubt if any of us are totally satisfied with the depth of our communication with God.

The Spirit “helps” and “intercedes for” (as Paul describes) only one group of believers—those who remain on the earth. That conclusion can be drawn from Paul’s use of the pronouns “us,” “our,” and “we” in Romans 8:26. Thus, the words “helps” and “intercedes” are in the present tense in the Greek, pointing to ongoing, linear action that occurred in Paul’s day. No need exists for the Spirit to intercede (as prescribed in Romans 8:26) for believers already in heaven, for they are “face to face” (1Corinthians 13:12) with the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit. Neither would the Spirit intercede in this manner for persons who are lost and living on the earth—even the lost who later choose to repent and believe. Why would the Spirit intercede (in the sense that Paul addresses in Romans 8:26) for individuals who have never desired to pray? The Holy Spirit convicts the depraved according to John 16:8. Only after the depraved choose to pray (and ask Christ into their hearts—and God makes them new) does the Spirit intercede as Paul describes. Hence, although the specific context of Romans 8:26 applies to believers of Paul’s day, we know that what Paul teaches here applies to present-day believers as well. In fact, it applies to any and all church saints so long as they live in their earthly bodies—as is verified in Romans 8:27. The Holy Spirit convicts unbelievers and believers alike of sin, but He “intercedes” in the manner described in Romans 8:26 for believers only—so long as they live on the earth.

Jesus, our high priest, also intercedes for the redeemed:

Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
(Hebrews 7:25)

How encouraging!

Conclusion: The Spirit of God “intercedes for” (and “helps”) New Testament believers from the time they are justified/saved until they are released from their earthly bodies and enter heaven. However, the particular context of Romans 8:26 points to the Spirit interceding for believers in Paul’s day alone.