

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Essential Groaning: The Resurrection Hope of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10
Against Word of Faith Theology**

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

Essential Groaning: The Resurrection Hope of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Against Word of Faith Theology

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DEDICATION

“The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
I have set the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken” (Psalm 16:5-8).

This is dedicated to my loving wife Allison who has been a sounding board, faithful friend, and
delightful encouragement to set the Lord always before me.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Lure and Dangers of Word of Faith Theology

Word of Faith (WOF) theology affirms that God always wishes for his children to be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous in this life.¹ He stands ready to give these blessings to all who speak words of faith that bring his healing and wealth into the world. In WOF theology, God's children should never experience sickness, suffering, or poverty because they were defeated at the cross.² God desires that healing and prosperity come to all who speak the words of faith that bring these blessings into existence.³ WOF preachers admonish their followers to seek these gifts from God for a life of material goods, ease, and comfort here and now.⁴

Unsurprisingly, the lure of WOF theology is strong. People need health, a measure of wealth, and some prosperity to survive. They naturally want to avoid pain, thrive, and achieve significance. Word of Faith is most attractive to the most impoverished. It has spread across Africa at an incredible rate, remaining the fastest-growing segment of Christianity in most of the continent.⁵ It is understandably popular. Promises of prosperity are sure to draw a crowd anywhere but are logically most attractive to those most in need, who cannot feed their families and regularly cope with sickness and disease.

¹ Kenneth Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1990), 54-55, https://kupdf.net/download/kenneth-e-hagin-new-thresholds-of-faith_58e37d8fdc0d60cf42da9825_pdf.

² Kenneth Copeland, *Freedom from Fear* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1980), 9-10, https://www.kcm.org/system/files/ba-bonus-content/freedomfromfear_pdfbook.pdf.

³ E. W. Kenyon, *The Hidden Man* (Lynwood, WA: Kenyon Gospel Publishing Society, 1970), 99, https://library.mibckerala.org/lms_frame/eBook/The%20Hidden%20Man%20-%20E.%20W.%20Kenyon.pdf.

⁴ David Jones, and Russell Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), 23, ProQuest Ebrary.

⁵ Kevin Smith and Genis Pieterse, "The Appeal of the Word of Faith Movement." *Conspectus*. 26, no. 1 (2018): 127.

Attractive things are the most dangerous. Pet owners remove antifreeze from their garage floors, fathers remove ladders when they finish cleaning the gutters, and teachers restrict internet usage. Spiritual dangers are no different. Like most things that are attractive to man in his natural state and “seem right” to him (Prov. 14:12), WOF theology is fraught with spiritual dangers.

Word of Faith theology is dangerous because it is not built on a view of God found in Scripture. Scripture overwhelmingly affirms (by example and principle) that God does not always wish for his children to be healthy and wealthy. He often prefers for them to have difficult lives now, doing his refining work in suffering and poverty (Psalm 66:10-12). It is good for his children to ask God for what they want. He is, after all, a good Father who gives good gifts to those who ask (Matt. 7:11). WOF theology fails to remember that a good Father is not a pushover. He is too wise and loving for that. A good father often does not give his children what they ask (like candy before dinner). A good father often gives his children challenges they wish they could avoid. Almost no child wants to wake up for school, but that is what he needs. To say that God always wants his children to be physically healthy and wealthy is spiritually dangerous because it presents an unbiblical and oversimplified view of God.

WOF theology is dangerous because it encourages an idolatrous love of the world. James condemns those who ask God for things with wrong motives so they might spend whatever they receive on their passions. They were not passionate about God himself but about the things they could get their hands on (health, wealth, and prosperity). A greater desire for God's gifts than God himself is the root problem with Word of Faith (WOF) theology. It causes its followers to commit spiritual adultery with the world (1 John 2:15-17) and make themselves enemies of God (James 4:4). WOF encourages people to make their genuine passion money, health, wealth, and prosperity instead of God.

WOF theology is dangerous because it fills churches with unregenerate people. The lost find eternal life through the low door of brokenness over sin, repentance, and desperate faith in Christ for salvation. Coming to God for anything else (including his gifts) does not save. Only those who possess evidence of genuine conversion, demonstrated in holiness (1 John 5:2) and love of neighbor (1 John 3:14), will hear, "enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:23).⁶ An overwhelming desire for health does not serve as evidence of a new spiritual birth.

WOF theology is dangerous because it sets people up for disappointment. Even if they could gain all the health, wealth, and prosperity they wished for, they would still want more. If Solomon (who had more wealth and intelligence than they could hope) found riches dissatisfying, what hope do they have?

Thankfully, the dangers of WOF theology can be exposed and avoided with a renewed focus on the resurrection. The danger of an unscriptural view of God is exposed and avoided when his children remind each other that this life is not meant to be heaven on earth; soon, their wise Father will bring heaven down to earth. The danger of an idolatrous love of the world is exposed and avoided by those who preach the superior glories of "Christ crucified" and the superior treasure that awaits in the next life (Heb. 10:34). The danger of unbelief is exposed and avoided where the gospel of the coming kingdom is preached. The danger of a dissatisfied life is exposed and avoided when saints are encouraged to store up treasures in heaven. All these dangers are exposable and avoidable when preachers (like the Apostle Paul) teach their flock to

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

look to and groan for the resurrection. When Christians remind one another that their "best life is the next life," they will avoid the attractive dangers of WOF theology.⁷

Thesis Statement

This dissertation will argue that Word of Faith theology's focus on the pursuit of pleasure in this current life contradicts Paul's example and admonition to groan in discontented hope for the resurrection. It will argue using a historical-grammatical examination of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, an analysis of groaning in hope of the resurrection in Scriptural themes, and a theological analysis of the importance of sustaining resurrection hope.

Methodology: A Historical-Grammatical Examination

Historical-Grammatical Examination

This dissertation will demonstrate that in contrast to Word of Faith theology, Paul saw groaning for the resurrection as an essential element of both saving and sanctifying faith through a historical-grammatical examination of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. Particular attention will be given to Paul's use of the word στενάζω "groan" in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4. The study will examine the word's definition, use, lexical range, semantic range, and cognates. The study will continue with an analysis of Paul's use of στενάζω in the broader context of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. It will examine the historical and literary contexts of both passages in order to reveal how Paul's groaning fit in the larger message of those passages. The examination will continue with a canonical analysis of the groaning theme from selected Bible passages. It will move to a theological evaluation and finish with a

⁷ "Your best life is the next life" is helpful and directly opposes prosperity/WOF theology in Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (New York: Faith Words, 2014), xiii.

section on current applications of the theme. Each chapter will conclude by observing how its findings contradict WOF theology.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one introduces the attraction that Word of Faith theology holds. It presents the thesis that WOF's emphasis on pleasure in this current life contradicts biblical (and especially Pauline) groaning in discontented hope of the resurrection. The chapter concludes by laying out the historical-grammatical methodology the dissertation will follow to make the case. This chapter sets the stage for the rest of the dissertation. It introduces WOF theology's attractions and problems, gives the thesis as the solution, and demonstrates how the dissertation will make the argument.

Chapter 2: Word of Faith Literature, Critiques, and Problems

Chapter two highlights the flaws of Word of Faith theology (that it encourages unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification) by examining literature (that affirms and critiques it) and the problems it presents to Christianity. It concludes by arguing that Paul's discontented groaning for the resurrection is the most significant flaw and most needed prevention for WOF's flaws. This chapter helps the reader see the problems of WOF theology and points to groaning as the best answer.

Chapter 3: Word Study of Paul's use of $\Sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4

Chapter three begins to answer the crucial question of what Paul meant by “groaning” in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4 with a detailed examination of the Greek word he used, “ $\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$.” The chapter examines the word's definition, lexical range, usage, semantic range, and cognates. This word study is essential to this dissertation because it clearly shows that Paul meant that he and his associates groaned in the hope of the resurrection.

Chapter 4: Canonical Analysis

Chapter four seeks to understand what Paul would have understood the resurrection to be and why he would have groaned for it. It does this by looking at three common Old Testament themes that he would have understood and included in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. These themes that flow out of resurrection hope are longing for home, delight in God, and wise living. This chapter is essential to understanding Paul's use of $\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ (groaning) in the context of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. It also demonstrates that WOF theology is not merely out of step with Romans 8 and 2 Corinthians 5, but the entire OT.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Paul's use of $\Sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ in the Broader Context of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Chapter five builds on an understanding of Paul's use of $\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ "groaning" in the context of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. It takes readers back to the historical and literary backgrounds of ancient Rome and Corinth so they can better grasp what he was saying to his original audience. It looks at the apostle's message to this audience in the verses surrounding Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4 to know why he spoke of his own and encouraged their groaning. This look at Paul's use of $\sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ “groaning” in the hope of the resurrection, in

context, is the backbone of the argument of this dissertation. Chapter five establishes that WOF theology seeks to avoid the discontented groaning that Paul experienced and prescribed to the church.

Chapter 6: Theological Reflection

Chapter six shifts from an in-depth analysis of Scripture to more general theological arguments for the necessity for discontented groaning in resurrection hope. The chapter demonstrates that groaning in the hope of the resurrection is an essential sign of saving and sanctifying faith. It proceeds to argue that WOF theology limits this groaning, keeping people from demonstrating saving faith and growing into the image of Christ. This chapter is a necessary part of the argument that WOF theology's pursuit of pleasure in this life actively works against the saving and sanctifying hope in the next life Paul prescribes.

Chapter 7: Application

Chapter seven examines ways for individuals and churches to grow in resurrection hope. Individual saints must begin by believing the correct facts about Christ's resurrection and their own and continue cultivating those right beliefs. Churches must teach the correct theology and gather and sing songs of the resurrection to increase discontentment with this world and love of the next. This chapter is a practical application of the truths of this dissertation. It is also an essential part of the argument that WOF theology contradicts Paul and all of Scripture's admonition to groan in hope because it demonstrates how actions (missing in WOF theology) cultivate greater love and hope in God.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Chapter eight summarizes the problems WOF theology presents to Christians and how resurrection hope answers them. Word of Faith theology does not see the value in groaning in the hope of the resurrection, as Paul did in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. This chapter provides a necessary review of this dissertation's arguments.

Chapter One: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the attractions and dangers that Word of Faith theology holds. It presented the thesis (that WOF's emphasis on pleasure in this current life contradicts biblical groaning in discontented hope of the resurrection) as the answer to those dangers. This chapter concluded by laying out the historical-grammatical methodology the dissertation will follow to argue the thesis. Chapter one sets the stage for the rest of the dissertation by introducing WOF theology's attractions and problems, giving the thesis as the solution, and demonstrating how the dissertation will make the argument.

CHAPTER TWO: WORD OF FAITH LITERATURE, CRITIQUES, AND PROBLEMS

This chapter will examine the literature that affirms and critiques Word of Faith theology. It will also look at the problems it presents to Christianity (that it encourages the following: unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification). The chapter will conclude by arguing that Paul's discontented groaning for the resurrection is a significant flaw and a needed prevention to the spread of WOF theology. This chapter helps the reader see the problems of WOF theology and points to groaning as the best answer.

An Introduction to the Unorthodox Roots of Word of Faith Theology

Word of Faith doctrine stands outside the bounds of orthodoxy because of its origins and unbiblical beliefs about faith, the nature of God, and Christ's atonement.⁸ McConnell labels it (like Paul to the Galatians) "a different gospel" (Gal. 1:6) because it mainly promotes the "good news" of prosperity, not salvation from the wrath of God.⁹

WOF has grown like "an exotic weed" in the garden of the Charismatic Renewal Movement (CRM). It has taken CRM by storm, especially in impoverished Africa.¹⁰ WOF doctrine now presents a significant threat to the CRM because it embraces all the trappings and language of charismatic orthodox Christianity yet grows from the cultish root of E.W. Kenyan's metaphysical philosophy.¹¹

⁸ Hank Hanegraaff "Foreword" in *A Different Gospel*, 13. The metaphysical nature of Word of Faith doctrine has led some, like Hanegraaff and McConnell, to conclude that the movement is outside the bounds of orthodox Christianity. This dissertation will follow their lead and argue that it is unorthodox.

⁹ D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 17, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ Hank Hanegraaff, "Foreword," in *A Different Gospel*, 13.

McConnel traces the "cultish roots" of WOF doctrine back to its founder. Determining the founder of the movement is a complex task. According to Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin is the undisputed father of the Word of Faith movement.¹² Copeland valued the teaching of his mentor so highly that he offered to exchange the title of his car for Hagin's tapes (which he proceeded to memorize).¹³ Other WOF leaders, such as Fredrick Price and John Osteen, also credit Hagin with shaping their thinking and teaching.¹⁴

Hagin, for his part, claimed that he received the doctrine that would become WOF theology from direct revelation.¹⁵ However, the evidence points to E. W. Kenyon as his source. Kenyon's daughter and coworkers claimed that Hagin plagiarized him.¹⁶ The evidence for this is irrefutable. Hagin published large sections of eight books taken verbatim from Kenyon's work, for which no credit was given.¹⁷

The root of Kenyon's doctrine is traceable. Kenyon was not a Pentecostal nor connected to the forerunners of the Charismatic Renewal movement (Wesleyan Holiness or classic Pentecostalism).¹⁸ Kenyon believed Satan was being so powerful that he had communicable nature.¹⁹ He went so far as to say that Christ himself partook of this nature. "We know that as

¹² Kate Bowler, *Blessed, A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹³ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 30.

¹⁴ Sonny Zaluchu, "Prosperity Theology in the Pandemic Era," *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 12, no. 1 (2022): 186-187, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁵ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹ William P. Atkinson, "The Nature of the Crucified Christ in Word-Faith Teaching," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 2 (2007): 170-171, <https://search.ebscohost>. Communicable attributes

Moses lifted up the Serpent in the wilderness, Jesus was also lifted up a serpent; that is, He was a partaker of Satanic Nature, the old Serpent."²⁰ Although Kenyon was not in complete agreement with the metaphysical movement, he was heavily influenced by it.²¹ The metaphysical movement claims that the spiritual realm is the only actual reality and the cause of every effect in the physical.²² Most (like Kenyon) believed that man can use his mind to control and create reality in the physical world.²³ This movement was the root of the Christian Science Movement.²⁴ Since WOF's doctrinal roots begin with Kenyon's metaphysics (the spiritual is the only reality and the power of man's mind control) instead of a biblical understanding of the reality (that the spiritual and physical world are both real and God is the only creator), WOF's doctrine is deeply flawed. It is even logical to conclude with McConnell that it is not biblical at its core but cultish.²⁵ Although WOF doctrine cloaks itself in Charismatic language, the meaning of the language is often entirely different.

WOF is a successful and dangerous substitute within the Charismatic Renewal Movement because it is so difficult to identify. It uses the same Evangelical and Pentecostal terminology with different meanings.²⁶ Like "tares among the wheat," WOF theology must be

²⁰ E. W. Kenyon, *The Father and His Family* (Lynwood, WA: Kenyon Gospel Publishing Society, 1989), 50, <https://christiandiet.com.ng/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Father-His-Family-E.W.-Kenyon.pdf>.

²¹ William M. R. Simpson. "The Significance of Andrew Perriman's Faith, Health and Prosperity in the Word of Faith Debate," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16, no. 1 (2007): 74, ProQuest Ebrary.

²² Jones, and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 23.

²³ Glyn J. Ackerley, *Importing Faith: The Effect of American 'Word of Faith' Culture on Contemporary English Evangelical Revivalism* (Havertown: The Lutterworth Press, 2016), 15, ProQuest Ebrary.

²⁴ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 55.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

exposed from the broader charismatic movement because its core beliefs are a heretical counterfeit to orthodox Christianity.²⁷ Some of the strongest critics of WOF doctrine have come from those within the CRM who know that the success of the true biblical gospel of repentance and faith depends on exposing it.²⁸

With the roots of WOF theology in view, running back to Kenyon's metaphysics, it is essential to hear from key players in the movement to form an opinion on whether WOF encourages unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification.

A Survey of Word of Faith Theology Literature

The literature of Word of Faith theology is not a governed body of teaching or a denomination. However, it is possible to classify it because it consistently aligns with the teachings of E.W. Kenyon and Kenneth Hagin.²⁹ Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Paul and Jan Crouch, Fred Price, T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, John Hagee, and more follow the core doctrines of Kenyon and Hagin that became WOF theology. The literature recorded in this chapter was taken from books and recordings of WOF teachers and is generally accepted across the movement.

Word of Faith Literature on Doctrine

Fundamental doctrines of Kenyon and Hagin that became Word of Faith theology are summed up memorably in Hanegraaff's acronym F-L-A-W-S (Faith-Little Gods-Atonement-

²⁷ Hanegraaff, "Foreword," in *A Different Gospel*, 19.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Katy Attanasi and Amos Yong, *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2, ProQuest Ebrary.

Wealth-Suffering).³⁰ When this chapter examines WOF doctrine, it will repeatedly focus on these five areas, using this helpful acronym for continuity.

Faith, in Word of Faith theology, does not originate from God as a gift, nor is it placed in him as the object of faith. Instead, faith is seen as self-generated and directed at God and the spiritual world in order to gain prosperity in this physical world.³¹ Kenneth Copeland defines faith as "a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function."³² Properly using faith is similar to cracking a code to the prosperity God promises. Copeland explains that "there are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's Word. Faith causes them to function."³³ According to Copeland, releasing this faith depends upon "speaking of things that are not as though they were."³⁴ Positive confession is not private communion with God but a bold statement requiring the faith-filled to tell others what they believe God for.³⁵

WOF doctrine views humanity as little gods. Paul Crouch claimed, "I am a little god. Critics, be gone!"³⁶ Hagin explains his view of mankind from creation: "Originally, God made the earth and the fullness thereof, giving Adam dominion over all the works of His hands. In

³⁰ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 52.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 19, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/34f7e0ab55388a9b40/t/5aa92d229140b783c10c1b48/1521036579160/lawsofp Prosperity+-+Kenneth+Copeland.pdf>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 9-10.

³⁵ Milton F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005) 57, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁶ Paul Crouch, "Paul Crouch- 'I am a little god,'" August 14, 2014, 0:21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzopxXJXxvk>.

other words, Adam was the god of this world.”³⁷ Copeland boldly takes this further, claiming believers can take the name “Yahweh” for themselves. He explains, “I say this with all respect, so that it don’t upset you too bad, but I say it anyways: When I read in the Bible where He [God] says, “I AM,” I just smile and say, “Yes, I Am too.”³⁸

WOF theology’s concept of man being a “little god” finds its most common comparison to Jesus himself. The believer does not merely become like Christ in his communicable attributes (holiness, joy, peace), but becomes like him in his deity. Kenyon writes, “The believer is as much an incarnation as was Jesus of Nazareth.”³⁹ Benny Hinn explains, “When you were born again, the word was made flesh in you. You are everything he is, was, and ever shall be.”⁴⁰

The view of man’s exalted status, embraced by the WOF, is essential to speaking prosperity and health into the physical world. If God can create out of nothing, then, with enough faith, man can too.⁴¹ Creflo Dollar explains this mysterious concept: “God uses words to create what he wants to exist. Christians have the same ability. For example, when you lack in your life, call forth abundance to replace it. Say what you believe is true according to the Word.”⁴²

WOF doctrine views atonement quite differently than orthodox Christianity in its nature and scope. In its nature, instead of Christ becoming a vicarious substitute for the wrath of God,

³⁷ Kenneth Hagin *The Believer’s Authority* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1996), 27, <https://www.restoredtofreedom.com/Kenneth-E-Hagin-The-Believers-Authority.pdf>

³⁸ Kenneth Copeland, TBN, August 9, 1987, in Robert M. Bowman Jr. *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 15.

³⁹ Kenyon, *The Father and His Family*, 118.

⁴⁰ Benny Hinn, “Benny Hinn Said Because We are Little Gods,” August 15, 2014, YouTube video, 0:03. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gk6oDDCMNMU> (17s).

⁴¹ Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 23.

⁴² Creflo Dollar, “Faith: The Power That Brings the World to Its Knees: Calling Those Things That Be Not as Though They Were,” June 2, 2009, <http://www.creflodollarministries.org/BibleStudy/StudyNotes.aspx?id=786>.

WOF theology affirms that Jesus became a demoniac.⁴³ Copeland writes, "Jesus went to hell a demon-possessed mortal man and emerged from hell a born-again resurrected man. This born-again Jesus defeated Satan and his forces in hell."⁴⁴ To explain how this could have taken place, WOF doctrine of the atonement affirms that Christ was separated from God not only for the hours on the cross but also for the days he lay in the tomb. It claims that when Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30) on the cross, he only meant that he had finished his earthly atoning work.⁴⁵ His heavenly atonement would happen three days later when he rose from the dead.⁴⁶

WOF doctrine also differs from orthodox Christianity in its view of the scope of the atonement. In WOF's view, the atonement was paid on the cross not only to satisfy God's wrath for sin but also to reverse the curse of poverty and sickness for those who have faith. Copeland explains that "Jesus offered Himself as the supreme sacrifice to purchase our freedom from every part of the curse (fear, sin, death, sickness, disease, and poverty...)." ⁴⁷ Hagee agrees and writes, "The good news to the poor is this. Christ took your poverty on the cross and gave you the riches of Abraham. ...The curse of poverty has been broken at the cross. If you have the anointing, you don't have the curse of poverty."⁴⁸

⁴³ Kenneth Hagin, *The Name of Jesus* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1996), 32. <https://dailywisdomtv.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Kenneth-E-Hagin-The-Name-of-Jesus.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Kenneth Copeland, "Jesus: Our Lord of Glory," *Believers' Voice of Victory* (April 1982), 3. <https://elevatechristiannetwork.com/tag/believers-voice-of-victory/>.

⁴⁵ Atkinson, "A Theological Appraisal of the Doctrine that Jesus Died Spiritually," 170.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 9-10.

⁴⁸ John Hagee, *The Seven Secrets: Unlocking Genuine Greatness* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2004), 232. <https://archive.org/details/sevensecrets0000hage>.

WOF doctrine views wealth as something that God wants for all his children. Kenneth Hagin describes God's desires for his children as follows: "God wants his children to eat the best. He wants them to wear the best clothing. He wants them to drive the best cars, and he wants them to have the best of everything."⁴⁹

WOF doctrine views sickness and suffering as completely avoidable with enough faith. In WOF's view, it is not normal for a true believer to be sick or suffer since it is always God's will to heal.⁵⁰ Copeland describes using faith to stay well: "Fear is a spiritual force, just as faith is a spiritual force. When you apply faith and operate in it by keeping the Word of God in your heart, that faith of God will flow through your body to keep it well and whole. When you apply fear and operate in it, the force of fear will work against you to make you sick."⁵¹ Kenyon echoes a similar sentiment. "I know that I am healed because he said that I am healed, and it makes no difference what symptoms may be in the body. I laugh at them, and in the name of Jesus, I command the author of them (Satan) to leave my body."⁵²

Word of Faith Literature on the Pursuit of Wealth

Word of Faith literature overwhelmingly affirms the pursuit of wealth and prosperity.⁵³ Its founder, E.W. Kenyon, affirms that "God never planned that we should live in poverty, physical, mental or spiritual. He made Israel go to the head of the nations financially. When we

⁴⁹ Kenneth Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1990), 54-55, https://kupdf.net/download/kenneth-e-hagin-new-thresholds-of-faith_58e37d8fdc0d60cf42da9825_pdf.

⁵⁰ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 262.

⁵¹ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 14.

⁵² E. W. Kenyon, *The Hidden Man*, 99.

⁵³ Mary V. Wrenn, "Selling Salvation, Selling Success: Neoliberalism and the U.S. Prosperity Gospel," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 45, no. 2 (2021): 297, ProQuest Ebrary.

go into partnership with Him we learn His ways of doing business."⁵⁴ Kenneth Copeland helps his readers understand that God supports their acquisition of wealth. He says God "is a good God. He will do His absolute best to see that you are blessed in every area of your life."⁵⁵ John Hagee agrees and points to Jesus as the prime example of the pursuit of wealth. He interprets John 1:38 in favor of this view: "Jesus turned to those who were following and said, 'Come with me,' and they said, 'Where dwellest thou?' He said, 'Come and see,' and Jesus took the crowd home to stay in His house. That meant it was a big house."⁵⁶ Hagee points to more evidence, "Jesus had a seamless robe so valuable that Roman soldiers gambled for it at the cross. It was a designer robe."⁵⁷

Word of Faith Literature on God's Promises

WOF theology grounds its view of God's unconditional promises of health and prosperity on the atonement. Kenneth Copeland writes, "Since God's Covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now!"⁵⁸ It belongs to the believer, who must claim it. The way to claim what God promises is through faith. Copeland describes the power of faith in this process: "If you will put faith to work, it will always overcome fear. Love always overcomes hate. Prosperity always overcomes poverty."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ E.W. Kenyon in Jones, and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 23.

⁵⁵ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 17.

⁵⁶ Hagee, *The Seven Secrets*, 232.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 51.

⁵⁹ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 6-7.

Kenyon affirms that the power of positive confession brings about God's promises. He writes, "Confession always goes ahead of healing. Don't watch symptoms; watch the word, and be sure that your confession is bold and vigorous. Don't listen to people. Act on the word. Be a doer of the word. It is God speaking. You are healed. The word says you are. Don't listen to the senses. Give the word its place. God cannot lie."⁶⁰

Word of Faith Literature on Evangelism and Sanctification

The WOF literature on salvation and evangelism appears to align with orthodox Christianity (in that it involves repentance and faith); however, since its core beliefs, like the atonement, do not align with sound biblical interpretation, it remains questionable.⁶¹ Hagin describes salvation from Romans 10 as confessing sin, believing in Christ's work, and accepting his gift.⁶² He acknowledges the importance of sharing it because faith comes through hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).⁶³ Although this emphasis on hearing the word and faith for salvation and sanctification sounds similar in mainstream Evangelicalism and WOF teaching, the meaning is different. Bowler explains that while Evangelicals focus on a personal relationship through hearing, WOF followers hear to “share in God’s power.”⁶⁴ Copeland clarifies that “God’s power

⁶⁰ E. W. Kenyon, *Jesus the Healer* (Seattle: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1943), 26, <https://christiandiet.com.ng/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Jesus-the-Healer-E.W.-Kenyon.pdf>.

⁶¹ WOF's core beliefs in the nature of the atonement do not align with sound hermeneutical interpretation of descriptions of the atonement or classic understanding of the work of Christ on sinners' behalf. Believing in a flawed view of the atonement puts the saving faith in jeopardy because to possess saving faith, one must have an accurate view of what Christ has accomplished—correct doctrine matters.

⁶² Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith*, 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, 66.

is in direct relationship with His Word. He has used His Word to release His power. He has sent His Word to us so that we may be in contact with His great power.”⁶⁵

Literature expressed by those inside WOF theology has briefly expressed their doctrine, pursuit of wealth, belief in God's promises, and beliefs about evangelism and sanctification. In order to form a clear picture of its errors, we now examine literature from those outside WOF, critiquing it. These critiques will present more evidence that WOF theology encourages unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification.

A Survey of Literature Critiquing the Word of Faith Theology

Literature Critiquing Word of Faith's Doctrine

The fundamental doctrines of WOF theology can be critiqued from a biblical perspective in a number of ways. This examination will categorize the critique using Hanegraaff's acronym F-L-A-W-S.⁶⁶

Opposing literature critiques WOF theology's concept of faith as a "self-generated spiritual force" exerted to gain prosperity. Jones calls Copeland's statements "obviously faulty, perhaps even heretical."⁶⁷ The view of faith as Copeland's "spiritual force" that "makes the laws of the spirit world function... governing prosperity" directly opposes orthodox Christianity's definition of trust in the person and promises of God.⁶⁸ Word of Faith and Prosperity theology

⁶⁵ Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, 26-27.

⁶⁶ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 52.

⁶⁷ David W. Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," *The 9Marks Journal* 216, no. 1 (2014): 29, <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalerrors-prosperity-gospel/>.

⁶⁸ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 29.

contradict the biblical view of faith as granted by and centered on God and replaces it with one produced and directed by man.⁶⁹ Jones concludes that “any theology that views faith solely as a means to material gain rather than justification before God must be judged faulty and inadequate.”⁷⁰

WOF theology's concept of humanity as little gods is criticized outside the movement for elevating man and demeaning God. Brogdon notes that Prosperity theology presumes to bind God to “spiritual laws and commands to bless ‘faith-filled’ believers.”⁷¹ Jones takes issue with the Word of Faith’s tendency to exalt man above God by treating prayer “as a tool to force God to grant prosperity.”⁷² He illustrates his point with Creflo Dollar’s statement, “When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass. It is a key to getting results as a Christian.”⁷³ In WOF theology, man, not God, is the center of worship. Man's comforts and desires are the prime focus of his prayer and faith. The biblical view of God as the object of worship is lost along with his pleasure and glory as worship’s purpose.

WOF theology’s concept of the nature and scope of the atonement is critiqued in opposing literature. Atkinson critiques the dual (physical on earth and spiritual in hell) nature of the atonement held by WOF theology. He affirms the single atonement on the cross by pointing out that “whatever spiritual sufferings Jesus might have gone through on the cross were over

⁶⁹ Zaluchu, "Prosperity Theology in the Pandemic Era," 187.

⁷⁰ Jones, “The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel,” 29.

⁷¹ Lewis Brogdon, *The New Pentecostal Message: An Introduction to the Prosperity Movement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015) 65, ProQuest Ebrary.

⁷² Jones, “The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel,” 30.

⁷³ Creflo Dollar, “Prayer: Your Path to Success,” in “The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel,” 31.

before he physically died. He was thus able confidently to place his spirit in God's hands (Luke 23:46), knowing that he had completed his atoning work (John 19:30) and that he would later that same day be in paradise (Luke 23:43).⁷⁴ The miracle of tearing the temple veil, opening "a new and living way (Heb. 10:20)" into the Father's presence, confirmed Christ's finished work.⁷⁵ The scope of the atonement is also critiqued. Hanegraaff argues that if WOF doctrine is correct and the cross broke the curse of poverty, then Paul was cursed as he found himself suffering in jail.⁷⁶ According to Scripture, the opposite is true. While suffering, Paul was content (Phil. 4:11).⁷⁷ The suffering apostle was filled with joy and urged the saints to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4).

WOF theology's concept of wealth is criticized for causing its followers to come to God with self-centered motives. Jones mentions that prosperity preachers often use James 4:2 to admonish their hearers to ask for prosperity and health: "You have not because they ask not."⁷⁸ He notes how often they ignore the next verse that explains what they should be asking: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (James 4:3)."⁷⁹ Requests only meant to fuel selfish passions for wealth will not be regarded by God. John Piper critiques WOF's encouragement to pursue wealth through interaction with Matthew 10:23-27.

"Jesus said, 'How difficult it will be for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God!' His disciples were astonished, as many in the "prosperity" movement should be. So Jesus raised their astonishment even higher by saying, 'It is easier for a camel to go through the

⁷⁴ Atkinson, "A Theological Appraisal of the Doctrine that Jesus Died Spiritually," 169-170.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Hank Hanegraaff, "FLAWS of the Health and Wealth Gospel: W is for Wealth and Want." November 6, 2019. YouTube video, 2:07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ge5UqFctdg8>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 30.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.' They respond in disbelief: 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus says, 'With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God (Mark 10:23-27).'"⁸⁰

Piper questions: "Why would you want to develop a ministry focus that makes it harder for people to enter heaven?"⁸¹

WOF theology's concept of suffering is critiqued in opposing literature. McConnell critiques the Word of Faith view that God always wants his children free from sickness and suffering with Romans 8:18-21. He says that it directly contradicts the Pauline teaching that "all creation groans, and believers groan right along with it."⁸² Believers must wait for the resurrection with patience (8:24-25) along with creation. "The believer's body is not made impervious to disease through faith," McConnell clarifies, "it remains a perishable body of 'weakness' and 'dishonor.'⁸³ At Christ's return, the believer's body will undergo the change described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-55. McConnell concludes, "Disease will be defeated when death is defeated."⁸⁴

Literature Critiquing the Word of Faith's View of the Pursuit of Wealth

The WOF view of pursuing wealth is not new or original to the movement. Paul condemns the pursuit of wealth as Demas left him, "in love with this present age" (2 Tim 4:10). Spurgeon says of the pursuit of wealth, "I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any

⁸⁰ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," *The 9Marks Journal* 216, no. 1 (2014): 42, <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalerrors-prosperity-gospel/>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 277.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth. You will say, ‘Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?’ You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God. But what I said was that to live with the object of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian.”⁸⁵

John Piper interacts with 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and brings a warning to WOF prosperity preachers. He demonstrates that the warnings in the text are, by implication, warnings “against preachers who stir up the desire to be rich instead of helping people get rid of it.”⁸⁶ Piper cites Paul’s admonition to contentment, “godliness with contentment is great gain” and “if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content,” and questions why WOF preachers would want to steer their hearers away from contentment in bare necessities? Piper cites Paul’s warning against those who desire to be rich, “temptation,” “a snare,” “many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction,” “all kinds of evil,” wandering “away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs,” and asks why prosperity preachers would “want to develop a ministry that encourages people to pierce themselves with many pangs and plunge themselves into ruin and destruction?”⁸⁷

Literature Critiquing the Word of Faith’s View of God’s Promises

Word of Faith's use of Scripture backing their claims of prosperity rarely hold up under the scrutiny of sound biblical hermeneutics. Jones notes that to support their claim that prosperity is a provision of God's covenant, "prosperity teachers appeal to Galatians 3:14, which refers to

⁸⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *2,200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles H. Spurgeon*. ed. Tom Carter (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988) 216, <https://www.logos.com/product/7362/2200-quotations-from-the-writings-of-charles-h-spurgeon>.

⁸⁶ Piper, “Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly,” 42.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

'the blessings of Abraham [that] might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus.'"⁸⁸ The irony of their use of this text, Jones continues, is that "they ignore the second half of the verse, which reads, '...that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.'"⁸⁹ The verse is taken out of its context. The "promise of the Spirit" is a blessing of salvation, not a promise of physical wealth.⁹⁰

Gordan Fee (an ordained Assemblies of God minister) critiques the hermeneutics of WOF's prooftexts for promises of wealth. Fee critiques Copeland's interpretation of "Beloved, I pray that in all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health (3 John 2 KJV)" as proof that God wants everyone to prosper and be healthy.⁹¹ Fee argues, "In the first place, the Greek word translated 'prosper' in the KJV means 'to go well with someone,' just as a friend in a letter two days ago said, 'I pray that this letter finds you all well.' This combination of wishing 'things to go well' and for the recipient's 'good health' was the standard form of greeting in a personal letter in antiquity."⁹² Fee calls this departure from the text's plain meaning (to its ancient audience to force an interpretation that favors prosperity) "an abuse of the text."⁹³

Literature Critiquing the Word of Faith's View of Evangelism and Sanctification

Jones critiques the WOF's view of evangelism and sanctification. He contends that the fundamental flaw of the prosperity gospel is that it is not gospel at all. He calls it a "false gospel"

⁸⁸ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 30.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Gordan Fee, *The Disease of the Health & Wealth Gospels* (Vancouver: Regent College Pub., 2006), 10, ProQuest Ebrary.

⁹² Fee, *The Disease of the Health & Wealth Gospels*, 10.

⁹³ Ibid.

because if it is true, "grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant, and man is the measure of all things."⁹⁴ With a man-centered "gospel" in place, man approaches God as his servant.⁹⁵ No fear of hell or hatred of sin leads to repentance. One does not stare at the beauty of Christ's redemption in reaction to the horror of one's own sin. As a result of this lack of "jaw-dropping" appreciation, there is no internal motivation for sharing the gospel with others or a longing for personal holiness. Without the true gospel of Christ's death for sins and resurrection, there is no salvation, evangelism, and sanctification.

WOF theology neglects evangelism and sanctification due to its higher pursuit of temporal success. Harris reveals this flaw as he critiques T.D. Jakes' *Reposition Yourself*.⁹⁶ He observes how Jakes consistently misinterprets Scripture to offer prooftexts for material gain.⁹⁷ Jakes uses "you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32) to support that Jesus will help a person see that "apathy, mediocrity, and fear are roadblocks to a better life."⁹⁸ The true message of eternal salvation from hell is dropped for a temporal one of prosperity. Jakes also uses Paul's statement that "he fights not as one who beats the air" (1 Cor. 9:26) to show how to "fight strategically for the prizes we long to enjoy."⁹⁹ Harris points out, "The prize that Paul refers to in his letter to the Corinthians is sharing in the blessings of the gospel with those whom

⁹⁴ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 31.

⁹⁵ James R. Goff, Jr., "The Faith That Claims," *Christianity Today* 34, no. 2 (1990): 21, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1990/february-19/faith-that-claims.html>.

⁹⁶ T.D. Jakes, *Reposition Yourself: Living Life Without Limits* (New York: Atria Books, 2007), 1.

⁹⁷ Steven Harris, "Book Review: *Reposition Yourself: Living Life Without Limits*, by T.D. Jakes," *The 9Marks Journal* 216, no. 1 (2014): 55, <https://www.9marks.org/review/reposition-yourself-living-life-without-limits-td-jakes/>.

⁹⁸ Jakes, *Reposition Yourself: Living Life Without Limits*, 27.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

he has gained through the preaching of said gospel.”¹⁰⁰ This message of the apostle, to propel his hearers to evangelism, is lost in the fog of Jakes’ temporal misinterpretation.¹⁰¹ Thus, evangelism with the true gospel (for the forgiveness of sins [Luke 24:47]) and sanctification (that mortifies remaining sin [Rom. 8:13]) is not fervently pursued.

The drive for evangelism and sanctification is lost where such man-centered, this-world-focused teaching pollutes Christ’s church. There is little emphasis on sharing the true gospel of freedom from the wrath of God in churches where the “good news” is prosperity. There is little emphasis on becoming more and more sanctified into the image Christ in churches where believers are encouraged to instead pursue becoming more and more wealthy.

Examining the literature critiquing WOF theology has revealed concerns about its doctrine, pursuit of wealth, view of God's promises, and concept of evangelism and sanctification. Now, we must look at the problems the theology presents to those who interpret Scripture using sound hermeneutical principles.

The Problems Word of Faith Theology Presents

Word of Faith theology presents several problems to those who interpret Scripture using sound hermeneutical principles (interpreting literally, historically, grammatically, and contextually).¹⁰² It encourages embracing unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification.

¹⁰⁰ Harris, “Book Review: Reposition Yourself,” 55.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² J. Scott Duval and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012) 48-49.

Word of Faith Theology Encourages the Embrace of Unbiblical Doctrine

The fundamental doctrines of Word of Faith (WOF) theology are summed up memorably in Hanegraaff's acronym, F-L-A-W-S (Faith-Little Gods-Atonement-Wealth-Suffering).¹⁰³ The main problem with these five points of doctrine is that they originate from something other than Scripture. It is only logical that all doctrine that claims to be biblical must begin with and understanding of how Scripture speaks to that subject.

Word of Faith theology's concept of faith is problematic for those who formed their view of faith from Scripture while practicing sound hermeneutical principles.¹⁰⁴ In WOF doctrine, faith is a "force, and words are the containers of that force."¹⁰⁵ Whatever happens in people's lives, good or bad, is a direct result of the words they speak.¹⁰⁶ Any words about failure or death lead to failure and death, and any words of life and victory lead to life and victory.¹⁰⁷ This concept of faith and using words to speak prosperity into reality is not found in Scripture.¹⁰⁸ Biblical faith, alternatively, is a living channel of trust in God himself and his promises recorded in his word (Heb. 11:6).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 52.

¹⁰⁴ Practicing sound hermeneutical principles involves reading the Bible literally, historically, grammatically, and contextually (Duval and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 48-49).

¹⁰⁵ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 52.

¹⁰⁶ WOF's concept of the power of words may actually create the superstition that "if I talk about suffering, then I am going to bring suffering upon myself." The same doctrines that WOF says dispel fear actually promote it.

¹⁰⁷ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 52.

¹⁰⁸ Hank Hanegraaff, "FLAWS of the Health and Wealth Gospel: F is for Faith Force," November 6, 2019, YouTube video, 0:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiewnjJfFaQ&t=48s>.

¹⁰⁹ Hanegraaff, "F is for Faith Force," 0:50.

WOF theology's concept of man is problematic for those who have formed their view from Scripture while practicing sound hermeneutical principles. WOF presents man as a little god.¹¹⁰ Man can dictate what God does and speak spiritual words into physical reality as he does. God is not presented as sovereign or acting according to his providence, as Scripture affirms (Eph. 1:11). The prosperity preacher often recasts God in his image, ascribing human characteristics.¹¹¹ Kenneth Copeland described God as a "being that is 6'2"—6'3", weighs a couple of hundred pounds, and has a hand span of nine inches across."¹¹² This view of God is quite different from Jesus' claim that God does not have a body but is spirit (John 4:24).

WOF theology's concept of the atonement is problematic for those who have formed their view from Scripture while practicing sound hermeneutical principles. It has Jesus finishing the atonement in hell instead of on earth, as Scripture teaches (John 19:28-30).¹¹³ In WOF's view, Christ's atonement was dualistic (requiring physical and spiritual death). They believe he died on earth physically and spiritually in hell.¹¹⁴ Word of Faith doctrine also extends Christ's atonement unbiblically to the "sin" of material poverty.¹¹⁵ Copeland says that knowing that "God put our

¹¹⁰ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 54.

¹¹¹ Hank Hanegraaff, "FLAWS of the Health and Wealth Gospel: L is for Little gods," November 6, 2019, YouTube video, 0:36. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rw6HXXH_yJTE.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 54.

¹¹⁴ William P. Atkinson, "A Theological Appraisal of the Doctrine that Jesus Died Spiritually, as Taught by Kenyon, Hagin and Copeland," Ph.D. diss., (University of Edinburgh, 2007), 170, <https://era.ed.ac.uk/bitstream/handle/1842/2231/Atkinson%20WP%20thesis%202007.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y>.

¹¹⁵ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 216.

sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary” is the “basic principle of the Christian life.”¹¹⁶

WOF theology’s concept of wealth is problematic for those who have formed their view from Scripture while practicing sound hermeneutical principles. Hanegraaff calls wealth the “watchword of prosperity.”¹¹⁷ Avanzini claimed Jesus was wealthy, lived in a big house, and “wore designer clothes” and Paul also was rich.¹¹⁸ These claims of wealth are contradictions of Jesus' own words that he had “no place to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20) and Paul’s words that he was “poor, yet making many rich” (2 Cor. 6:10). In contrast to WOF theology, Scripture presents the poor as examples and chosen members of God's kingdom. James tells the scattered churches that God has “chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom” (James 2:5).

WOF theology's concept of suffering is also problematic for those who have formed their view from Scripture (while practicing sound hermeneutical principles) because it teaches that God never wishes for anyone to suffer.¹¹⁹ Symptoms are merely illusions of the devil designed to trick God’s children away from their Father’s guarantee of health and healing.¹²⁰ If a person has enough faith, he can avoid sickness altogether.¹²¹ This view of suffering is inconsistent with the many biblical examples of saints who suffered. Biblical sufferers, like Jeremiah, were people of

¹¹⁶ Kenneth Copeland, *The Troublemaker* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1996), 6, https://christiandiet.com.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Troublemaker-Kenneth-Copeland-Christiandiet.com_.ng_.pdf.

¹¹⁷ Hank Hanegraaff, “FLAWS of the Health and Wealth Gospel: W is for Wealth and Want,” November 6, 2019, YouTube video, 0:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ge5UqFctdg8>.

¹¹⁸ John Avanzini, "Believer's Voice of Victory," program on TBN (January 20, 1991), in *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 381.

¹¹⁹ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 262.

¹²⁰ Kenyon, *Jesus the Healer* 26.

¹²¹ Hank Hanegraaff, “FLAWS of the Health and Wealth Gospel: S is for Sickness and Suffering,” November 6, 2019, YouTube video, 0:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df1NCDr072U>.

faith. The writer of Hebrews says of such faith-filled sufferers that they were those “of whom the world was not worthy (Heb. 11:38).” Temporary suffering is expected. "Through many tribulations," Paul instructs the saints, “we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Word of Faith Theology Encourages Senseless and Harmful Desires

WOF theology encourages senseless and harmful desires that destroy the gain of contentment and plunge its followers into ruin and destruction. Paul explains to Timothy that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Contentment along with godliness is great gain because setting hopes on material things that must be left behind brings frustration (6:7). It is great gain because simple things, such as food and clothing, are enough to satisfy (6:8). Contentment with basic necessities is also great gain because it protects from the spiritual danger of the love of money (the root of all kinds of evil) which causes many to "wander away from the faith and pierce themselves through with many pains” (6:10). With no regard for the "gain" of contentment “those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (6:9).

WOF theology encourages senseless and harmful desires for wealth that rob God of the glory of providing basic necessities for his children. Contentment demonstrates trust in God that glorifies him. The writer of Hebrews concludes, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me” (Heb. 13:5-6)? Teaching people to pursue wealth works against their life's purpose, to glorify God (Is. 43:7). The love of money robs God of his glory by keeping his people from being content with the necessities he provides and honoring his promise never to leave or forsake them.¹²²

¹²² Piper, “Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly,” 44.

Word of Faith Theology Encourages Seeking What God Does Not Promise

Word of Faith theology claims that God wants his children to have health, wealth, and prosperity.¹²³ To acquire prosperity, all that is needed is to agree with God and speak these blessings into existence by faith.¹²⁴ The weight of biblical evidence is against this. Many examples of godly sufferers exist. God does not desire nor promise health, wealth, and prosperity for his children in this present, evil age. He promises difficulty and trouble (John 16:33). This life is (for now) lived in enemy territory (1 John 5:19), on a sin-cursed earth (Rom. 8:22), while waging a civil war with the flesh (Rom. 7:18). Since man's fall, this present life has become a race (Heb. 12:1), a series of tests (1 Peter 1:7), and a time in which saints will have tribulation (John 16:33). God does, however, promise something much better than temporal prosperity. He promises eternity with him in a new heaven and earth (Is. 65:17, Rev. 21). He assures his children of actual joy and peace (Is. 26:3) that money and health cannot secure (Psalm 4:7). He promises the more desirable blessing of his abiding presence (Heb. 13:5).

These biblical promises explain why the underlying principle of WOF theology (agreeing with God for prosperity and health) is not born out in biblical history. If WOF theology is correct, God's material blessings should have been on full display in the lives of the faithful saints of Scripture. Those with faith should have possessed health, wealth, and prosperity. Most, like the majority of the heroes of Hebrews 11, did not. They suffered physically, looking forward to true prosperity in the life to come. Hardship and hope that caused groaning were normative for the faithful. Instead of prosperity, the heroes of the faith groaned in hope for the resurrection and

¹²³ Fee, *The Disease of the Health & Wealth Gospels*, 10.

¹²⁴ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 216.

a better country (Heb. 11:16). They groaned in longing because they experienced the effects of sin and death in a fallen world and because of the persecution of evil men. They groaned in hope as they drew near to God, believing that he rewards those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6) with the pleasure of drawing near to him (11:6a) and the pleasure of spending eternity with him in the new Jerusalem (11:10).

Word of Faith Theology Contributes to Complacency in Evangelism and Sanctification

Evangelism and Sanctification bring the hatred of the world (1 Peter 4:12) and require rigorous discipline (2 Cor. 3:18, Heb. 12:1-2). People seeking comfort, prosperity, and ease will not be eager to deny themselves, take up their cross, suffer, and be persecuted.¹²⁵ They will not be conditioned for the struggles of the hard-to-reach and dangerous places where they must share the gospel. They will be less likely to pursue Christ in spiritual disciplines of rigorous Bible study, Scripture memorization, fasting, and brokenness over sin. In their over-desire for ease and comfort in this life, they will miss the disciplined, chosen suffering that conforms believers to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

This chapter has examined the literature affirming WOF literature from those who teach WOF theology and found it questionable. It has looked at literature criticizing it and affirmed it. It has examined the problems the theology presents to those who practice sound biblical interpretation and confirmed that it is indeed not a biblical theology. Yet despite all the exposed flaws, an important critique of WOF theology is missing.

¹²⁵ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," 42.

The Research Gap: The Lack of Critique of Word of Faith Theology Based on Paul's Theology of Groaning for the Resurrection

This chapter has demonstrated many helpful critiques of WOF theology, but there are few critiques of the movement's need for more emphasis on groaning for the resurrection.¹²⁶ Paul paints a picture of the Christian life as a race to be run for the prize of the next life (1 Cor. 9:24). He presents it as a series of challenging tests that display God's glory and the ultimate reward of the resurrection (1 Thess. 5:8-9). The life of the faithful is not meant to be easy or exceedingly prosperous in this present age of sin and death (1 Thess. 3:3).¹²⁷ Paul's theology of groaning for the resurrection highlights the importance of suffering, utter discontentment with this life, and longing for heaven. This theology of present-discontentment in view of the glories of heaven runs the length of Scripture but is most clearly explained in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10.

Perhaps the most significant critique of the Word of Faith movement is the lack of "heavenly-mindedness." Paul displays and prescribes groaning for a new body, heaven, and home.¹²⁸ If they would follow their Savior's example, Christians must move forward in hope "for the joy" set before them (Heb. 12:2) as he did. Sadly, Word of Faith theology ignores the essential role that groaning for the resurrection plays in spiritual development. Health, wealth,

¹²⁶ This dissertation will consistently use the term "the resurrection" to refer to a physical resurrection of the dead to a new body (like Christ's resurrected body) made for a physical existence on the new earth (2 Cor. 5:1-8). It does not simply mean life in heaven, although all who die in Christ (like the thief) go directly into the presence of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). They await the resurrection of their bodies at the coming of the return of Christ (Phil. 3:20-21). Chapter five will explore this concept of the resurrected body in greater detail.

¹²⁷ Paul encourages the saints in Thessalonica not to be moved by their afflictions. "For you yourselves know that we are destined for this (1 Thess. 3:3)."

¹²⁸ Groaning for heaven, the new heaven and earth, and the coming "kingdom of heaven" are all part of groaning in the hope of the resurrection. Paul displays how the resurrection of the body is the initial first step to any glorious physical inheritance: "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Cor. 15:50).

and prosperity in this life make for churches filled with dissatisfied idolaters. Groaning in persecution, suffering, and delightful anticipation of the life to come make for churches filled with mature, confident, and joyful saints. These saints move through this life, gaining rewards they can keep. This groaning for the resurrection is the underexplored answer to the flaws of WOF theology.

Proposed Solution: A Historical-Grammatical Examination of Groaning for the Resurrection in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

The necessity of groaning and discontentment with this life in the hope of the resurrection, as described in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, is an undeveloped and perhaps the most decisive critique of Word of Faith theology. Groaning in resurrection hope corrects WOF's theological problems. The healthy discontentment with this life commended in these two passages encourages embracing biblical doctrine, sensible and helpful desires, seeking what God promises, and evangelism and sanctification.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages the Embrace of Biblical Doctrine

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages embracing a biblical definition of faith anchored in the hope of the resurrection. The writer of Hebrews famously defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), and then proceeds to list heroes of faith that are “looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). This expectant hope in the coming city is entirely different from the self-directed metaphysical view of faith found in WOF theology.¹²⁹ True faith in the

¹²⁹ Simpson, “The Significance of Andrew Perriman’s Faith, Health and Prosperity in the Word of Faith Debate,” 86.

resurrection allows followers of Christ to persevere like the heroes of Hebrews 11 persevered. It is the antidote for the human-centered focus on health, wealth, and prosperity in this life of the WOF movement.

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages a biblical doctrine of man. As he looks and groans for heaven, man is reminded of his mortality and sin. He throws away any ideas of being a little god and wastes no time attempting to speak physical changes from spiritual words of his authority.¹³⁰ Instead he prays, asking God to bring the changes he needs. The longing for the redemption of the body brings singular focus, not on self, but on the one true God who will make all things new.

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages the embrace of the biblical doctrine of the atonement. Eager longing for the resurrection encourages the view affirmed by the plain, classical reading of Scripture that Christ atoned for the sins of all who placed their faith in him (Heb. 9:12-14). It causes a rejection of the WOF view that Christ's atonement extended to the "sin" of disease and material poverty.¹³¹ Disease, misery, and poverty are normative for the faithful and work out for the ultimate good of those who love God (Rom. 8:28). Their presence is the reason for groaning. A groaning for the world where tears, poverty, and pain will be no more (Rev. 21:4) corrects errant WOF doctrine of the atonement.

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages a biblical doctrine of wealth. Wealth can be gained but never kept. God causes "all grace to abound" so that his children might have all material blessings they need, not to keep, but in order to "abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). The groaning for the treasure that can be kept in heaven keeps Christians from clinging to

¹³⁰ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 55.

¹³¹ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 29.

what they cannot on earth. The fixation on the heavenly city reminds Christians that the wealth accumulated here is not worth comparing to it (Rom. 8:18). They long for the "better and more lasting possession" to come (Heb. 10:34). Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is excellent prevention for WOF's man-centered focus on wealth.

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages embracing a biblical doctrine of suffering. WOF theology teaches that God never desires Christians to suffer.¹³² Suffering is never pleasant, but like discipline, it yields "the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are being trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). It is good and profitable for conforming saints into the image of Christ and weaning them from dependence on the world. Groaning in the hope of the resurrection helps believers put their suffering into perspective as the positive character-building test it is. A renewed focus on the hope of heaven can help make it clear that the next life is supposed to be the one without suffering. Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is the antidote for the WOF movement's central focus of avoiding suffering here and now.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages Sensible and Helpful Desires

Unlike WOF theology, which encourages a senseless and harmful craving for money that plunges its followers into ruin and destruction (1 Tim. 6:9), groaning in the hope of the resurrection encourages sensible and helpful desires. Groaning with discontentment in this present body on this earth encourages a contentment that, along with godliness, is "great gain" (6:6). Those who see the age to come as the priority will not fret about a lack of prosperity now.

Groaning with resurrection hope encourages the sensible and helpful desire to glorify God by setting all hope on him (1 Tim. 6:17). Rather than foolishly setting their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, Paul instructs Timothy to "charge the rich in this present age to set their

¹³² Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 14.

hopes on God” (6:16). The hope in God that comes from the longing for heaven helps believers reject placing their hope in their wealth. Hope in God is the antidote to WOF theology's destructive encouragement towards the over-desire for money.

Groaning with discontentment in this present body, on this earth encourages the helpful and sensible desire to be rich in treasure that can be kept. Paul commands Timothy to charge the rich to be rich, not in material goods, but in good works, generosity, and treasures in heaven (1 Tim. 6:18-19). This fixation on the treasure of heaven keeps believers from WOF theology's destructive encouragement towards the over-desire for riches they cannot keep.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages Seeking What God Promises

Groaning in discontentment with this life and the hope of the one to come encourages believers to focus on what God actually promises in Scripture. Contrary to WOF theology, God does not promise his children health, wealth, and prosperity in this life.¹³³ His children are promised quite the opposite in this world: tribulation (John 16:33) and persecution if they live a godly life (2 Tim. 3:12).

Thankfully, God promises a greater reward than unsatisfying temporal prosperity. He promises life and life more abundant (John 10:10). God promises eternal life with him in a new heaven and earth (Is. 65:17). God promises abundant life here and now that transcends his children's external circumstances. This abundant life looks like peace (Is. 26:3) for those whose minds "are stayed" on him. It looks like more joy than what the "grain and new wine" of prosperity can bring (Psalm 4:7). It looks like the constant and enduring friendship and love from

¹³³ Hagee, *The Seven Secrets*, 232.

the most praise-worthy being (Heb. 13:5). The blessings of eternal life and life more abundant make health, wealth and prosperity look like disposable, fast-food prizes.

The discontentment in this life encourages Christians to seek more of the promised blessings of eternal life. The more they set their minds on heaven (Col. 3:2), the more they long for Jesus (Col. 3:4). The greater their anticipation, the greater their delight when they finally see Jesus' face. The more they set their hopes on eternal life, the more likely they will share the gospel with those who do not know it. The more they set their hopes on the resurrection, the more likely they are to live a holy life now in eager expectation of it (1 John 3:3).

The discontentment in this life encourages Christians to seek more of the promised blessings of abundant life. The more of his presence they sense, the more they will want to experience. The more joy, peace, and confidence they receive from the Holy Spirit, the more they will want to experience. Those hungry for the abundant life will not be satisfied with the "trinkets" of prosperity but will do the hard work of practicing spiritual disciplines in order to walk in (Gal. 5:16) and be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

Groaning in discontentment with this life and hope in the next helps believers to seek the better gifts God does promise rather than the lesser gifts of health, wealth, and prosperity he does not. Life and life more abundant are promised and most desirable. Seeking life glorifies God above all and demonstrates pure, unselfish love for him. The saints' appetites for these better, attainable, promised gifts remain healthy when they do not fill their bellies with the husks of empty WOF promises.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages Evangelism and Sanctification

Groaning with discontentment in this present body on this present earth encourages evangelism and sanctification in a way that WOF theology cannot. WOF theology encourages its

followers to seek a life of ease and comfort.¹³⁴ The pursuit of ease and comfort is impossible for those who intend to obey the Lord's command to share the gospel (Mark 16:15) or become increasingly like Jesus (Rom. 8:29). Evangelism will bring persecution (1 Peter 4:12).

Sanctification requires pain, poverty, patience, and periods of humbling. Alternatively, holy discontentment with this life gives the toughness it requires to do the demanding tasks the Lord commands while simultaneously giving the joy and hope needed to press on to complete those tasks (Phil. 3:14). Groaning in resurrection hope propels believers to be proactive in sharing their faith. The longing for home brings a longing to take as many friends and neighbors with them to the heavenly city as possible. The groaning for heaven also encourages them to progress in their sanctification. According to his promise, they wait "for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells," and they are "diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (2 Peter 3:13-14).

Chapter Two: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has examined the roots of WOF theology, literature affirming it, literature opposing it, the problems it presents to sound hermeneutics, and the solution to those problems. The necessity of groaning and discontentment with this life in the hope of the resurrection, as described in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, is an undeveloped and perhaps the most decisive critique of Word of Faith theology. Groaning in resurrection hope corrects WOF's theological problems. The healthy discontentment with this life commended in these two passages encourages embracing biblical doctrine, sensible and helpful desires, seeking what God

¹³⁴ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," 42.

promises, and evangelism and sanctification. It is now crucial to examine the word Paul uses for groaning in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4.

**CHAPTER THREE: WORD STUDY OF PAUL’S USE OF ΣΤΕΝΑΖΩ IN ROMANS 8:23
AND 2 CORINTHIANS 5:2, 4**

This chapter begins to answer the crucial question of what Paul meant by “groaning” in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4 with a detailed examination of the Greek word he used, “στενάζω.” This word study will demonstrate that Paul used this word to explain his discontent with the world and how much he yearned for heaven. It is crucial to explore this word because a greater understanding of the word will help readers see how resurrection hope empowered Paul’s ministry. A greater understanding of the word will also demonstrate WOF’s error in not emphasizing it.

In contrast to WOF theology, Paul demonstrates that groanings and discontentment with this life in the hope of resurrection are reasonable, good, and necessary in the Christian experience. A lack of groaning in the hope of the resurrection is a needed critique of WOF theology. This fixation on the future helps to fix the problems the theology presents to orthodox Christianity by encouraging the embrace of biblical doctrine, sensible and helpful desires, seeking what God promises, and evangelism and sanctification.¹³⁵ This chapter will continue to critique and correct Word of Faith theology by illuminating Paul's use of the word στενάζω (groaning) in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4. It will do this by examining the word's definition, lexical range, usage, semantic range, and cognates.

¹³⁵ The problems (discussed in chapter two) are that WOF theology encourages the embrace of unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification.

Definition and Lexical Range of Στενάζω

Before proceeding to examine Paul's use of στενάζω in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4, we must define the word and consider its lexical range.

Definition of Στενάζω

Thayer defines στενάζω as “to make (intransitively, be) in straits, i.e. (by implication) to sigh, murmur, pray inaudibly: with grief, groan, grudge, sigh.”¹³⁶ Bauer describes Paul's use of στενάζω in 2 Corinthians 5:2 as “to express oneself involuntarily in the face of an undesirable circumstances.”¹³⁷ The word originated from στενός, which means narrow, strait or constricted space.¹³⁸ Στενάζω (groaning) refers to groaning resulting from pressure from what has occurred or what will occur. Pressure can produce groaning for what is pleasant or because of what is unpleasant.¹³⁹

Στενάζω is the inarticulate moaning that comes from the pressure of grief, anger, or desire. The moaning can be directed to God in prayer, at others, or merely within ourselves as a natural reaction to the pressure.¹⁴⁰ The word can be audible but usually refers to unexpressed internal feelings.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Joseph H. Thayer, et al., "Στενάζω"- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Boston, MA: Repository Press, 1896), 172, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹³⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 838.

¹³⁸ Thayer, et al., "Στενάζω"- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

¹³⁹ Muhammad W. Schmidt, *A Greek-English Reference Manual to the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament: Based on Tischendorf's Greek New Testament Text and Strong's Greek Lexicon with Some Additions and Amendments* (Hamburg: Disserta Verlag, 2018), 490, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁴⁰ Thayer, et al., "Στενάζω"- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

¹⁴¹ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 416, Logos Bible Software.

Moaning from external pressure can be in response to disturbing constraints of compassion, as in Mark 7:34; frustrations of dealing with difficult people, as in Hebrews 13:17 and James 5:9; or dissatisfaction with living in the present world, as in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4.¹⁴² This last type of dissatisfied groaning is the subject of this dissertation.

Lexical Range of Στενάζω

The lexical range of στενάζω can encompass sighing, murmuring, or groaning.¹⁴³ Being constricted by circumstances often leads to sighing, murmuring in anger, or groaning in dreaded or delightful anticipation.

The Usage of Στενάζω

Examining the use of στενάζω outside and within the New Testament helps gain a clearer understanding of Paul's use of the word in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4. Understanding how he used the word to groan in hope helps demonstrate the importance of groaning in discontented resurrection hope in this life instead of pursuing prosperity as WOF does.

The Usage of Στενάζω in Greek Literature and the Septuagint

Greek literature outside the New Testament uses στενάζω to demonstrate sighing, murmuring, or groaning.¹⁴⁴ Examples can be found in the works of such as Demosthenes, Philo and Aeschylus.

¹⁴² Frederick W. Danker and Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 328. ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁴³ Schmidt, *A Greek-English Reference Manual to the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, 490.

¹⁴⁴ Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, eds. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder, (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2015), 1957.

Demosthenes used the word to describe his father's loud groanings if his father were to learn that he was charged unfairly.¹⁴⁵ He uses it again to describe the groaning and lamentation of the “great men who laid down their lives for glory and for liberty” if they could see as it is now.¹⁴⁶

Philo uses στενάζω repeatedly to speak of groaning in “intense and excessive sorrow.”¹⁴⁷ He categorized groaning into good and bad. Good groaning came with repentance over “the illness of folly and senselessness and unrighteousness.”¹⁴⁸ Bad groaning came from an unmet “desire for wrongdoing.”¹⁴⁹ He made intensity the distinction between grieving and groaning (good or bad). He acknowledged that “we often grieve without groaning; but when we groan over them, we let our sorrows bring on us a very storm of trouble and distress.”¹⁵⁰

In the play *Persians*, Aeschylus has Xerxes using the word, saying “Strike, strike, and *groan* for my sake.”¹⁵¹ Xerxes following lines parallel the first, reinforcing Aeschylus' meaning, “cry aloud” and “lift up your voice in lamentation.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ Demosthenes, *Against Aphobus 1, Demosthenis Orationes*. ed. S. H. Butcher and W. Rennie. Oxonii, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1939), 27.69. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Dem.%2027.69&lang=original>

¹⁴⁶ Demosthenes, *Against Atrocities, Demosthenis Orationes*. ed. S. H. Butcher and W. Rennie. Oxonii, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1939), 23.210. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Dem.+23+210&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0074>

¹⁴⁷ Philo. *On the Creation. Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*, Trans. Francis Colson & G. Whitaker, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 445. ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Aeschylus. *Persians*, trans. Herbert Weir Smyth, (Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. 1926), 1046-1050. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0012%3Acard%3D1046>

¹⁵² Ibid.

Στενάζω is used thirty times in the Septuagint as a verb meaning to groan, sigh often, or sigh deeply.¹⁵³ The Septuagint (LXX) uses στενάζω for the Hebrew verb, הָנָה, meaning to “sigh or groan,” five times (Is. 24:7; Lam 1:8, 21; Ez. 21:6, 7).¹⁵⁴ It uses στενάζω for שָׁמַם, to “be or make uninhabited or deserted; tremble, cause to tremble,” three times (Job 18:20; Ez. 26:16; 28:19).¹⁵⁵ Στενάζω is used in the Septuagint for בָּלַג, to “cause to flash; become cheerful, brighten up,” once in Job 9:27. It is used in Job 24:12 for שָׁוַע, to “call for help.”¹⁵⁶ The word is translated for עָגַם, to “be sad,” in Job 30:25. Job wept over those in trouble. The LXX uses the word again for זָעַק, to “cry, call for help; summon, raise a battle cry,” in Job 31:38; for אָנָה, to “lament,” in Isaiah 19:8; and for אָבַל, to “mourn, cause to mourn in Isaiah 19:8.¹⁵⁷ Στενάζω is used in the Septuagint for אָנָה to mean “sighing, groaning” in Isaiah 21:2 and in Isaiah 30:15 (Brenton Septuagint Translation: BST) for נִחָה, to mean “mourning and repentance.”¹⁵⁸ The Lord promises that they will be saved when they return and “rest.” Στενάζω occurs again in Isaiah 46:8 (BST) for אָשַׁשׁ to “groan in repentance.”¹⁵⁹ The word is used for הִמָּה, to “make a noise; be tumultuous, turbulent; roar, moan” in Isaiah 59:10.¹⁶⁰ It is used to “groan” for סָפַק, in Jeremiah 31:19 (BST). The word is used to “groan” in Ezekiel 26:15 for אָנָה. The Lord warns that the coastlands will

¹⁵³ Lexham Press, *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Logos Bible Software.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

shake, and the wounded will groan at the coming slaughter. Finally, στενάζω is used for the Hebrew verb נָנַח, “lament” in Nahum 3:7 (BST).¹⁶¹ Στενάζω means to groan, most often in mourning over sin in the LXX. Unlike WOF theology emphasis on happiness, the faithful are continually groaning over their sin. They are the ones who mourn over their sin hungering and thirsting for righteousness (Matt. 5:4-6).

The Usage of Στενάζω in the New Testament

Στενάζω occurs six times in the New Testament.¹⁶² The ESV translates στενάζω from the Morphological Greek New Testament (MGNT) as “groan,” three times, as to “sigh,” once, as “groaning,” once, and as “to grumble,” once.¹⁶³

Mark 7:34

Στενάζω is used once as ἐστέναξεν, an Aorist Active Indicative verb in the third-person singular.¹⁶⁴ Mark records that Jesus looked “up to heaven, he (sighed) and said to him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened’” (Mark 7:34).

Commentators differ in their rationales for Jesus' sighing.¹⁶⁵ Some like Nast see it as symbolism or a magical healing technique.¹⁶⁶ Some like Gould, see compassion as Jesus'

¹⁶¹ Lexam Press, *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint*.

¹⁶² James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1990), 1076.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Thayer, et al., "ἐστέναξεν," *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 100.

¹⁶⁵ Robert H. Stein, *Mark: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 360, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁶⁶ William Nast, *A Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical: Embodying for Popular Use and Edification*, (Cincinnati, OH: Poe & Hitchcock, 1864), 705. ProQuest Ebrary.

motivation for the sighing.¹⁶⁷ Others, like Stein see it as part of the Lord's intense prayer.¹⁶⁸ The third option seems to be the most reasonable since Jesus prayed like this as he sought God's power to heal. His sighing was combined with his looking up into heaven. His compassion for the deaf man was probably the "compression or straits" that influenced his prayerful groaning. Jesus sighs, likely out of the intensity of his compassion as he prays.

Romans 8:23, 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4

Στενάζω is used three times as στενάζομεν as a Present Active Indicative 1st Person Plural verb.¹⁶⁹ It is a groaning from the constraining straits of discontentment. Specifically, in these three verses, Paul describes the groaning that is the normal state of a saint who is not yet home with Christ.¹⁷⁰ Since this sense of groaning (in anticipation of the resurrection) is the subject of this dissertation, chapter five will examine these verses more thoroughly.

Hebrews 13:17

The writer of Hebrews exhorts his hearers, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with (groaning), for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb. 13:17).

¹⁶⁷ Ezra Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: T & T Clark, 1996), 138-139, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁶⁸ Stein, *Mark: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 360.

¹⁶⁹ Thayer, et al., "στενάζομεν," *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

¹⁷⁰ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 682, ProQuest Ebrary.

This is the only time this usage of στενάζω occurs in the NT. Στενάζοντες is a present active participle and a nominative, plural, masculine verb.¹⁷¹

Στενάζοντες is being used to show groaning from anger, sadness, and resentment at members of the flock who do not submit to spiritual authority. The narrow pressure of disobedience has led to unexpressed resentment in church leadership. All will suffer as a result. Elders can keep watch over the flock out of fear and frustration rather than love.¹⁷² A groaning, begrudging watchfulness only temporarily yields positive results. Long-term, the people do not benefit.

James 5:9

Στενάζω is used once as στενάζετε, a verb that is present active imperative and in the second person plural.¹⁷³ James charges the scattered churches, “Do not (grumble) against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door” (James 5:9). Here, the word is used to display the silent grumbling borne out of narrow constraints of frustration with people.¹⁷⁴ They grumbled instead of settling their disagreements in love, subordinating their wills, or practicing humility. This low-level, passive-aggressive behavior is poison for the church and brings disunity and judgment. Grumblers should expect judgment at any moment. "The Judge is standing at the door."

¹⁷¹ Thayer, et al., "στενάζοντες," *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

¹⁷² James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924), 240, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁷³ Thayer, et al., "στενάζετε," *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

¹⁷⁴ Frederick W. Danker and Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 328. ProQuest Ebrary.

Στενάζω Expanded

It is helpful to expand the search beyond στενάζω to related words in its semantic field and cognates. This investigation should yield the fullest understanding of how Paul used the word in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4. Understanding Paul's use of groaning in the hope of the resurrection will help to explain why its absence in WOF theology is a significant flaw.

Related Words in the Semantic Field of Στενάζω as used in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4

Εμβριμάομαι “Deeply Moved” (John 11:33,38)

A word in the semantic field of στενάζω, as it is used in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4, is ἐμβριμάομαι, which means to be "deeply moved" in John 11:33, 38.¹⁷⁵ This word can mean to snort with anger, admonish sternly, or to speak or act with deep feeling.¹⁷⁶ This second definition is the one the ESV and most English translations chose.

John records, at the tomb of Lazarus, that "when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was *deeply moved* in his spirit and greatly troubled" (John 11:33). Later, he records again that "Jesus, (deeply moved) again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it" (John 11:38).

Εμβριμάομαι is somewhat like στενάζω because both words describe deep internal emotion. Deep anguish and anger caused Jesus to be deeply moved in himself (his internal state).¹⁷⁷ This emotion led him to weep (11:35) and command that the stone be taken away (11:39). In the same way, the deep anguish brought on by the straits of discontentment and

¹⁷⁵ J. P. Louw, and Eugene Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, Second edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 385.

¹⁷⁶ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 147.

¹⁷⁷ Edward W. Klink, *John: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2016), 509, ProQuest Ebrary.

suffering in this world caused Paul’s groaning in hope of the resurrection (Rom. 8:23 and 2 Cor. 5:2, 4).

Ἀπεκδέχομαι “Waiting Eagerly” (Romans 8:23)

Another word that means something similar to στενάζω is ἀπεκδέχομαι, which means “waiting eagerly” in Rom. 8:23.¹⁷⁸ This word means to expect at any moment with eager anticipation.¹⁷⁹ It is a word meant to convey the hopeful expectation of the New Testament. Of the eight times the word is used in the NT, seven relate to eagerly awaiting Christ's coming or the resurrection.¹⁸⁰

Paul says, “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we *wait eagerly* for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23).

Ἀπεκδέχομαι must mean something similar to Paul’s use of στενάζω, “groan inwardly,” because he uses it as the following phrase in the same verse. He is using it to give more information about why he and other saints are groaning. Groaning is not merely out of misery at the curse; the saints also know something that inanimate creation cannot.¹⁸¹ They know that the time is short. They groan, eagerly awaiting the redemption of their bodies.

¹⁷⁸ Louw, and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 385.

¹⁷⁹ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 46.

¹⁸⁰ 1 Peter 3:20 is the only verse that does not address waiting for Christ or the resurrection. It talks of God's wrath waiting in the days of Noah. However, even this is in the context of Christ's coming and judgment. This word demonstrates that NT expectation is not on this life, as WOF theology emphasizes, but on the next.

¹⁸¹ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 682.

Συνωδίνω “Suffers the Pain of Childbirth” (Romans 8:22)

Another word in the semantic field of στενάζω, as it is used in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4, is συνωδίνω, which is a compound word that means “suffers the pain of childbirth” in Romans 8:22.¹⁸² Longenecker points out that Paul used this word “figuratively (Gal. 4:19) and then literally (Gal. 4:27) with respect to a woman's labor pains at childbirth.”¹⁸³

Paul tells the church, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the (pains of childbirth) until now” (Rom. 8:22).

Συνωδίνω helps to understand Paul’s use of στενάζω “groaning.” Childbirth is the reason for the συστενάζω “groaning together.” Συστενάζω is a variation or cognate of στενάζω, with only the additional σύν “together” added to it (8:22).¹⁸⁴ Creation does not merely experience the narrowing constraints of the contractions of pain that will produce groaning (in the next verse, 8:23); it συν-ωδίνω; together-travails.¹⁸⁵ Its subjection to sin and death since Genesis 3 causes the entire creation to groan in hope. Creation anticipates the revelation of the children of God because it knows its renovation is bound to theirs.¹⁸⁶ Συνωδίνω is very similar to στενάζω because it uses a metaphor to illustrate groaning from being in straits. The verbal illustration of the word for groaning will follow in the next verse.

¹⁸² Louw, and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 385.

¹⁸³ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 682.

¹⁸⁴ Thayer, et al., “Συστενάζω”- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 183.

¹⁸⁵ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 434.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 426, ProQuest Ebrary.

Ἐπιποθέω “Longing” (2 Corinthians 5:2)

Another word that means something similar to στενάζω “groaning” is ἐπιποθέω, which means “longing” in 2 Corinthians 5:2.¹⁸⁷ The context of this word surrounded by hope in the resurrection lends itself to this interpretation. In most of the nine times the word is used in the NT, it describes the writer's longing to see his audience.¹⁸⁸ Here, it describes a longing for a new eternal body like Christ's. Paul says, “For in this tent we groan, (longing) to put on our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2).

In the same way that “wait eagerly for ... the redemption of our bodies” explained groaning in Romans 8:23, “longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” defines the groaning of this verse. The groaning here again is a groaning of hope. It is not merely one of discontentment because of suffering; it is one of discontentment due to hope for the resurrection.

Βαρέω “Being Burdened” (2 Corinthians 5:4)

Another word that means something similar to στενάζω “groaning” is βαρέω, which means “Being Burdened” in 2 Corinthians 5:4.¹⁸⁹ Paul says, “For while we are still in this tent, we groan, (being burdened)—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:4).

Βαρέω helps describe στενάζω both in its definition and its description. “Being burdened” has a similar meaning to “groan” in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4. Βαρέω is a weight that weighs down as the feelings that cause στενάζω do.¹⁹⁰ Here, the word also provides

¹⁸⁷ Louw, and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 385.

¹⁸⁸ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

¹⁸⁹ Louw, and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 385.

¹⁹⁰ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 75.

context that gives meaning to Paul's use of groaning. βαρέω describes στενάζω. The groaning is not in anger. It is not in compassion. It is again in eager expectation for the resurrection.¹⁹¹ The groaning occurs because the saints are "being burdened" that they "would be further clothed" with their new immortal bodies. They are burdened that their mortal bodies "may be swallowed up by life." This longing for the new bodies they will possess is the cause of their expectant groaning.¹⁹²

Cognates of Στενάζω

It is also helps shed light on στενάζω by exploring the cognates of the word. Their similar meanings complement and explain Paul's use of the word. These parts of the word and slight changes to στενάζω are στενός "narrow" (Matt. 7:13, Luke 13:24), στεναγμός "groaning" (Acts 7:34, Rom. 8:26), and συστενάζω "groaning together" (Rom. 8:22).¹⁹³

Στενός "Narrow" (Matthew 7:13-14, Luke 13:24)

Στενός means narrow in dimension or in sense.¹⁹⁴ Jesus tells his disciples to "enter by the *narrow* gate. For the gate is wide, and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is *narrow* and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt. 7:13-14). Similarly, the Savior uses the same word to answer the question "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" in Luke 13:23. Jesus answers "Strive to enter through the *narrow* door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24).

¹⁹¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *2 Corinthians: A Short Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2020), 65, ProQuest Ebrary.

¹⁹² Ibid., 64-65.

¹⁹³ Thayer, et al., "Στενάζω"- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

¹⁹⁴ Danker and Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 328.

The two gates and doors mentioned in Matthew and Luke are two choices or decisions that Jesus applies to his listeners from his sermon. Everyone must make a choice: one leads to life and the other leads to death. The narrow gate and door are illustrations of the narrow, constraining truth about who Jesus is. He is the only source of salvation.¹⁹⁵

Στενός (narrow) is the root from which στενάζω (groaning) is derived.¹⁹⁶ Being in narrow straits leads to sighing and groaning.¹⁹⁷ Examining στενός helps to shed light on the way Paul would have understood his groaning. It illuminates the apostle's use of στενάζω in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4 because the groaning he speaks of there also comes from a narrowing crushing pressure.¹⁹⁸ Just as Jesus was the narrow gate and door (that those who put their faith in enter through constricting truth about who he is) believers enter into groaning as Paul did (Rom. 8:23a, 2 Cor. 5:2a) through the constricting, narrow pressure of waiting “eagerly for adoption as sons” (Rom. 8:23b) and “longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2b).

¹⁹⁵ The context of Matthew 7 and Luke 13 determine that Jesus is depicting himself as the only narrow way to salvation from the wrath of God. The narrow gate is the one way to salvation that Jesus is. The gate in the context of the Sermon on the Mount is the constraining demands of poverty of spirit and mourning over sin (Matt. 5:3-4), and laying down any thoughts of works to achieve salvation and coming to Jesus alone. The narrow door of Luke 13:24 illustrates the same truth about Jesus. He calls himself the narrow door in response to the question, “Lord will those who are saved be few?” It is also important to interpret these verses from the whole of Scripture. Jesus calls himself the door (John 10:9) and the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He calls himself the holy and true one, “who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens” (Rev. 3:7).

¹⁹⁶ Strong, “Στενάζω”- *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, 66. Strong states that “στενάζω G4728 is from στενός G4728.”

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. Strong's defines στενάζω as “to make (intransitively, be) in straits, i.e. (by implication) to sigh, murmur, pray inaudibly: —with grief, groan, grudge, sigh.”

¹⁹⁸ Thayer, et al., “Στενάζω”- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

Στεναγμός “Groaning” (Acts 7:34, Romans 8:26)

Στεναγμός, like στενάζω, is also rendered "groaning" in the ESV, but the two types of groanings have slightly different emotional causes.¹⁹⁹ Στενάζω is groaning in response to narrow straights.²⁰⁰ Στεναγμός is groaning as an intense feeling of oppression or in prayer.²⁰¹

The word is used twice in the New Testament. Stephen uses στεναγμός to quote God’s compassion and deliverance for his people. “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their (groaning), and I have come down to deliver them” (Ex. 3:7, Acts 7:34). Paul uses the word to describe the Spirit’s groaning for believers as he orders their prayers to heaven. He says, "Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with (groanings) too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26).

Στεναγμός helps to understand Paul’s use of στενάζω in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4 because both words describe groaning. Just as the children of Israel groaned in Egypt (Acts 7:34), Spirit-indwelt believers groan for a building from God (2 Cor. 5:1-2).²⁰² Just as praying correctly is a work of the Spirit (Rom. 8:26), so too are the groanings of anticipation and discontentment with the world (Rom. 8:23). Στενάζω and στεναγμός are the work of the Spirit.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 435.

²⁰⁰ Strong, "Στενάζω"- *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament*, 66.

²⁰¹ Danker and Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 327.

²⁰² Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2012), 378, ProQuest Ebrary.

²⁰³ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 687.

Συστενάζω “Groaning Together” (Romans 8:22)

Συστενάζω means to groan together.²⁰⁴ Συστενάζω is only slightly changed from στενάζω “groan,” with the addition of σύν “together” added to it.²⁰⁵ Creation travails and suffers agony together.²⁰⁶ This word is only used once in the New Testament.²⁰⁷ Paul says, “We know that the whole creation has been (groaning together) in the pains of childbirth until now” (Rom. 8:22).

Συστενάζω helps to understand Paul’s use of στενάζω in Romans 8:23. He uses it to connect creation’s groaning to the groaning believers also experience.²⁰⁸ The συστενάζω “groaning together” of creation in the pains of childbirth (Rom. 8:22) is similar to the inward στενάζω “groan” of the Spirit-indwelt saints as they eagerly await their adoption and redemption (8:23).²⁰⁹ It is a groaning of longing. “Creation waits with eager longing” (8:19), and “we wait eagerly” (8:23). It is clear that both are longings to be made new. Creation waits in 8:19-21. Those with the firstfruits of the Spirit wait in 8:23.

Paul’s motives are clear; he wants the saints to look forward to their resurrection and groan in hope. Schreiner points out that “Paul encourages believers to endure temporary sufferings by giving them a glimpse of the beauty that awaits the children of God. The redemption they await is so stupendous that it will involve the entire created order.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 435.

²⁰⁵ Thayer, et al., “Στενάζω”- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

²⁰⁶ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 682.

²⁰⁷ Thayer, et al., “Στενάζω”- *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 172.

²⁰⁸ John D Harvey, *Romans, B&H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 250, ProQuest Ebrary.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 426.

Συστενάζω also better explains Paul's use of στενάζω in 2 Corinthians 5:2,4. The creation groans to be made new. The saints groan eagerly for their resurrected bodies, "eternal in the heavens," fitted for timelessness in the new heavens and new earth.²¹¹ Creation is συστενάζω "groaning together" because it was "subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20), and "in this tent" (of the earthly, futile body) we στενάζω "groan," "longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" (2 Cor. 5:2). Creation is συστενάζω "groaning together" in the hope that it "will be set free and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). The children of God also στενάζω "groan" that they "would be further clothed so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor. 5:4).

Examining στενάζω (its definition, use inside and outside of the NT, and related words) has yielded a more complete understanding of how Paul used the word in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4. He used στενάζω to demonstrate that he and his companions groaned in eager expectation of the resurrection. With this word better understood, it is possible to see why the absence of groaning in WOF theology is a significant flaw.

Paul's Use of Στενάζω Against the Word of Faith Movement

Paul's use of στενάζω in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4 to mean groaning for the resurrection (as this chapter has demonstrated) stands in opposition to WOF's theology because it indicates that he intended for a regenerated person to be discontented and uncomfortable in this life. The apostle's life experience is full of this dissatisfaction with this present life (2 Cor. 6:10), and he extends that out to be the prescribed norm for all Christians.²¹² He makes it clear that "we"

²¹¹ George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 279. ProQuest Ebrary.

²¹² Thiselton, *2 Corinthians: A Short Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 70.

who have "the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23).²¹³ Paul stresses the necessity of groaning for all believers by his emphatic repetition of the pronoun αὐτοί (ourselves) and the expression ἐν ἑαυτοῖς (in ourselves) in 8:23.²¹⁴ These refer to the interior groaning Schreiner calls the "the lot of every believer."²¹⁵ The apostle says, "In this tent, we groan" (2 Cor. 5:2,4) to show that groaning is normal and healthy for all who hope for the resurrection. Paul affirms that discontented groaning is not only normal and healthy but also the good work of the Spirit to wean believers from the love of the world.

The apostle's concept of groaning contradicts the view of WOF theology. They believe God desires all his children to experience health, wealth, and prosperity in this life.²¹⁶ They claim that it is not normal for believers to be sick or suffering because it is always God's will to heal.²¹⁷ Paul's groaning demonstrates that God intends for perfect health to wait for the next body. In this one, it is normal to be poor, often sick, and suffering (2 Cor. 6:4-10).²¹⁸ All this everyday suffering in "the tent" of this body produces a very natural groaning for heaven. Paul promotes this groaning. WOF theology avoids it. Paul focuses on the next life that can be kept. WOF focuses on the current one that will be lost.²¹⁹ This chapter has demonstrated that Paul used

²¹³ Harvey, *Romans: B&H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, 249.

²¹⁴ Schreiner, *Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 427.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Kenneth Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith*, 54-55.

²¹⁷ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 262.

²¹⁸ Thiselton, *2 Corinthians: A Short Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 65.

²¹⁹ WOF teachers do believe in heaven but do not emphasize it because of their preoccupation with making this life heaven. Gloria Copeland says "the devil is under our authority. We can live days of heaven on earth." See Gloria Copeland, "You Can Live in Days of Heaven on Earth," July 30, 2017, 0:00-3:05. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKXh2F-I75A>).

στενάζω to express the discontented groaning that should be the regular part of a Christian's experience. The WOF theologians have no place for this discontented groaning for future glorification; its groaning is limited to what can be gained in this life.

Chapter Three: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has critiqued Word of Faith theology with an examination of Paul's use of στενάζω in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2, 4. Στενάζω means to groan (usually inaudibly) out of the constraint of circumstances, people, or future prospects. It could be sighing, murmuring, or groaning. The word's use in and outside of the New Testament was explored. Further investigation demonstrated that Paul used στενάζω (in Rom. 8:23 and 2 Cor. 5:2,4) to mean groaning with a discontented longing for the resurrection. This chapter also examined words with similar meanings within the semantic range of στενάζω and cognates related to it. This chapter concluded that Paul understood groaning in discontentment and hope of the resurrection to be a normal, reasonable, sound, and necessary part of the Christian experience. Groaning in the hope of the resurrection critiques and corrects the problems of WOF theology by encouraging the embrace of biblical doctrine, sensible and helpful desires, seeking what God promises, and evangelism and sanctification.

CHAPTER FOUR: OLD TESTAMENT THEMES THAT INFLUENCED PAUL'S CONCEPT OF GROANING IN ROMANS 8:18-25 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-5:10

Having examined the word στενάζω in chapter three, we must first reflect on Old Testament themes that influenced Paul's thinking before looking at how he speaks of the resurrection in chapter five. Paul's argument for groaning fits with the rest of Scripture, especially the Old Testament, which would have shaped his thinking as he grew up in the first-century Jewish community and studied to become a Pharisee (Acts 22:3).²²⁰ After the Damascus road, Paul was transfixed on Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18).²²¹ As he wrote Romans and 2 Corinthians, he was filled with and guided by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). What influence did the Scripture he studied before those experiences play on his concept of the resurrection?

This chapter is essential to the argument of this dissertation (that WOF theology is out of step with Paul's use of στενάζω in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10) because it will allow readers to understand Paul better. Chapter four will help to explain what he longs for in the resurrection, why he longed for it, and how he thought groaning in hope should look like right now. It will do this by explaining some common Old Testament themes that would have formulated Paul's theology of patient endurance through groaning in resurrection hope.

As an added benefit, chapter four will also work to dispel doubts of those who may conclude that the next chapter is an isolated interpretation of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians

²²⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 553.

²²¹ One of the reasons for Paul's original blindness to Jesus was that he was likely raised to think more of the "Days of the Messiah" than his person. See Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 553. What first-century Judaism wanted was more the focus than the who. The judge of the living and dead, whom every OT prophet bore witness to (Acts 10:43), was not as seriously considered as the judgment on their enemies. This overemphasis on the result, without due consideration of the means, led Israel to reject their true Messiah as he rode into Jerusalem on a colt instead of a war horse. It was necessary that the Messiah must suffer these things (Luke 24:26), but they and Paul did not see it at first.

4:7-5:10 or that Paul is an outlier and the rest of Scripture speaks to God's promise of earthly prosperity to those who practice faith.²²² As this chapter sheds light on Paul's thinking, it will argue from the OT that saints from the earliest redemptive history groaned in the hope of the resurrection.

This chapter will focus on some OT passages that shaped Paul's thinking about the resurrection. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to include every instance of these resurrection themes or every influence on Paul. This chapter also does not intend to exhaustively point to particular verses he used in Romans 8 or 2 Corinthians 4-5 from the OT (although it occasionally will). It explores three major OT themes that result from groaning in the hope of the resurrection and then looks to how Paul incorporated those themes into Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10.

In Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, Paul includes three major Old Testament themes that logically flow out of the hope of the resurrection. These three themes are longing for the resurrection, delight in God, and wise living.

Old Testament Longing for Home in the Hope of the Resurrection

In Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, Paul writes about the resurrection with a longing for home. He urges his hearers to long for a new home both in the new creation and in their newly created bodies (Rom. 8:23) and to look to their "building from God" (2 Cor. 5:1).²²³ This longing for the life to come is present in the OT he grew up hearing and missing in WOF theology.

²²² Kenyon in Jones, and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?*, 23.

²²³ Grant R. Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 210, ProQuest Ebrary.

A longing for home is not unique to Paul. It is seen in the characters and themes of the OT, especially in Genesis 1-3 and Ezekiel 37. There is restlessness and dissatisfaction with the world's broken state, which leads to a groaning for a real and lasting home where there is no more death and pain.²²⁴ This longing for home in the Father's house (John 14:2) and for his presence can only be realized in a resurrected body, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit eternal life (1 Cor. 15:50). Mortals cannot come home apart from taking on immortality (1 Cor. 15:54), a new resurrected body.

The emphasis in WOF theology on this life's pleasures suppresses the saints' appetite for their better country (Heb. 11:16).²²⁵ It turns them into frustrated children who built sandcastles before the tide. It turns them into idolaters who prefer God's gifts now to his glory to come.²²⁶ It takes them from the company of homesick saints throughout Scripture who groan with resurrection hope.

Longing for the Garden out of Resurrection Hope: Genesis 1-3

Longing for the Garden in Genesis 1-3

The first three chapters of Genesis helped inform Paul's view of the cause of groaning in the hope of the resurrection. They help explain that the world, in its current state of groaning, is not a safe place to store up wealth and prosperity. No promise of health is available to all who

²²⁴ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 588.

²²⁵ The writer of Hebrews illuminates his definition of saving and sanctifying faith through examples of people who practiced it in the Old Testament. He concludes that "all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40). What "was promised" is the resurrection of Christ from the dead and the resurrection of his saints that will follow. The saints from both covenants will be glorified and "made perfect" together when Jesus returns. Time wore down and destroyed the "tents" of their earthly bodies, but they awaited a new "building from God," their glorified body (2 Cor. 5:1). They camped in this world as "strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:14) and groaned to enter into the city God has prepared for them (11:16).

²²⁶ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 31.

speaking words of faith. The world is currently under a curse. The only hope of health, wealth, and prosperity lies in a resurrected body on a remade earth. These chapters also set the stage for the drama of redemption to take place.²²⁷ Man does not need redemption from his misery and poverty (as WOF theology asserts).²²⁸ He needs redemption from the sin that drives him from the presence of God.

Genesis 1-3 lays the foundation for the necessity of groaning through introductions. It introduces God, how he creates, and the role man plays as a king and priest in his creation. Adam and Eve are in a temple garden, later depicted in the tabernacle, with a tree of life and direct access to God.²²⁹ They enjoy perfect fellowship with him and each other because they are sinless. The couple enjoys the pristine garden without weeds or pain because creation is not groaning from the effects of sin. Things are “good” as God had made them.

In chapter three, sin enters the world and disrupts everything good. The crafty serpent slithers into the garden and deceives the couple. Their sin causes a chain reaction of horrific consequences, and their relationship with God, each other, and creation is broken.²³⁰ They are given a series of curses and ejected from the garden to keep them from eating from the Tree of Life and living forever. A cherub with a flaming sword blocks their return. Eve bears her first child, thinking she has gotten the “man from the LORD (Gen. 4:1)” only to learn she has given birth to the first murderer. They repeatedly offer sacrifices and see the blood of animals only

²²⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014) 136. ProQuest Ebook Central.

²²⁸ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 9-10.

²²⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic 2001), 85, ProQuest Ebrary.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

temporarily cover their sin. The promise of the serpent that “they would be like God, knowing good from evil” had only made it so they could see how miserable and guilty they were apart from grace.²³¹

Adam and Eve’s only hope of restoration is that God would redeem them and make them new. Thankfully, God promises that very thing (Gen. 3:15). He promises that a Savior will come through the seed of the woman who will permanently defeat Satan through suffering. The hope of restoration is present in every groan of childbirth. Sailhamer explains, “The pain of every birth is a reminder of the hope that lies in God’s promise. Birth pangs are not merely a reminder of the futility of the fall; they are a sign of an impending joy.”²³² Soon, creation and the saints’ groaning for the resurrection will give birth to the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8:23).

Adam and Eve groan, longing to return to the life they once knew. They remember what they were designed to be and what they lost, and the couple groans because of the curse. Humanity has tasted and lost true health, wealth, and prosperity. They know they will not find it again unless God restores the garden, so they groan eagerly, expecting redemption.

The longed-for resurrection is also foretold in Genesis 1-3 typology. Adam was the archetype of fallen humanity (1 Cor. 15:45-49). Every image-bearer descending from him would be an embodied soul subject to sin and death as he was.²³³ Jesus serves as an archetype of resurrected humanity. He is the last Adam who secured eternal life for all who have placed their

²³¹ John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis: The Expositors Bible Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2008), 92, ProQuest Ebrary.

²³² *Ibid.*, 110.

²³³ Mitchell L. Chase, “From Dust You Shall Arise: Resurrection Hope in the Old Testament,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 18, no. 4 (2014): 11, https://sbts-wordpress-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/equip/uploads/2015/03/Mitchell-L.-Chase_From-Dust-You-Shall-Arise.pdf.

faith in him (1 Cor. 15:22).²³⁴ Paul may also have used this typology when he spoke of the hope of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:35-49. He compares the body to a seed that must go into and come up from the ground (15:37).²³⁵

Paul was not alone in referencing Genesis 1-3 and the resurrection. Daniel uses the metaphor of waking up from the dust to refer to the resurrection of the body.²³⁶ The curse of Genesis 3:19 is reversed as the righteous “awake from the dust to everlasting life (12:2b)” and “shine like the stars (12:3).”²³⁷ The unrighteous are resurrected also. They awake from the dust “to shame and everlasting contempt (12:2c).”²³⁸ Jesus may have been alluding to the new plant life of Genesis 1-2 when he spoke of the new life that would come from him falling to the ground like a grain of wheat (John 12:24).²³⁹ The narrative of the plants springing to life on the third day of creation (in addition to being a historical event) symbolizes what would happen on Easter morning with Christ's body and to his follower's bodies when he returns.

²³⁴ Chase, “From Dust You Shall Arise: Resurrection Hope in the Old Testament,” 11.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., 24.

²³⁷ Daniel speaks of the resurrection, of the regenerate and unregenerate, with absolute clarity. He prophesies, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:2-3).

²³⁸ Those who sleep in the dust refers to those who have physically died. Death in the Old Testament was often spoken of as lying down and sleeping. Nearly every king of Judah did not just “die” but “slept with his fathers” in the family tombs. Humanity sleeps in the dust because they inherited the curse from Adam of returning to the dust. God tells him, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19).

²³⁹ Nicholas P. Lunn, “Raised on the Third Day According to the Scriptures: Resurrection Typology in the Genesis Creation Narrative,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 3 (2014): 532, ProQuest Ebrary.

Paul's Concept of Resurrection Hope Shaped by Genesis 1-3

Genesis 1-3 shaped Paul's thinking. He understood that humanity was made in God's image. As a result, they were composed of more than just a physical body. Each person has a spirit (Gen. 2:7) that is made to live forever like God (Dan. 12:2-3). Before the fall, both the body and spirit were eternal until sin entered the world, bringing death (Rom. 5:12). Paul's understanding of eternal life was shaped by his understanding of creation, the fall and the promise of the Messiah (Gen. 3:15).

Paul also understood from the Genesis account that humanity was now in trouble. The only way to eternal life spiritually and physically was by a resurrection.²⁴⁰ The garden home with God was lost because of sin. He says, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Paul understood from Genesis 1-3 that the only way to eternal life was through the second Adam, Jesus Christ (the seed of the woman). Paul says, "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22).²⁴¹

Isaiah has in view a physical resurrection of the people of God. He declares definitively that the dead "shall" live and rise (26:19a). The earth will give life to the dead, causing all those who dwell in the dust to awake and sing for joy (26:19b). Wegner points out that "The phrase 'your dead will live (26:19)' must refer to a remnant of Israel that will be resurrected to live in

²⁴⁰ Stanley E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 255.

²⁴¹ Paul argues for the necessity of the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:12-34 as the guarantee of a future human resurrection and a part of God's plan for Christ to defeat death and reign forever with resurrected saints. If there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been raised (15:13), his preaching has been in vain (14), he is misrepresenting God (15), our faith is futile (17), we are still in our sins (17), those who have died have perished (18), we should be pitied for the sacrifices we have made (19).

God's restored kingdom.²⁴² Their bodies had returned to the dust (Gen. 3:19), but the all-powerful God had formed them again from the dust.

This understanding of the need for the resurrection and the solution shaped the groaning he writes about in Romans 8 and 2 Corinthians 4-5. Creation groans because it has been subjected to futility (Rom. 8:20) and is in bondage to corruption (8:21). Genesis 1-3 shaped the way he understood his outer self (2 Cor. 4:16) and the tent that was his temporal Adamic body (2 Cor. 5:1).

Longing to Return to the Land out of Resurrection Hope: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Longing to Return to the Land in Ezekiel 37:1-14

Ezekiel's resurrection hope would also have shaped Paul's thinking. Raised in the Jewish community away from his homeland, he would have been steeped in Israel's hope of dry bones coming to life in the land.²⁴³ He would have been taught the OT and the Pharisees' hope of the resurrection of the dead (Acts 24:21) at Gamaliel's feet.

The prophet's vision of the valley of dry bones was intended to inspire the exiled house of Israel to hope not only in their soon return to the land but also in their physical resurrection from the dead. In this best-known of Ezekiel's prophecies, Yahweh uses a scene of dry bones coming to life to demonstrate that he will restore Israel in the last days to a mighty nation that lives again in their land, with his Spirit in them.²⁴⁴ How can he do all this? The answer is by raising them from the dead.

²⁴² Paul D. Wegner, *Isaiah: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 698, ProQuest Ebrary

²⁴³ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 553.

²⁴⁴ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37 a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. 1st ed.* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 747.

Ezekiel 37:1

Ezekiel records, “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones” (Ez. 37:1).

Considering the prophet's starting place before the vision causes the ancient hearer and modern reader alike to experience it dramatically. The hearer is taken from a picture of Israel flourishing like the garden of Eden (36:35) down to a valley of desolate bones, from inhabited cities to a valley of silence and death, from deliverance from uncleanness (36:29) in the wholeness and purity of Eden to the ceremonial uncleanness of bones all around him. The difference between the low place of exile and the high place of home is heightened by the language used to describe the prophet's direction to them by the hand of the Lord. In (37:1) he is "brought out," *וַיֹּצֵאֵנִי*.²⁴⁵ In (40:2), he is “brought into” *וַיְבִיאֵנִי* the land.²⁴⁶ The contrast between the valley of exile and death and the mountain in the land of life parallels the curses of covenant breaking and the blessings of covenant keeping.²⁴⁷ The language reveals utter failure and a desperate need for redemption. It will take Yahweh's intervention to bring his people back from the dead and into the land.

The starting place of this vision (the valley in exile covered in dry bones) is a fair illustration of the attitude of Ezekiel's hearers.²⁴⁸ Goldingay points out that the people had gone

²⁴⁵ F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, "H3318 - Yāšā'" - *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 126.

²⁴⁶ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, "H935 - Bô'" - *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 23.

²⁴⁷ Ian M. Duguid, *Ezekiel: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), *Ezekiel*, 426, ProQuest Ebrary.

²⁴⁸ Ralph H. Alexander, *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 259, ProQuest Ebrary.

from confidence to abject hopelessness.²⁴⁹ The mood is best captured later in the vision (37:11). Sadly, the hopelessness of the prophet's low audience had not caused them to cry out to God in repentance but only to yield to despair. The prophet's vision would help change that.

Ezekiel 37:2

Ezekiel continues, “And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry” (Ez. 37:2).

Ezekiel describes his first role in the vision as a witness to complete deadness, “led around among them.” God wants him assured of what he will see by exposure to the gruesome scene. As he is led in between, back and forth, and to step over bones, he sees that there are none alive and a vast quantity of bones. This taking part in the vision and his surprise, as his audience would be, reflects the real emotions the prophet felt at the astonishing sight and gives him relatable credibility with his audience (who themselves would have been shocked and awed by his words).²⁵⁰ When the prophet sees the bones, he observes that “they were very dry.” The bones had lain in the sunbaked valley for a long time.²⁵¹ They no longer had a shred of flesh or tissue. They were baked dry and white by the elements. Ezekiel testifies to this by observation.

Ezekiel 37:3

Ezekiel reveals God’s question, “And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know” (Ez. 37:3).

²⁴⁹ John Goldingay, *Ezekiel: Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2019), 35, ProQuest Ebrary.

²⁵⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 748.

²⁵¹ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: The New International Commentary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans, 1997), 33, ProQuest Ebrary.

God questions Ezekiel perhaps to test him, but also likely to point out the utter incongruity of what he is about to witness. He will remember the resurrection of these dry bones coming to life. It is also not an idea the prophet would have learned from his ancient Near Eastern culture. Resurrection in the surrounding cultures was limited to calling up spirits from the dead.²⁵² It was confined to a short presentation of the dead for guidance or awakening a god for a fertility cycle, but not a resurrection to life, as Ezekiel will see.²⁵³

Ezekiel is wise enough to answer, "O Lord God, you know," in response to his question. By answering in this way, he reveals that he is unsure if God would choose to make the bones come to life.²⁵⁴ It is unlikely that Ezekiel doubted God's power to raise the dead. The writer of Hebrews reveals that Abraham (a thousand years before) had expected God to raise Isaac from the dead if he had not provided a substitute (Heb. 11:9). Ezekiel would have been familiar with the miracles of resurrection from the dead done by Elijah and Elisha. The dry bones were beyond the short time that had elapsed in those cases, but it is unlikely that the prophet (who had seen so much of the power of God) would have doubted Yahweh's power. Whether God would bring the bones back to life was another matter.

Ezekiel 37:4

The prophet recalls, "Then he said to me, 'Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord'" (Ez. 37:4).

²⁵² John H. Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 722, ProQuest Ebrary.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 748.

God does not answer whether the bones can live with words. Instead, he moves to demonstrate that he can and will resurrect the bones. The bones will hear the words despite not having ears or brains because of the one commanding them to listen. Here, God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy a command to the bones to hear their maker.²⁵⁵ God commands the bones as Jesus will command the corpse of Lazarus (John 11:43) and the dead in Christ (1 Thess. 4:16) when he returns. The word of the Lord is what had the power to bring life. The creator who made the bones knows they will live and has the power to resurrect them.

Ezekiel 37:5-6

Ezekiel moves to obey the command. He speaks, "Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." (Ez. 37:5-6).

The bones are to hear the word of the Lord, who spoke life into creation and breathed the breath of life into man. They have been commanded to hear, told what will generally occur, and given the steps that God will use to do this wonderful thing.²⁵⁶ The shocking revelation occurs through the inverse order of decomposition.²⁵⁷ Physical bodies will join together, but the most crucial part of their reconstruction will come when God will "put breath" in them, and they "shall live." The God who breathed into humanity (Gen. 2:7) would again breathe into the lifeless

²⁵⁵ Alexander, *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ezekiel*, 259.

²⁵⁶ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 743.

²⁵⁷ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 34.

bodies of these assembled bones. The lesson learned from such a tremendous demonstration of creative power is: "You shall know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel 37:7-8

After the command to hear and the description of how the bones will come to life, Ezekiel begins speaking. He recalls, "So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them" (Ez. 37:7-8).

The Lord's command rings out through the prophet, and results are short in coming. The sound and the rattling parallel with bone to bone. The bones came together, each bone to its joining bone, and the scattered bones became skeletons once again.²⁵⁸ How the bones came together is better described in Hebrew than in English translations. Greenberg points out that the best paraphrase is "the inert mass resolved into bones headed for and finally arriving at their proper joins."²⁵⁹ This distinction points to the precise animation of the bones by the word of the Lord.

As foretold (37:5-6), ligaments and tendons formed to connect bone to bone and bone to muscle. Bones began to grow connective tissue. Muscles formed, and skin covered the forms. The prophet witnessed the creation of bodies from the inside out instead of how death destroys

²⁵⁸ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 34.

²⁵⁹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 744.

from the outside in. The skin covered them in the same way that bread forms a crust in the oven.²⁶⁰ The muscles and skin came on the bones, but they were not yet alive.²⁶¹

Ezekiel 37:9

God speaks to Ezekiel again, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live” (Ez. 37:9).

The second stage of the resurrection again begins with the word of the Lord through the prophet. The sequence of body coming together (37:7-8) and then distinct breath entering (37:9-10) follow the creation process in Genesis 2:7.²⁶² God creates man and then breathes into him the breath of life. In contrast to the Genesis account, God does not breathe the breath of life himself into an individual. Here, he summons the breath from the wind to give life to the multitude in the valley.

Ezekiel 37:10

Again, Ezekiel takes part in this great object lesson through obedience, “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army” (Ez. 37:10).

His immediate obedience yields immediate action by the Lord again. If the prophet had been despondent at the sight of the lifeless bodies, it was now turned to joy.²⁶³ If he had doubted

²⁶⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 744.

²⁶¹ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 34.

²⁶² Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel: Brazos Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 282.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

God's ability to bring the bones to life, it had evaporated. The bones are now a great mass of living humanity in the valley.²⁶⁴ It is an army restored to life for a restoration. At this point, Ezekiel does not know who the army is, but he must know it has a great purpose.

Ezekiel 37:11

The text moves from Ezekiel's participation in the vision (prophesying and watching bones come to life) to God's interpretation. The prophet recalls the word of the Lord to him, "then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off'" (37:11).

It begins with "Then he said to me," which indicates that the vision is over. He addresses the prophet in his customary manner, "son of man," and identifies the bones for the first time as "the whole house of Israel." The dead were not merely the tribe of Judah in exile but all of Israel. The "whole house" is to be raised.

God also reveals a possible motive for sending the vision. The house of Israel had reached a point of hopelessness where they were chanting their death song, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost. We are indeed cut off." They believed that they had been "cut off" (from the land of the living [Is. 53:8-9]). All hope was gone. They, like the valley of dry bones, were too far gone. Jenson points out that attention must be given to the Hebrew verse order in order to translate it correctly. The way they would have chanted the dirge was "dried up our bones/ perished- our hope/ cut off- we ourselves."²⁶⁵ How was Ezekiel to encourage a nation that had given up all hope and was sure they were finished? The answer would soon appear.

²⁶⁴ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 36.

²⁶⁵ Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel: Brozos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, 282.

Ezekiel 37:12

Now that he knows the identity of this grand resurrected army, the prophet is instructed, "Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel" (Ez. 37:12).

God promises to "open your graves" and "raise you from your graves." Yahweh will physically open graves and raise them from the dead.²⁶⁶ The word of the Lord says the "whole house of Israel" will be raised (bone, body, and life) to enter the land.²⁶⁷

Ezekiel 37:13

God's overall purpose in the coming resurrection is to act for the sake of his glory. He tells the house of Israel, "And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people" (Ez. 37:13).

This verse promises a resurrection of (bones, flesh, skin) and the breath of life. The

²⁶⁶ Jenson, *Ezekiel: Brozos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, 282.

²⁶⁷ Some have argued that this vision only means to describe the resurrection of Israel as a nation. Kelle argues that this passage does not deal with the resurrection of individuals but is only a metaphor for the restoration of Israel" because "ancient Israel did not have a belief in the bodily resurrection of persons" See Brad E. Kelle, *Ezekiel: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 201), 301. Goldengay agrees that Ezekiel 37:1-14 is not a picture "of the literal resuscitation of dead people" but a "picture of bringing back to life a community that thought it was dead." See Goldingay, *Ezekiel: Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, 35.

Arguing that the vision only intends to describe God's restoration of Israel is too limited. There is no denying that a restoration from Babylon is in view, but like so many other prophecies it is not the only thing in view. Resurrection hope does not need to be ruled out on grounds that it is a second century BC Jewish invention, as Kelle asserts. See Kelle, *Ezekiel: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 301. OT saints like Daniel (12:1-2) and the heroes of Hebrews 11 certainly had resurrection hope. Jenson points out that the debate about whether Ezekiel's vision points to a resurrection of Israel as a nation or a resurrection of individuals to make a nation is moot because it is shown to be one of the individuals who make up a nation. See Jenson, *Ezekiel: Brozos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, 282. It is a vision of what Judaism and Christianity describe as "the resurrection of the dead."

only result was overwhelming evidence that the God who could do such a thing was the self-existent Yahweh.

The early church by in large interpreted this passage as a vision of the resurrection.²⁶⁸ Some used it as evidence against the Docetism heresy.²⁶⁹ This resurrection interpretation is unsurprising since Jesus taught them that the entire OT pointed to his death and resurrection (Luke 24:27), their hope was based on their own resurrection (Rom. 8:23-24), and some of Christ's earliest followers had seen something like what Ezekiel described. Mathew records that day the curtain of the temple was torn in two, the earth shook, and the rocks split (Matt. 27:51). "The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (27:52-53).

Ezekiel 37:14

God promises, "And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord" (Ez. 37:14).

²⁶⁸ Early Christians unsurprisingly interpreted this to be a vision of the bodily resurrection of the dead (since belief in the resurrection is part of saving faith [Rom. 8:25]). However, there is also compelling evidence that ancient Jews believed this to be a literal resurrection of the dead to life. Greenberg points out that "early Jewish interpretation understood the passage to represent a literal resurrection of the dead" and discusses the vision in the *Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 92b*. See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary*, 751. This was the dominant trend of earliest Jewish interpretations due to archaeological evidence. Ezekiel paintings of the synagogue at Dura-Europos (on the upper Euphrates, near ancient Mari; third century b.c.) include scenes of the four winds (in the form of winged Psyches) entering dead bodies, and next to them an assembly of standing men in an attitude of praising. See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary*, 751. Block remarks that the fact that scholarly evidence now in the majority supporting the traditional Old Testament concept of the resurrection as that of the Pharisees (Acts 23:6-9) rather than the Sadducees is a welcome and logical change. See Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 37.

²⁶⁹ Brad E. Kelle, *Ezekiel: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 201), 301.

The valley becomes full of life as Yahweh visually demonstrates his promise to "remove the heart of stone" (36:26-27) and give a heart of flesh. The Spirit he will place in them (36:27) will cause them "to live" physically and come to life spiritually so they will walk in his statutes and obey his rules from a desire generated by their new nature.

The phrasing of 37:14a is similar to 6a but not quite the same. The bones and the rest of the lifeless bodies in 6 waited for God's breath to enter them through the wind.²⁷⁰ The future resurrected bodies of 14a receive his Spirit. What had been called "a new spirit" in 26 becomes apparent. As in 27, God reaffirms it as "my Spirit." The "new spirit" that brings life is Yahweh's Spirit. Greenberg points out that "by infusing them with his Spirit he will "settle/let them stay" on the land (14a)."²⁷¹ The Spirit now inside of them will not only bring them up from the soil but also bring them back to the soil and give them the character to keep them on the soil.²⁷² When all this comes to pass, the result is that they will "know that I am the LORD." They can count on it because of who he is, and he said it. It gives cause for hope that the only hope of Israel is her God because he is the sovereign Lord of history and their source of life.²⁷³

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones demonstrates God's desire that exiled Israel hope in resurrection.²⁷⁴ God desires that saints continue to groan and look to the next life for ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction. Resurrection hope produces boldness (2 Cor. 5:8) and holiness (1 John 3:3). It is a recurring theme in Scripture absent from WOF theology.

²⁷⁰ Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel: Brazos Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 282.

²⁷¹ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary*, 78.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 36.

²⁷⁴ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary*, 78.

Paul's Concept of Resurrection Hope Shaped by Ezekiel 37:1-14

Paul speaks of God's promise "to put my Spirit within you" (Ez. 37:14). He says to the Corinthian church, "You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3). He goes on to say a few verses later that God has made him and his companions "sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). Paul, like Ezekiel, demonstrates the need for the resurrection by highlighting the contrast between the two covenants. The "letter" of the old covenant "kills," so people need a resurrection. The answer to how the resurrection will take place is forthcoming. Ezekiel says, "I shall put My Spirit in you, and you shall live" (Ez. 37:14), and Paul says similarly, "The Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).²⁷⁵

The Spirit makes believers' souls come to life. It stands to reason he is also, as with the dry bones, who brings the other part of them, their physical bodies, to life. He continues this same line of thought in Romans 8, explaining, "If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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 dwells in you" (Rom. 8:10-11).

Although there is no clear quotation from this OT passage in Paul's resurrection imagery, he speaks of a similar bodily resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. There, he argues for the necessity of the resurrection in Christian theology. It is necessary because Christ's resurrection from the dead, according to the Scriptures (15:4), is the foundation of the gospel. He moves on to speak of

²⁷⁵ Keven Daugherty, "Naked Bodies and Heavenly Clothing in 2 Corinthians 5:3," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, no. 8 (2011–12), 216.

his hope in his resurrection: "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (15:19-20).

The apostle's hopes for the resurrection are firm and logical. He has no reason for others to pity him for his delusions (15:29) because "Christ has been raised from the dead" (15:19a). Christ's resurrection is the basis for his confidence in his own resurrection. Jesus, he affirms, is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20). Paul uses this familiar metaphor for death (sleep) as Daniel had (Dan. 12:2) because that is all that physical death is (sleep until a person wakes up in eternal reward or punishment). Jesus is the firstfruits (or down payment) of the future harvest of those who will wake up in heaven and gain a new glorified body like his.²⁷⁶

Paul's eschatology and groaning in the hope of the resurrection is built on the distinction between this life and the life and the longing for the life to come that he gained from his understanding of OT texts like Genesis 1-3 and Ezekiel 37.²⁷⁷ Daugherty affirms that Romans 8:18-25 connects groaning to the revelation of the 'sons of God' (8:19), while 8:19-23 refers to 'creation' five times in the sense of creation in the present age (8:18) or 'the present time.' 2 Corinthians refers to 'this age' in 2 Cor. 4.4.²⁷⁸

Paul's mind and letters are filled with longing for a resurrected physical body. Unlike WOF theology's short-sighted focus on achieving health, wealth, and prosperity in this life, Paul

²⁷⁶ Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 553.

²⁷⁷ Daugherty, "Naked Bodies and Heavenly Clothing in 2 Corinthians 5:3," 221.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

repeatedly seeks to point to the resurrection of the body as the Christian's primary hope.²⁷⁹ Unlike WOF's concept of faith, biblical faith trusts God while suffering and groaning in the hope of the resurrection (Heb. 11:13-16). That faith causes saints to long for home and delight in God.

Old Testament Delight in God in the Hope of the Resurrection

A second theme Paul draws from the OT in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10 is a delight in God himself. This theme naturally flows out of the hope of the resurrection because after the resurrection a believer's faith will be sight (1 Cor. 13:12) as God comes to dwell with man (Rev. 21:3).²⁸⁰ Paul groans, realizing that his present suffering is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed (Rom. 8:18) in God's presence. This hope caused him to delight more in God, longing to "be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

Humanity was designed to delight in God through relationship.²⁸¹ God created men in his women in his image to do what he eternally has been doing within the trinity- delighting in God. He commands his children to "delight yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4), and "rejoice in the

²⁷⁹ Paul is not concerned for the physical wealth of his audience as WOF teachers are. He is very concerned about the spiritual wealth of godly character and rewards in heaven. He writes like Jesus with more concern for spiritual than physical wealth. Jesus writes to the church of Laodicea, "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see" (Rev. 3:17-18).

²⁸⁰ God's presence is the best part of heaven for any Christian. The environment will be unimaginable. The presence of loved ones gone before will be a dream come true. The inability to sin will be the second best part, but the best part, they knew, was being with the Lord. Paul tells the Thessalonian church, "So shall we ever be with the Lord. Comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:17-18). Christians' highest comfort is that they will always be with the Lord.

²⁸¹ Adam walked with God in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8-10). Enoch walked with God and God "took him." Paul said he wanted to know God and the power of his resurrection and to share in his sufferings (Ph. 3:10). God wants man to know Him as he is fully known (1 Cor. 13:12).

Lord always" (Phil. 4:4). This delight is meaningful because of the resurrection.²⁸² Saints know their deep delight in God's person and promises will never fade. Their delight in God will be fully realized in his presence. It will last forever because he does.

This delight in God is only heightened by the thought of the resurrection. Resurrection hope causes saints to delight in God's attributes like justice, mercy, and faithfulness even as they suffer. It causes them to smile at the thought of seeing him face to face and ache for his coming, as John did (Rev. 22:20).

WOF theology, alternatively, sells its followers short of this (highest of all delights) by its lack of focus on the best to be had at the resurrection.²⁸³ Hearing that God always wants his children to have "the best clothing, drive the best cars, and have the best of everything" does not get the best in this life or the next.²⁸⁴ WOF's destructive obsession with this life's unsatisfying, temporary pleasures robs God of the glory of being his children's primary object of delight.²⁸⁵ In so doing, WOF theology is out of step with the Bible's emphasis on delighting in God through groaning in the hope of the resurrection.

²⁸² A Christian's deep delight in God will never fade in heaven and the new Jerusalem because he will make his dwelling among them (Rev. 21:3).

²⁸³ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," 42.

²⁸⁴ Hagin, *New Thresholds of Faith*, 54-55.

²⁸⁵ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 17.

Delight in God's Justice out of Resurrection Hope: Job 19:25-27

Delighting in God's Justice in Job 19:25-27

Job demonstrates this delight in God's justice through groaning for the resurrection. He looks to the resurrection as his only hope in suffering. As a righteous sufferer, Job also refutes the claims of prosperity preachers that God gives an easy life to those who please him.²⁸⁶

Job 19:25

Job is suffering, yet he knows he has done nothing worthy of punishment. He has miserable friends for comforters (Job 16:2) who conclude he suffers because of his sin. Job even claims that God is treating him as an enemy by pursuing him and not being satisfied with his flesh (19:22).²⁸⁷ He wishes that someone would plead his case. Then Job exclaims, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth" (19:25).

The ESV capitalizes "Redeemer" because the translators believed Job was speaking about God advocating for him in context.²⁸⁸ If this is the case, God would advocate for Job before God. Job may have been speaking better than he knew here, for God (the Son) would advocate for him against God (the Father) 's wrath.²⁸⁹ John says, "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). The ESV's interpretation of this verse is יִלְצֵנִי

²⁸⁶ Hagee, *The Seven Secrets*, 232.

²⁸⁷ Lindsay Wilson, *Job: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 96, ProQuest Ebrary.

²⁸⁸ A יִלְצֵנִי (Redeemer) is someone who provided legal protection by buying back, avenge or deliver someone unable to defend themselves (Lev. 25:23-25, Ruth 4:4-15, Prov. 23:11, Jer. 50:34). Job expected his Redeemer to advocate and plead his case to God and "stand upon the earth" (19:25) but probably after his death since he says it will happen "after my skin has been thus destroyed" (19:26).

²⁸⁹ Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 30.

hermeneutically sound and carries credibility as the historical interpretation of the church.

Christian commentators have applied Job 19:25 to Jesus since Clement of Rome.²⁹⁰

Job 19:26-27

Job continues with the reason for his confidence, “And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me” (19:26-27)! Job anticipates a physical resurrection. The context points to it. He expects to be physically dead, his body decomposed, yet “in his flesh,” he will see God (19:26). His physical eyes will see God. Job anticipates seeing as a man in a physical body, not in a disembodied state.²⁹¹ As he imagines the resurrection, Job groans with anticipation of his vindication and says, “My heart faints within me” (19:27)!

Paul’s Concept of Resurrection Hope Shaped by Job 19:25-27

Just as Job sought an audience with God to state his case, even if it meant meeting with him after death, Paul embraced a similar passion for justice regarding the hope of the resurrection. He delighted in God’s justice as Job had knowing that all humanity will stand

²⁹⁰ Christian commentators such as Clement, Thomas Aquinas, Matthew Henry, and O’Donnell have applied Job 19:25 to Jesus. See (1 Clement 26:3), Clement, *1 Clement: A Reader’s Edition* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020) 73; Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas Commentary on Job*, Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018) 160-161; Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 756; Douglas S. O’Donnell, *Job: ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 541, ProQuest Ebrary. It is sound, Christ-centered hermeneutics to interpret Job’s Redeemer as Jesus since all of Scripture points to him (Luke 24:27, John 5:39). It is also logical because Jesus was living when Job spoke (John 1:1) (Job 19:25a) and Jesus would redeem Job on the earth (25b) at the cross, long after Job’s body had deteriorated (26).

Not all Christian commentators take the view that Job is speaking of Jesus as his redeemer. Some like Wilson argue that the identity of the redeemer is not Job’s focus. The redeemer is merely a hypothetical legal figure that he is sure will advocate for him to right his relationship with God. See Lindsay Wilson, *Job: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 97. Other commentators such as Tremper Longman have argued that Job is not specifically referring to Jesus but only Yahweh. He acknowledges rightly (John 8:58) that when he refers to Yahweh he is referring to Jesus though, so this does not seem to be much of a disagreement. See Tremper Longman, *Job: Baker Commentary of the Old Testament* (Ada MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 261-262.

²⁹¹ O’Donnell, *Job: ESV Expository Commentary*, 541.

before God's judgment.²⁹² Since God is the great equalizer of justice, Paul learned to defer to God's judgment instead of taking matters into his own hands against his enemies. He tells the Roman church to “never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom. 12:19). He tells the Galatians not to be deceived God is not mocked for whatever a man sows he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7). Knowing that no wrong will go unjudged (Gal. 6:8) allows those wronged to release their own need to retaliate in order to balance the scale of justice.²⁹³ Reliance on God's judgment of the wicked (often after this life) is a familiar theme in the Psalms, but it is linked to the resurrection here.²⁹⁴

The justice he waits for is sometimes dealt out in this life but often is not. Not seeing it in this life does not mean it will not occur. Justice, in its final form, is dependent on the resurrection of the just and unjust and handed down at the judgment seat of Christ. He tells the Corinthian church to make it their “aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

Delight in God's Presence out of Resurrection Hope: Psalm 27:4

Delighting in God's Presence in Psalm 27:4

The Psalms (as a record of a thousand years of the prayers and songs of the saints) direct the Ancient Israelites and modern readers alike to know God and how his will can be done on

²⁹² Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 772.

²⁹³ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC, 2010), 13.

²⁹⁴ David consistently comforts himself among those who have wronged him with the knowledge that God will vindicate him. He rests in God as the judge. A classic example of this is found in Psalm 37. David repeatedly tells himself to “fret not” because God is just. He says, "The Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off" (Psalm 37:28).

earth as it is in heaven.²⁹⁵ David was not content with the knowledge of God he could attain in this life. He groaned because his hunger for God's presence could only be satisfied in his resurrected body. WOF theology's focus on blessings in this life robs its followers of the David-like-groaning for the resurrection (where they can see God face to face).

In the Psalms, David demonstrates why he is a man after God's own heart. He loved the Lord with all his heart. His love manifested itself in groaning for God's presence. David's groaning for the house of the Lord, that he could enter and never leave, marked his life. He writes, "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

Above all else, David longs to be in God's presence. Longmen points out that more than the building "God himself who is the object of his attention and focus."²⁹⁶ How is David to get his greatest longing satisfied and go to God's presence? It could be that he merely longs to go to the tabernacle, but it seems that he wants more than that. His longings in this verse reach higher than the tabernacle. He could not have his needs met there. David was not a priest. As a member of the tribe of Judah, he could not enter or live in the temple (27:4a). Nor could he "gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (27:4b) and live (Ex. 33:20) if he was able to enter. There was not even a temple as he wrote these words. It stands to reason that David's ultimate longing was not just for the tabernacle but for heaven, the house of the Lord that the tabernacle represented (Heb. 8:5).

²⁹⁵ C. Hassell Bullock, "The Psalms and Faith/Tradition," in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard Jr. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2013), 53–54.

²⁹⁶ Tremper Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 209, ProQuest Ebrary.

Ultimately, there will be no need for a temple (Rev. 21:22) because the Lord will live among his people in the new earth (Rev. 21:4). This has always been God's plan for the "fullness of time" (Eph. 1:10). It is fantastic to imagine how the undignified king will dance before the Lord on that day (2 Sam. 6:21)! This longing for God's presence is realized in a resurrected body.²⁹⁷ David's longing to be with the Lord does not drive WOF theology. They suppress the hunger for God's presence with a destructive focus on the comforts of this life.

Paul's Concept of Resurrection Hope Shaped by Psalm 27:4

Paul delighted in God's presence because he loved the Lord and cherished the Psalms. He quotes the book twenty-three times (second only to Isaiah). He tells the Colossians (3:16) and Ephesians (5:19) to sing the Psalms as the word of Christ dwells in them, and they are filled with the Spirit.

He shares David's love for the Lord and longing to be with God. Although Paul does not explicitly quote Psalm 27:4, he echoes the same sentiment when he encourages the Thessalonians that the great hope of heaven is "we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).²⁹⁸ Paul and his audience found fresh encouragement because they shared David's intense desire to be with the Lord.

²⁹⁷ God dwelling with man had not occurred since the Garden of Eden. The children of Israel had a representation of God's presence in the tabernacle and later the temple, but the people knew that he did not live there. The high priest could only go into the holy of holies once a year to atone for sins. However, the OT had promises of better days. In the sinless world to come (Ez. 37:24-28, 43:7-10; Zech. 2:11), God would physically dwell with his people. This promise of a resurrected body (1 John 3:2) and to "ever with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17) is a great beacon of hope and blissful discontentment in this world as it currently is.

²⁹⁸ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: Word Biblical Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), 102, ProQuest Ebrary.

Old Testament Wise Living in the Hope of the Resurrection

Paul drew from the fountain of wisdom literature that saturated his mind as he wrote Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. All his eager expectation of the resurrection did not cause him to detach from the world around him. It led to wise living in it. He sees his present suffering as minimal (Rom. 8:18), so he presses on and is wise enough to wait for the resurrection with patience (Rom. 8:25).²⁹⁹ His resurrection hope also causes him to always be of good courage (2 Cor. 5:8) and makes it his aim to please God (2 Cor. 5:9).³⁰⁰

Living wisely is based on a correct view of the resurrection, which is not unique to Paul. It is woven into the entire Old Testament. Wise living begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 9:10). It is living as he instructs with a correct view of God, oneself, others, and the long-view of time.³⁰¹ It sees reality as it truly is (through God's perspective), as explained in his word. This view of the truth results in wise living and comes from a biblical view of the bodily resurrection. Lapsing into thinking that gives too much weight to this life (its pleasures and pains) is the height of foolishness.

WOF theology promotes this foolishness. Its followers are encouraged to build bigger and bigger barns in their quest for prosperity.³⁰² They run the risk of God saying to them, "Fool!

²⁹⁹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 9, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁰⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, "A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, no. 3 (2015), 124.

³⁰¹ Holiness and boldness display wisdom because the person understands the truth that he is standing in the presence of a holy God even though he can't see him. He sees the reality that Jesus is with him, so he is bold. He understands that time is short and he will be rewarded in the coming kingdom, so he acts on what he knows to be true. This understanding and action based on the truth (that is very real), even though he cannot see it with his senses, is wisdom. It begins with the fear of the Lord, is empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and only comes with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).

³⁰² McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 17.

This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be (Luke 12:20)?

The Absence of Despair out of Resurrection Hope: 2 Samuel 12:19-23

The Wise Absence of Despair in 2 Samuel 12:19-23

Far from content in this life, David groaned for the resurrection of his body. After the death of his newborn son, it became clear that this was his hope. He understood the meaning of resurrection hope as he believed he would someday see his son alive again in heaven. This understanding prevented him from falling into despair. David experienced God's blessing of prosperity but (unlike WOF theology) was wise enough to see that God's blessings are not ends in themselves, nor can they be kept in this life.³⁰³

2 Samuel 12:19-20

In 2 Samuel 12, David begins to experience the consequences of his great disobedience towards God. Nathan has just confronted him for his adultery and murder and immediately confesses his sin to the Lord. Because God is gracious, he does not die but must deal with the consequences.³⁰⁴ David fasted and prayed for God to restore the child born to Bathsheba from their adultery, but the child died. The chronicler records that "when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the Lord

³⁰³ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," 42.

³⁰⁴ V. Philips Long, *1 and 2 Samuel: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 373, ProQuest Ebrary.

and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate" (2 Sam. 12:19-20).

David mourns over his sin, because he knows the child is suffering because of his actions and in constant prayer. Although David is forgiven, he must still deal with the consequences of his horrendous sin.³⁰⁵ The first consequence is the child's death.³⁰⁶

2 Samuel 12:21-23

"Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food." He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:21-23).

David's actions were strange to his servants. He journeyed from deep sadness to calm, poised clarity. The king explained why: He sought the Lord and prayed intently because he knew

³⁰⁵ Bill T Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2003), 536, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁰⁶ It is important to make a distinction between punishment and consequences because it helps explain God's nature. It also explains how David can still experience consequences when he had been told that the LORD had "put away" his sin (2 Sam. 12:13). God exercises punitive punishment to right the scales of justice (Rom. 12:19, Gal. 6:7-8). People who have been wronged do not need to take vengeance themselves and can rest that one day perfect justice will be served by their just God (Psalm 103:6, 146:7). David's punishment was placed forward in time on the lacerated back of his greater son (Psalm 32:1, Rom. 3:25) because he evidently at some point believed God and was counted righteous like Abraham (Gen 15:6, Rom. 4:3). This made him a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 3:14, Acts 13:22) and was the reason he immediately confessed his great sin (2 Sam. 12:13) instead of making excuses like Saul (1 Sam. 13:11). For all those (like David) who have looked to Christ for salvation (John 3:14) there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). For those who have not, their ultimate punishment will take place after sentencing at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). There is also a corrective punishment that God gives to all his children when they sin (Heb. 12:9-10) which is more precisely called discipline. Consequences alternatively are the natural reactions to choices. David's child dying was neither punitive nor corrective punishment. It was a consequence. For more information on this distinction see Bill T Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel: The NIV Application Commentary*, 536.

God's gracious nature. David begged Yahweh for the child's life until God revealed his final verdict. Fasting no longer served a purpose.³⁰⁷

David's consolation is the resurrection in this text.³⁰⁸ He believed he would go to the child, but there is more to this than just believing he would go to the grave. The hope of the grave is no great comfort. The king could eat, drink, and go up to the Lord's house because he knew he would ultimately see his son again in the land of no more pain and death (Rev. 21:4).³⁰⁹

David looked forward to eternity with a Greater Son of his who would also suffer for his sin and say, "Let the little children come unto me, for such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:4). David did not believe, like the Sadducees, that there was no resurrection (Matt. 12:18). He looked forward longingly to it, as Paul did, and groaned. He groaned at his sinfulness. David groaned at all the death he had seen. He groaned, longing for the resurrection and time with the son he had known for seven days. Hope in the resurrection was his source of joy and stability, allowing him to sorrow well and not as those with no hope (1 Thess. 4:13).

³⁰⁷ Long, *1 and 2 Samuel: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, 373.

³⁰⁸ Although this dissertation argues that the resurrection was David's great consolation, not all commentators agree. Long does not see resurrection hope but only David's acknowledgment that he will join his son in the grave. See Long, *1 and 2 Samuel: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, 37. Neither Long nor the following two examples give a reason for this explanation. Baron also does not see resurrection hope. He comments on David's statement that he would go to his son, "David grimly and resolutely accepts the truth, his fate, and divine punishment." See Robert Barron, *2 Samuel: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2015), 119, ProQuest Ebrary. Jenson agrees commenting that there is something of grief that is truncated here, of "moving on" in the recognition that he cannot bring his son back again." See David H. Jensen, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 227, ProQuest Ebrary.

Although some commentators disagree it does seem best to credit David's emotional change to hope in the resurrection for the reasons listed in the text of the dissertation above. This verse has a long tradition of interpretation of resurrection hope going back to Ambrose in 375. He explains that, "David wept for his son who was about to die; he did not grieve for him when dead. He wept that he might not be snatched from him, but he ceased to weep when he was snatched away, for he knew that he was with Christ." See Ambrose, "Consolation on the Death of Emperor Valentinian," in *Ancient Christian Commentary*, ed. John R. Franke (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 367.

³⁰⁹ Long, *1 and 2 Samuel: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, 37

Paul's Concept of Resurrection Hope Shaped by 2 Samuel 12:19-23

This narrative helped to inform Paul's resurrection hope. No specific evidence refers to it in his letters, but the apostle shares David's hope. Paul carries this into his reasoning when he instructs the Thessalonian believers that they "do not sorrow as those who have no hope" (1Thess. 4:13). Like David, washing and returning to the court (2 Sam. 12:19-20), Christians mourn, but are comforted by the promise of reuniting with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

The apostle shares David's confidence in resurrection hope as he suffered.³¹⁰ In 2 Corinthians 5, he states that even if the tent of his body is destroyed, he has a building from God waiting (5:1). Paul also carries David's empowering hope into Romans 8 when he says "that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (8:18).³¹¹

Understanding the Nature of Life out of Resurrection Hope: Psalm 39:4-7

Wisely Understanding the Nature of Life from Psalm 39:4-7

Paul draws his concept of the brevity of life from multiple OT references, but especially from David's Psalm 39. Here, David seeks wisdom in these verses, knowing his life is short and fleeting. He finds it along with rest because he knows this short life is not the end.³¹² Like David,

³¹⁰ Roger A. Nauss, *God's Glory and Our Hope in Suffering: Romans 8:18-30* (Devotional, First Southern Baptist Church, Hurt, VA, March 2024), 1.

³¹¹ Paul's "sufferings" include a thorn in the flesh. He prayed three times that this "thorn in the flesh" might be taken from him. However, Jesus replied, "My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is perfected in your weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul then went on to glory in his weakness so that the power of God might be displayed in him. This is quite different from WOF preachers who deny weakness at every turn. God did not want Paul healed. He wanted Paul's obedience, dependence, and humility. God wanted Paul to point people away from himself to Jesus. The apostle knew the thorn was only a temporary malady that would be remedied when he joined Jesus in his heavenly home with a new body (Nauss, *God's Glory and Our Hope in Suffering: Romans 8:18-30, 1*).

³¹² Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms, Psalms 1-72* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 233, ProQuest Ebrary.

God's perspective on time allows saints to see that pursuing health, wealth, and prosperity now is a poor investment because this life is fleeting.

Psalm 39:4

David leaves his recounting of his encounter with the wicked in his presence and moves to his burning request, "O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am" (Psalm 39:4)!

Longman points out that "rather than complaining, the psalmist asks God to make him realize just how short and inconsequential his life is."³¹³ He knows that "creation has been subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20), and longs for eyes to see it. He prays like Moses, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

David knows that a correct understanding of his brief life and how small he is in relation to God will give him the right "heart-set" to think like God and be wise. Wisdom from God is essential for life. Weiser points out that without the continual "criterion and compass" God offers, mankind falls "victim to his own prejudices or to those of others."³¹⁴

Psalm 39:5

David continues after the wisdom-producing humility that comes from a correct understanding of the transience of his life, "Behold, you (Yahweh) have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely, all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah" (39:5).

³¹³ Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, 185.

³¹⁴ Artur Weiser, *Psalms-OTL: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2010), 329, ProQuest Ebrary.

David realizes that he and all of humanity are fragile and temporary. He compares his life to the small measures of a hand's width. It is only "a few handbreadths" in length. His life is only a "mere breath." The word translated as "breath" is *הֶבֶל*.³¹⁵ David's son, Solomon, would use this word thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes to describe the "meaninglessness" or "vanity" of life. Longman defines the word as "breath, vapor, or bubble" or here as "transience."³¹⁶ Human life has the same longevity as an exhale on a brisk March day by God's design. David speaks the same sentiment as James, "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:14). God alone stands forever. David could say along with Moses, "In this matter of timelessness, God you stand apart," for "before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Psalm 90:2).

As Moses had said 500 years before in Psalm 90:4, "A thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night." Comparing his life to "yesterday" may even be too long. Waltke points out that "a thousand years are more like a watch in the night, (the four hours a watchman stands his post to protect the people while they sleep). Accordingly, the mortal's seventy or eighty years are like a little over a quarter of an hour in the scope of a day to God."³¹⁷

Gaining the wisdom of God is essential to groaning for the resurrection. Apart from God's long view of time, saints will only see the brief life before them. They will say with

³¹⁵ Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius's Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (London: Bagster and Sons, 1846), 245.

³¹⁶ Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, 185.

³¹⁷ Bruce K., Waltke, and James M. Houston. *The Psalms as Christian Praise: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 126, ProQuest Ebrary.

Solomon that life is הֶבֶל (vanity) and be correct, if it only takes place in this world “under the sun (Ecc. 1:14).”³¹⁸ Wisdom is only grasped as saints humbly see their transience and foolishness and seek God’s eternal perspective in his word.

Man is inherently foolish because he lacks perspective on what reality is. From the tiny “peephole” of his life in the small enclosed system of the world in a very short amount of time, he understands precious little and can know little for sure. In contrast, David sees Yahweh as the Wise King because he is separate from his creation. God has a “big picture” view of all because he stands separate from it. This view of the transcendent timelessness of God is the foundation for the Ancient Israelite understanding of Yahweh's wisdom. It also explains why they must go to him for wisdom and truth. They saw themselves as foolish, small, and fleeting. They knew he was not. Groaning for the resurrection begins with a proper view of this life only found by seeking God, the source of wisdom.

Psalm 39:6

David points to the effect of man's transient, breath-like existence, "Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely, for *nothing*, they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

Like his son, “the Preacher” (Ecc. 2:17-23), David comments on the meaninglessness of gathering wealth only to have it go to someone else. The king speaks quite differently than WOF theology, which encourages heaping up wealth. He also comments with startling realism on the brevity of life by comparing it to a shadow and pointing toward the inevitability of death.

³¹⁸ Strong, "H1892 - Hebel" - *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon*, 107.

Turning to the Wise King brings a radical change of heart. David loses the rebellious self-assurance that has shaped his thinking when he sees the truth (in light of his death and the transient nature of his life). He finds that his turmoil has been "much ado about nothing."³¹⁹ David's courageous acceptance of God's perspective decisively ends his attempts to hold on to the ephemeral.³²⁰ He does not change his thinking and behavior out of dejected pessimism but sober realism.³²¹

David uses the word *הַבָּל* again (nothing) in 39:5.³²² It is vain to be in turmoil for what someone cannot keep.³²³ It is vain to be in turmoil for nothing. In this shadow-like existence, humanity needs the outside perspective of the Wise King Yahweh. He alone can tell them what is essential and what is vanity. As creation groans in the futility to which it was subjected (Rom. 8:22-24), man must reach outside of it to find meaning, purpose, and direction. Only the Wise King can help him do it. This was the view of the wise nature of Yahweh, which David held, and the view of orthodox Ancient Israel. It is the basis for understanding David's view of the resurrection.

Psalm 39:7

In response to his renewed understanding of his frailty and God's eternity, David cries, "And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you."

³¹⁹ Weiser, *Psalms-OTL: A Commentary*, 328.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² Gesenius, *Gesenius's Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon*, 126.

³²³ Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957), 256.

What could he possibly wait for that would deliver him from his foolishness and silence in the presence of the wicked but the Wise King, Yahweh?³²⁴ He had learned long before that the battle was not won by the strength of the army. After all, the warhorse and chariot are a "false hope of victory" (Psalm 33:17). His hope is in God.

He only grasps this new hope after his humiliation and consultation with God. He can only answer "My hope is you" to the question "For what do I wait?" when he has received wisdom.³²⁵ He finds all this after grasping the transient nature of his life, the vanity of striving for what has been subjected to futility, and the utter failure of his character in the presence of Yahweh. After he sees the Wise King (Weiser points out), he realizes "that it is in God alone that he can find comfort and support when every human support has proved unreliable."³²⁶ When David has gained his freedom from his foolish overconfidence and misplaced dependence on the world, he can boldly come to the one who will give him rest (Matt. 11:28) and cast all his cares on the one who cares for him (1 Peter 5:7).³²⁷

The wisdom and rest David found are the results of groaning for the life to come. God's perspective allows those indwelt with the Holy Spirit to see that their lives are fleeting and that health, wealth, and prosperity are fading. David looked forward to the resurrection. If he had not, he would have lapsed into despair as Solomon had and seen the whole of life as "vanity." WOF theology capitalizes on this life and riches that are passing away. As a result, it does not

³²⁴ Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on Psalms 1-81* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2006), 521. ProQuest Ebrary.

³²⁵ Waiting is foreign to WOF theology. Why wait for anything when they think God wants them to have their heart's desire now? Just naming and claiming is supposed to bring immediate results. Planting a seed (usually with money) claims a blessing, now. WOF does not wait and so does not know the value of waiting on the Lord as David did in Psalm 39:7.

³²⁶ Weiser, *Psalms-OTL: A Commentary*, 329.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 330.

encourage its followers to seek the same kind of wisdom, peace, and stability that David experienced.

Paul's Concept of Resurrection Hope Shaped by Psalm 39:4-7

Paul's theology of groaning in the hope of the resurrection was shaped by Psalm 39's focus on the transience of human life and God's eternity. He speaks similarly to David. David longs for wisdom and to be delivered from all his transgressions (Psalm 39:8), so he asks God to let him know how fleeting his life is (39:4). Paul uses the same awareness of the transient nature of this present life to produce holiness. He encourages the Corinthians to live a life of "undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:35) because "the present form of this world is passing away" (7:31). Paul employs the same breath (Psalm 39:5) and shadow (39:6) language as David had to speak of this life.

Paul uses this same wise awareness of the brevity of life in 2 Corinthians 4-5 and Romans 8. When he considers that he is a jar of clay (2 Cor. 4:7), that the old self is passing away (4:16), that the things that are seen are transient (4:18), and that the earthly tent will soon be destroyed (5:1), it only propels him on to share the gospel (4:13), renew the inner man (4:16), store up a weight of glorious treasure in heaven (4:17), and be of good courage (5:6). When he considers sufferings of this present time (Rom. 8:18), the futility to which creation has been subjected (8:20), and the groaning of his own heart (8:23), it only prompts him to look to the glory to be revealed (8:18), to creation's renewal (8:21), and to wait with patience for the redemption of his body (8:25).³²⁸

³²⁸ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 9.

The only response to the fantastic hope of the resurrection is present action.³²⁹ The apostle wants the magnificent thought of the resurrection (as he had in Philippians 4:1 and 1 Corinthians 15:58) to help them “stand firm in the Lord.”³³⁰ It is a beautiful bonfire of wise consideration that leads to action. A wise understanding of humanity's transient life and God's eternal nature causes discontentment with what this life offers and groaning in hope for the resurrection. Groaning in hope fuels the saint's holiness and greater action in this present life.³³¹

Old Testament Themes that Influenced Paul's Concept of Groaning Against the Word of Faith Movement

Real and lasting health, wealth, and prosperity await in the next life, not this one. The saints of the OT knew this to be true and groaned for the resurrection. Paul was influenced by their groaning and incorporated it into Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. This groaning often manifested itself in a longing for home, a desire for God, and wise living. Discontented groaning for the ultimate health, wealth, and prosperity of the next life is normal for Christians whose treasure is in heaven. Groaning for the resurrection is a way to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.³³²

³²⁹ Daniel L. Akin, *1,2,3 John: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2001), 104, ProQuest Ebrary.

³³⁰ John Reumann, *Philippians (Anchor Yale Bible Commentary): A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 605, ProQuest Ebrary.

³³¹ John confirms with Paul that the wise response to the resurrection is action. John says, “Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). There is no such thing as “heavenly mindedness” causing someone to be “no earthly good” in Paul or John's mind. Everyone who has this hope of the resurrection, John insists, “gets started on being like Jesus early.” He “purifies himself” just as Jesus himself “is pure.” The saint who groans for the resurrection makes pursuing purity a continual priority. For more information on the purifying power of resurrection hope, see Akin, *1,2,3 John: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, 104.

³³² Schreiner, “A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10,” 124.

Chapter Four: Summary and Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated that the Old Testament bears witness to a groaning in resurrection hope. Paul's groaning in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10 is drawn from the witness of Scripture he had at the time (the OT). The hope of these OT authors who influenced Paul was that after they had slept in the dust, they would awake to everlasting life and shine like stars forever and ever (Dan. 12:2-3). It grew from God's promise to open their graves and raise them from the dead (Ez. 37:12,13). These OT saints "died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). Their hope of the resurrection worked itself out in themes of longing for a heavenly home, a delight in God, and wise walking with him in this life. Similarly, this hope of physical resurrection should be used by Christians today to wean them from a love of the world, cause them to take greater delight in God, and live this life wisely with God's eternal perspective.

Discontented groaning with inevitable and beneficial trials opposes WOF theology's view that suffering, sickness, and a lack of wealth are signs that a Christian lacks faith.³³³ It requires faith to look to a "better country" (Heb. 11:16) as OT saints did. Groaning in eager hope of the resurrection is foreign to a theology that focuses on comfort and prosperity in this life.³³⁴ Word of Faith theology's promises of health, wealth, and prosperity it cannot deliver.³³⁵ Even if it could deliver, those treasures would soon be lost in this world. Those who pursue health,

³³³ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 6-7.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 31.

wealth, and comfort in this life will be disappointed; those who lose their lives will find it (Matt. 10:39), both now and in eternity.

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection, as OT writers did and Paul will demonstrate in the next chapter, is the key to joy and glorifying God that WOF theology misses. It is the key to joy because it yields deep, settled happiness that cannot be taken away even by aging and death. This joy in God (made possible by the resurrection) glorifies him in a way that WOF cannot.³³⁶ This joy glorifies God by showing the world that he is more satisfying than what it offers.³³⁷ It glorifies God by showing that saints have a better and abiding possession in the world to come (Heb. 10:34).

³³⁶ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," 42.

³³⁷ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books 1996), 32.

**CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF PAUL’S USE OF ΣΤΕΝΑΖΩ IN THE BROADER
CONTEXT OF ROMANS 8:18-25 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-5:10**

Having examined OT themes that shaped Paul’s thinking about the resurrection, we now consider the historical and literary contexts of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10 to determine Paul’s use of στενάζω. This chapter will demonstrate how Paul used στενάζω in both passages to show the church that the Holy Spirit’s groaning for the resurrection within him motivated him to greater ministry. It will also reveal that, in opposition to the prosperity claims of Word of Faith theology, Paul expected groaning in discontented expectation of the resurrection to be the norm for all Christians filled with the Spirit.

The apostle’s understanding of the necessity of discomfort in this life and groaning for the next confronts and prevents the spread of WOF theology. It confronts WOF’s fixation on pleasure in this life with a call to fixate on pleasure in the next. It prevents the spread of WOF theology by keeping Christians from its errors. Christians who look forward to the resurrection do not seek ultimate comfort in this life and fall into the errors of WOF theology.³³⁸ They follow Paul as he follows Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), enduring trials, temptation, and persecution, fueled by hope in the joy of the resurrection set before them (Heb. 12:2). In so doing, hope-fueled saints get the joy and peace that forever alludes those who seek their primary pleasure in this life. They are undistracted agents of transformation in a world where they are promised trials. Saints can look to Paul for guidance in Romans 8:18-25.

³³⁸ The problems WOF theology presents to orthodox Christianity (discussed in chapter two) are that it encourages embracing unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification.

Romans 8:18-25

It is vital to examine Paul's use of στενάζω in the broader context of Romans 8:18-25. The chapter will examine the passage's historical and literary contexts to reveal how Paul's expectation of groaning for the resurrection fits into the passage's and the book's larger message.

The Context of Romans 8:18-25

Historical Context of Romans 8:18-25

There is near unanimous consensus that Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans from Corinth between 57 and 58 AD.³³⁹ This dating of the letter is based on the inscription for the appointment of Gallio as proconsul of Corinth dated in 51–52 and the time that had elapsed from that appointment to the occasion of the letter.³⁴⁰ Acts 18:12 records Paul's trial before Gallio in Corinth near the end of his second missionary journey. The apostle spent two and a half years in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, which ended in Corinth and included a collection for the church in Jerusalem. He wrote Romans from Corinth at the end of this journey.

Paul wrote to a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile Christians. Ambrosiaster (the fourth-century church father) records that Jewish Christians planted the church after returning from Pentecost with the gospel.³⁴¹ The congregation would become exclusively Gentile when Claudius evicted the Jews from Rome around the year 49 (Acts 18:2).³⁴² By the time Paul wrote, Jews

³³⁹ Andreas Kostenberger, Scott Kellum, Charles Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2009), 579-587.

³⁴⁰ Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 14.

³⁴¹ Ambrosiaster, in Moo's, *The Letter to the Romans*, 9.

³⁴² Dixon Slingerland, "Suetonius Claudius 25.4, Acts 18, and Paulus Orosius' 'Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII.?' Dating the Claudian Expulsion(s) of Roman Jews," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 83, no. 1/2 (1992): 127, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1455110>.

were allowed to return to the city, and the church had regained its diversity.³⁴³ The Gentile believers in the church were a mixture of "God-fearers" who would not have converted to Judaism and those evangelized by personal relationships with the Christians there. It does appear that Paul's primary audience was converted Jews since much of his content deals with Old Testament fulfillment in Christ.³⁴⁴

Osborn states that (contrary to custom) "it is nearly a certainty that Peter did not start this church in Rome."³⁴⁵ In his *Life of Claudius*, the Roman historian Suetonius writes of the Jews' expulsion from Rome because of conflict with followers of Chrestus.³⁴⁶ Most historians take "Chrestus" to be Christ. This conflict between Christians and Jews likely occurred in the year 49 (ten years before this letter). The church must have been established for this to be the case. Peter was ministering in Jerusalem at this time. Paul insists that he has no desire to build on another's foundation (Rom. 15:20b). It seems unlikely that Paul would do the very thing he said he would not in this letter, by building a church Peter had begun. Paul made it his "ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named" (15:20a).

Literary Context of Romans 8:18-25

Romans comes closer to a volume of systematic theology than any other New Testament letter.³⁴⁷ Paul wrote to clearly explain the gospel and its implications to a church he had never

³⁴³ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 9.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 15.

³⁴⁶ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 4.

³⁴⁷ Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters*, 304.

visited or personally disciplined.³⁴⁸ Once armed with correct theology, the strategic role this trained and thoughtful church could play must have been foremost on his mind. However, Romans is not merely a treatise on gospel or Pauline theology. Paul is writing a particular letter to a particular church. He references the context, the people he knows, and specific situations in the church. It is also not a book systematic doctrine since it is not an exhaustive treatment of Pauline theology.³⁴⁹

Instead, it is best to conclude that Paul wrote Romans for several reasons. He wrote to inform the church in Rome of gospel doctrine and the theology that flowed out of it. He also wrote to unify Jews and Gentiles, introduce himself, and give them some apostolic grounding. Paul desired that the gospel would unify Gentiles and Jews in the congregation. By the time he wrote, many Jews, like Pricilla and Aquilla, would have returned to the city.³⁵⁰ This reintroduction of Jews would have led to natural conflicts. Paul wanted to introduce himself so that a gathering ready to receive him would be more likely to listen and send him on his way to Spain.³⁵¹ Paul also wrote to ground the church in Rome with apostolic authority.³⁵² With this letter, the church would have a document from an apostle from which to grow. If the church in Rome was intended to be a sending church, as Paul expected, a letter from him would give it credibility.

³⁴⁸ Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters*, 304.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 9.

³⁵¹ Ibid, 308.

³⁵² Ibid, 310.

Paul writes to the Romans to explain and deepen their faith in the gospel.³⁵³ He writes to this church, which had suffered and would suffer again for their faith. This congregation had been saved in the hope of the resurrection (8:24) and needed more of this hope to thrive. The church in Rome was in a critical strategic location as a sending church, poised to reach the nations with the gospel. Paul uses this epistle to help them know and apply the gospel for victorious, holy living and evangelism. He shows them specifically in Romans 8 how the Holy Spirit makes this possible.

Romans 8 demonstrates how God helps Christians to persevere in faith despite their continual wrestling with sin. Paul admitted his struggle with sin in the previous chapter. He now prepares to contrast the new life in Christ with what Keener calls "the best that law-informed-flesh could do" in 7:7–25.³⁵⁴ Although Paul wanted to serve God, he found a desire to sin in his flesh. He argues in chapter 8 that the Spirit enables believers to remain in a right standing with God despite continual sin. This "new way of the Spirit" sets a person free from the "old way of the written code" (7:6) and is what allows the Christian to "serve the law of God with (his) mind" (7:25) and live free from condemnation (8:1). The Holy Spirit comes into a believer's life at salvation and gives him the ability to live for God. He keeps him holy (willing and working for God's good pleasure [Phil. 2:12-13]).

³⁵³ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 23, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁵⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2011), 98, ProQuest Ebrary. Keener sees Paul's struggle as too great of a contrast with the Christian life, so he holds to a view that was dominant among the Greek Fathers that Paul was speaking of his pre-conversion self. He explains that "Reacting against Pelagians, the later Augustine came to depict Rom. 7 as the Christian life (with most Latin fathers); most church fathers, however, especially in the east, viewed it as non-Christian. The medieval Western church, Luther, and Calvin followed the dominant Western tradition; Erasmus, Wesley and Pietists followed the tradition of the Greek fathers." See Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, 91. This dissertation takes the Augustinian view that Paul is speaking of the struggle he currently faces with his flesh. The present tense verbs Paul uses and his authenticity with his weakness (throughout 2 Corinthians and Acts 23:5) add credibility to this view, but it is a subject of much healthy debate.

Romans 8:18-25 is part of a larger discussion Paul has on the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers in 8:1-30. First, the Spirit sets believers free from sin and death (8:1-4a). Second, the Spirit enables believers to please God (8:4b-8). Third, the Spirit causes believers to rise from the dead (8:9-11). Fourth, the Spirit confirms believers are the children of God (8:12-25). Fifth, the Spirit helps believers in their weakness (8:26-30).

In the fourth section on the work of the Spirit, Paul shows that the Spirit confirms believers are the children of God (8:12-25) by helping them to put to death the deeds of the flesh (12-13), by keeping them from slavery to sin and fear (14-15), and by giving them an unshakable hope of glorification (16-25). This unshakable hope of glorification is the context of his discussion about groaning in hope.³⁵⁵

Analysis of Paul's use of *στενάζω* in Romans 8:18-25

Having explored the context, we now move to the text itself. Paul saw groaning in the hope of the resurrection as a necessity. An outline of the flow of Paul's use of *στενάζω* in Romans 8:18-25 includes Paul's Perspective of Groaning (8:18), Creation's Groaning (8:19-22), and The Believer's Groaning (8:23-25). It is critical to examine the language of the verses and the interpretation of each section. Particular attention will be given to 8:23, but its surrounding context will explain how Paul used the word.

Paul's Perspective of Groaning for the Bodily Resurrection (Romans 8:18)

Paul instructs the Roman church on how to live in the Spirit by the gospel through hope.³⁵⁶ The way to do it is to have the proper perspective about suffering. He writes, "For I

³⁵⁵ Schreiner, "A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10," 124.

³⁵⁶ Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, 105.

consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

Paul is advocating the kind of suffering that has a joyous outcome.³⁵⁷ He considers the sufferings of this present time as minimal because of the tremendous hope of glorification with Christ (8:17). The Spirit inside him has borne witness that he is a child of God (8:16). If he is a child, Paul is an heir of God with Christ (8:17). This reminder of sonship gave him clear thinking about his present circumstance. Paul reminds the Roman church to share his correct, Spirit-empowered outlook on suffering.³⁵⁸ He wanted them to see that their current sufferings were "light and momentary" in the large view of eternity (2 Cor. 4:17a). They were doing some good, "preparing an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17b).

Robinson points out that the same idiom here, μέλλουσιν δόξαν, occurs in Galatians 3:2.³⁵⁹ There, Paul tells the Galatians, "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed." Faith had been revealed by the gospel in justification. The glory would be revealed for the Roman church in glorification.

Creation's Groaning (Romans 8:19-22)

Romans 8:19

Paul tells the church the reason why groaning is an essential component of hope, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God" (8:19). The Spirit had testified that the believers are already God's children (8:15-16). He had brought life to them

³⁵⁷ Moo, *Romans: The New NIV Application Commentary*, 267.

³⁵⁸ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 9.

³⁵⁹ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1930), 368.

spiritually. What had been a spiritual reality would soon be made a physical one. The Spirit would soon give life to their mortal bodies (8:11).

In this verse, Paul connects the Spirit-empowered hope of believers (8:18) to the hope of creation itself. He argues that even irrational creation waits with eager expectation.³⁶⁰ Keener points out that "rhetorically, Paul includes three apok-words in 8:19, two of them also including the d and k sounds."³⁶¹ He strains the language to demonstrate creation's on-edge, "strained expectancy!" Paul uses the same word in Philippians 1:20, where he states that his (ἀποκαραδοκίαν) "earnest expectation" and hope is that, instead of being put to shame, Christ shall be magnified in his body, "whether by life or by death."³⁶² Creation waits for the "revealing of the sons of God" rather than its own because it knows its renewal is contingent upon theirs.³⁶³ Creation waits and groans in hope.

Romans 8:20

Paul explains why creation waits; "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope" (8:20).

Creation longs because it was "subjected to futility." This word ματαιότητι (futility) means pointlessness.³⁶⁴ Although Paul only uses the word once more (in Eph. 4:17), ματαιότητι appears frequently in the Septuagint. When Solomon wants to describe how the universe grinds

³⁶⁰ Jonathan Moo, "Romans 8:19–22 and Isaiah's Cosmic Covenant." *New Testament Studies* 54, no. 1 (2008): 74, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁶¹ Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, 105.

³⁶² William Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 2003), 322.

³⁶³ Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 211.

³⁶⁴ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Rom. 8.

creation into the dust and says that it all is לִפְנֵי “futility and striving after the wind” (Ecc. 1:2), the Greek translators used the word ματαιότητι.

God subjected creation to futility against its will (Rom. 8:20), the hapless victim of man's sin (Romans 5:12). Thus, the law of entropy began.³⁶⁵ Weeds and parasites began attacking what God had declared "good." The groaning has continued from day to day ever since. Isaiah cries against the curse that brings futility, "The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:5). Animals are subject to constant parasitic attacks, born with painful mutations and degrade with aging.³⁶⁶ The earth convulses with destructive storms. Trees fall to blight. The creation groans and longs.

Romans 8:21

Paul has argued that unreasoning creation was subjected to futility (death and decay due to the fall) against its will, but it does have hope. Its hope is “that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

He affirms that creation will be freed from "its bondage to corruption" after the "children of God" obtain it. This long-awaited freedom will come when God creates a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21-22). The old earth will pass away. The elements will burn with fervent heat (2 Peter 3:12). Christ on the throne will make all things new (Rev. 22:1–5).

³⁶⁵ Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, 107.

³⁶⁶ Klaus Niimberger, “The ‘Spirit’ and the ‘Groaning of Creation’ in Romans 8 Seen Against the Background of Modern Science.” *Scriptura* 109, no. 1 (2012): 56. <https://web-b-ebshost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost>.

Romans 8:22

In this hope of redemption from "its bondage to corruption, "creation waits and groans. Paul tells the Romans, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now" (Rom. 8:22).

He points out that creation's groaning is evident. It is the great subjective experience of all who observe the world and think. They can feel creation breaking down inside their bodies, see creation wearing down, and almost hear its groaning around them.

All of creation is groaning perpetually. Spring points out that "all creation as a collective subject is groaning, and this is reinforced by the prefix *συστενάζει*."³⁶⁷ It is also not a one-time or new action. The combination of the present tense for groan and the phrase "until now" indicates the continual state of groaning that all creation has been subjected to.³⁶⁸

Surprisingly, Paul describes this groaning (of unreasoning creation subjected to futility) not with despair but with hope of new creation.³⁶⁹ Creation groans as a woman about to give birth.³⁷⁰ It is the groaning of intense pain and joyful anticipation.³⁷¹ It is the groaning of hope for new life. Creation can sense that the time is short until it is delivered.³⁷²

³⁶⁷ Matthew B. Spring, "A Theology of Groaning" (STB Thesis, Saint John Vianney Theological Seminary, 2010), 22, https://www.academia.edu/A_Theology_of_Groaning.pdf.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Louw & Nida, "συνωδίνω," 24.88.

³⁷⁰ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 368.

³⁷¹ Aaron Sherwood, *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, and Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁷² Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 213.

The Believer's Groaning (Romans 8:23-25)

Romans 8:23

Paul moves from the groaning and hope of the unreasoning creation to the groaning and reasoned hope of the believer. He says, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, στενάζομεν (groan) inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23).

What the Christian is groaning and waiting eagerly for is evident from the end of the verse, "the redemption of our bodies." Resurrection is the hope of believers. They wait eagerly for a physical new body, groaning in anticipation.

Voorwinde supports this interpretation of Paul's use of στενάζομεν in 8:23 as "the eschatological groaning of those who eagerly await the redemption of their bodies."³⁷³ In 2 Corinthians 5:2,4, Paul uses a similar (more metaphorical) description of the waiting saints as those who long to be clothed with their building from God, but it has the same meaning. Voorwinde notes that in both cases, the "sighing still has the element of grief and distress (as στενάζω does in LXX), but the hope of the resurrection body radically tempers this."³⁷⁴

Paul calls the "resurrection of the body" the "adoption as sons." He made clear in 8:14-16 that the believer has already been adopted into God's family. He means here that they will be adopted in an ultimate sense at their glorification.³⁷⁵ There is a sense of both "already" and "not yet" here. Osborne points out this sense of expectation for the "not yet." He says, "We are already his children, but have not yet seen his face. We are already heirs, but have not inherited.

³⁷³ Stephen Voorwinde, "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians," *Vox Reformata*, 11 no. 1 (2015), 84.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Schreiner, "A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10," 124.

We are already glorified, but have not yet received our new bodies."³⁷⁶ Voorwinde explains, "Encrypted within the sighing and groaning are both the painful distress of the old order and the sure hope of the world to come. Caught in the tension between their present distress and their future hope, the believers' most appropriate response is to groan."³⁷⁷

At the "yet to come" adoption of sons, the Christian's current body will be gloriously transformed from a "body of death" (Rom. 7:24) (subject to decay and a desire to sin) to a glorious resurrected body like Christ's (1 Cor. 15:49).³⁷⁸ The Lord Jesus "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:21).

The hope of the bodily resurrection is a significant theme in Paul's writing and ran counter to dualistic elements in Greek culture of his day that human beings are composed of a rational soul and a material body."³⁷⁹ These dualistic cultural tendencies may have conditioned some to think that the hope of eternal life was bound up in a bodiless existence.³⁸⁰ Paul is clear that the saint's hope is a resurrected physical hope (walking on a remade earth in perfect bodies composed of matter). He says, "We wait for the redemption of our bodies." Creation and the humanity inside it suffer, groan, and anticipate the glories of the new physical age together in solidarity.³⁸¹

³⁷⁶ Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 210.

³⁷⁷ Voorwinde, "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians," 84.

³⁷⁸ Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 210.

³⁷⁹ Dannie Strauss, "Soul and body: Transcending the dialectical intellectual legacy of the West with an integral biblical view?" *die Skriflig* 48 no.1 (2014), 1. <https://web-a-ebsohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost>.

³⁸⁰ Grant R Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 413.

³⁸¹ Sherwood, *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, and Exegetical Commentary*, 298.

The beginning of the verse also clarifies how they have come to be groaning. Paul explains they groan because "they have the firstfruits of the Spirit." This entire section of Romans deals with living in the Spirit due to the gospel. The Holy Spirit is the down payment, bringing an insatiable love for Christ and hatred of sin (8:5-8) that causes believers to groan inwardly as they wait eagerly for adoption as sons.³⁸² The Spirit comes to live inside a believer at the moment of salvation and brings a holy discontentment for temporal, earthly things that do not satisfy. The saint is discontent because of his new longing for Christ, which cannot be satiated apart from being with him. He is discontent with his fleshly desire for sin (Rom. 7:24). The saint has new assurances of the resurrection but also new discontentment with the health, wealth, and prosperity this life offers. They are like Israel, ready to make their way out of slavery in Egypt as God hears their groanings.³⁸³ The Spirit causes internal groaning and eager waiting. The saints groan like a great choir in unison with each other, all of creation (8:22) and the Spirit" (Rom 8:26, 2 Cor 5:5).³⁸⁴

John Calvin explains that this groaning is not simply misery with this life nor a compelling desire to be free that leads to escapism, inactivity, or separation.

A twofold feeling is required in believers— to groan, being loaded with a sense of their present misery, and still to expect with patience their deliverance. They are to be much elevated by the expectation of future blessedness, as to overcome, by their magnanimity, all present troubles, not considering their character and situation in this world but their future glory.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 542.

³⁸³ Marijke Hoek, "Suffering and Weakness in Romans 8:14-39: With Particular Reference to the Role of the Spirit" (PhD Dissertation, The University of Manchester, 2005), 15, ProQuest.

³⁸⁴ Voorwinde, "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians," 84.

³⁸⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, ed. by Timothy George (B&H Publishing Group, 2022), 223, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Paul first sees having the indwelling "firstfruits of the Spirit" in 8:23 as the cause of the believer's groaning for glorification because he is the down payment. In the same way the hardworking farmer would gladly see and enjoy the beginning of his wheat harvest as a preview of things to come, the Holy Spirit is the firstfruits of the harvest of glorification the believer can expect. Paul sees him as the down payment or present promise of the saints' future hope (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph. 1:14). The Spirit has sealed them with the Father's love that will never allow them to be separated (8:31,33,35) from him "for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

The longing for "the redemption of our bodies" (brought on by the down payment of the Spirit) makes life in the "tent" of this current body incapable of satisfying. No matter how happy a person is at the moment, they are never fully content. They always longing for something better. That is because, as Schreiner argues, "There is a longing in us for perfection. There is a sense of incompleteness and an ache in our lives. We are not fully satisfied or fulfilled. We sense that there is more to life." That groaning is satisfied in the resurrection.³⁸⁶ With the Spirit, saints know something better is coming and groan in hope for the resurrection.³⁸⁷

Paul, secondly, sees that having the "firstfruits of the Spirit" as the cause of the believer's groaning because with the Spirit, they possess the mind of Christ. Paul has shown earlier in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit is the resident counselor, teacher, and prayer refiner, but he also argues that he allows the believer to think like Jesus.³⁸⁸ Paul makes this most evident in 1 Corinthians 2. Paul tells the wayward church that when he first came to Corinth, he made no effort to speak eloquently (though he certainly could have). He spoke with the wisdom of the

³⁸⁶ Schreiner, "A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10," 121-129.

³⁸⁷ Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 215.

³⁸⁸ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 368.

Spirit in his power so their faith "would rest on the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4–5). He goes on to explain how the Spirit-indwelt Christian can have this "secret and hidden wisdom of God" (2:7). They can think the very thoughts of God himself by having God (in the person of the Holy Spirit) living in them (2:11). Paul says, because of this, "we have the mind of Christ" (2:15).

The mind of Christ (brought about by the indwelling Holy Spirit) does not allow the believer to be satisfied in this world. Jesus best illustrates this. He did not live a life of ease and comfort. As a suffering servant, Jesus spent most of his ministry groaning. He groaned at the tomb of Lazarus in John 11, where he weeps (11:35) in agony at the unbelief and pain of the effects of sin. Groanings of Christ are typified in Isaiah's pre-description of him as "a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3). It is demonstrated in his high-priestly prayer longing, and groaning for the restoration of glory and fellowship with his Father (John 17:5).

This "mind of Christ" brings groaning with a new perspective on others (eternal, bound for heaven or hell), oneself (eternally loved and set apart by the Father), Christ (priceless), time (short), and ultimate reality (2 Cor. 5:16). This new, clear, in-touch, "Mind of Christ" actual perspective, is the truth by which believers live and groan.³⁸⁹ Spirit-indwelt Christians have the "eyes of the heart" opened (Eph. 1:18) to see it only because the Holy Spirit lives in them. That is why Solomon says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). When saints are empowered to think clearly, groaning (in a world where sin, death, and Satan reigns) is only logical.

Thirdly, Paul sees the "firstfruits of the Spirit" as the cause of the believer's groaning for glorification because he has brought a new hatred of sin. Having a clear picture of just how much sin offends God makes the present struggle with the flesh nearly intolerable. Paul has this hatred

³⁸⁹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 545.

of sin clearly in view. He had just confessed his struggle and frustration with sin.³⁹⁰ In 7:24, he exclaims, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" The Spirit causes the believer (with their new hearts of flesh [Ez. 36:26]) to long to be holy as their Father is holy (1 Peter 1:16). They mourn over their sin. Like David, they cry, "My iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.... I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart" (Psalm 38:4, 8). The desire for the resurrection or glorification of the body is an "upward spiral" that only intensifies this groaning and eager longing for holiness. John writes, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

When the Holy Spirit indwells a believer, he brings holy discontentment with unrighteousness to his life. For the first time, the regenerate man sees sin for what it is and hates it.³⁹¹ He sees Jesus as supremely valuable and longs for him to come quickly. The Spirit groans, adding the intensity that is lacking. Jonathan Edwards resolved on July 23, 1723, that when he found those groanings (of which Paul spoke) in himself, he promoted and gave full vent to them through prayer.³⁹² The believer groans in weakness and longing but is given more longing for the will of God in so doing. The Spirit brings about the willing and working for God's good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

³⁹⁰ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 367.

³⁹¹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 542.

³⁹² Jonathan Edwards, *The Power of God: A Jonathan Edwards Commentary on the Book of Romans*, ed. David S. Lovi and Benjamin Westerhoff (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 188, ProQuest Ebrary.

Romans 8:24

Paul continues, "For in this hope (of the redemption of our bodies [8:23]) we were saved. Now, hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees" (Rom. 8:24)? The apostle makes two statements. A person is saved in hope (8:24a), and hope, by definition, is future-oriented (8:24b). It is only hope if it is based on something that has not yet been seen. It relates, as Calvin explains, "to a future, not present good."³⁹³

A Christian is saved in hope. Paul takes it for granted that his salvation (as long as he lived in this world) is founded on hope.³⁹⁴ He puts all his hope in Christ, that he will save him from the wrath of God he deserves. Present hope in the resurrection bears witness that the saint has been saved from sin's dominion, is being saved from sin's bondage, and will be saved from sin's penalty.³⁹⁵ If this hope causes creation to groan, how much more will it cause humanity that subjected it to groan?³⁹⁶ Paul argues that this hope that does not put to shame is the evidence that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom. 5:5)." "We have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and (as a result) we rejoiced in the hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). Without hope, there is no evidence of faith.

Paul states that this hope is obviously future (directed). It is a groaning now for what will come. Christians hope in what they cannot see.

³⁹³ Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, 234.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 168, ProQuest Ebrary.

³⁹⁶ Osborne, *Romans: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 215.

Romans 8:25

Paul again affirms the future-oriented nature of hope. He explains, “But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8:25).

A hope in Christ that saves is a hope in what cannot be seen yet.³⁹⁷ It involves an expectation that he will rescue from the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). This hope is the evidence that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

This saving and sure hope does not lead to burn-out or an attitude of escapism.³⁹⁸ It empowers the saint with transforming energy. It causes the believer to wait for it with patience. Hope helps him persevere in his faith to the end.³⁹⁹ It is a patient, "in it for the long-haul" hope that spurs the groaning saint on with good works while he waits.

2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Having examined Paul's use of στενάζω in Romans 8:18-25, we must now consider his use of the word in 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. The remainder of this chapter will examine the historical and literary contexts of the passage in order to reveal how Paul's expectation of groaning for the resurrection fit in the larger message of the passage and the book. Examining στενάζω in context will reveal that Paul did not pursue health, wealth, and prosperity in this life as WOF theology does. He groaned in the discontented hope of the resurrection and prescribed that groaning to his audience.

³⁹⁷ Sherwood, *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, and Exegetical Commentary*, 299.

³⁹⁸ Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, 233.

³⁹⁹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 545.

Context of 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Historical Context of 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

The Corinth of Paul's day was a relatively new city, at only ninety years of age. The city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC. Most of the Greek male population was killed, the women and children enslaved, and the city lay desolate for 102 years.⁴⁰⁰ Julius Caesar ordered the city rebuilt as a Roman colony shortly before his death. As a result, the new city was distinctly Roman in architecture, festivals, religion, laws, political institutions, language, city layout, and even inhabitants.⁴⁰¹ The inhabitants were descendants of freedmen and former soldiers from across the empire.⁴⁰² Like other Roman colonies, it was a miniature of its mother city, Rome.⁴⁰³ One ancient exception to the similarity was the imposing Temple of Aphrodite above the city. Corinth's strategic location at the isthmus that connected Achaia to Macedonia and between the Aegean and the Gulf of Corinth made it a burgeoning trade capital.⁴⁰⁴ As a result, the city had a colorful, international culture.

Paul's authorship of 2 Corinthians is generally undisputed.⁴⁰⁵ The apostle had visited the city in the early 50s at the end of his second missionary journey. After a brief visit to Jerusalem, Paul began his third journey from Antioch. He spent two and a half years in Ephesus (where he wrote four letters to the Corinthian church [his second and fourth are 1 and 2 Corinthians])

⁴⁰⁰ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2021), 25, ProQuest Ebrary.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 26.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 10.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 4.

before traveling north to Troas (where he wrote this epistle). Paul refers to his first letter and a painful visit (13:2). He mentions his work in Ephesus (1:8), and coming quickly from Troas (2:13). These events match his activities at the beginning of Acts 20. The manuscript appears to be written from Troas since it is the last place the apostle indicates he had gone (2:13, 7:5). It was most likely written in the year 55.⁴⁰⁶

Paul endured a tumultuous relationship with the Corinthian Church. They had struggled with rampant sin, been drawn in by false teachers, and rejected his leadership. To Paul's great relief, shortly before he wrote the letter, they had rejected the false teachers and repented. The sins of 1 Corinthians, such as the man with his father's wife (2:5-6), had been addressed. The letter served to inform them of his plans, collect for the saints in Jerusalem, warn and expel the false teachers, and describe God's good purpose in the trials.⁴⁰⁷

Knowing Paul's audience greatly aids in understanding his message. The content of the letter indicates a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles. The number of OT references in the letter indicates that there was probably a large Jewish contingent in the Corinthian church.⁴⁰⁸ Paul uses the word for a tent in (5:1), which seems to refer to the Hebrew Tabernacle. Paul's Greek audience would have been familiar with being tried before the governor's tribunal. He mentions the Judgement seat of Christ (5:10) and uses the βήματος, the bema tribunal.⁴⁰⁹ Some church members may have been familiar with the concept, having seen Paul's trial before the tribunal when he first visited them (Acts 18:12-18).

⁴⁰⁶ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 18.

⁴⁰⁷ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 440.

⁴⁰⁸ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 25.

⁴⁰⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all Greek New Testament passages referenced are from the *SBL Greek New Testament* (Atlanta: Logos Software, 2010).

Literary Context of 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Paul had been deeply concerned for the wayward church in Corinth. Much of the book is centered around the relief he felt at the church, rejecting the false teachers and returning to the true gospel and a right relationship with him.

Paul's tone is varied. He sounds "heavy-handed" at times but also light and jubilant. This variance has caused some to question if he wrote the entire epistle. These differences can be explained by recognizing that Paul may have used a rhetorical device in his writing that caused him to spend the early part of the letter in a gentler, rapport-building discussion and the latter in a stern warning.⁴¹⁰ The consistency of themes throughout the letter also lends weight to Paul as the exclusive author. He consistently returns to the theme of boasting, his apostolic sincerity, fleshly wisdom, the grace of God, and the Day of the Lord.⁴¹¹

Much of 2 Corinthians deals with God's grace in suffering. He begins by informing the church of the persecution he experienced in Ephesus. He even "despairs of life itself," dealing with the opposition there (2 Cor. 1:8). To add insult to injury, the false teachers use Paul's suffering to criticize his authentic apostleship.⁴¹² Their argument seems to have been, "If Paul is a godly teacher, God would not allow him to suffer as he does."⁴¹³ Paul responds to the false teachers' slights by providing incredible insight into God's good purpose in suffering. He informs the Corinthians that suffering is for their sake (1:6), to cause his team not to rely on God (1:9), and to help them gain a greater reward in heaven (4:17).

⁴¹⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 41.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

⁴¹² John Barclay, *2 Corinthians: Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2003), 1357.

⁴¹³ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 251.

2 Corinthians is a letter of heightened emotions. The book does not follow a set pattern of doctrine and application, typical in Paul's other letters. Here, he mainly speaks about his struggles and his gospel-empowered relationship with God and others. The letter is an in-depth analysis of the grace of God working in the heart of a mature Christian that modern-day readers would do well to imitate.

Analysis of Paul's use of στενάζω in 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate how Paul used στενάζω in 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10. Far from seeking prosperity, health, and wealth (as WOF theology affirms he had), the apostle clearly chose to suffer. Suffering made him spiritually stronger and more hopeful. It caused him to groan for his own resurrection.⁴¹⁴ Groaning for the resurrection was Paul's motive for speaking the gospel (4:7-15), not losing heart (4:16-18), remaining in good courage (5:1-8), and living to please God (5:9-10).

Groaning for the Resurrection Empowered Speaking the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:7-15)

Context

Paul's statements about his hope in the gospel ministry are better understood from an examination of the context of 3:4-4:6. His gospel ministry was based on the knowledge that God had commissioned him as a minister of the new covenant (3:6). He practiced this ministry of sharing the gospel with boldness because the life-giving (4:6) new covenant far exceeded the old covenant of "death" (3:7-11).⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴ Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, 322.

⁴¹⁵ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 240.

Paul reveals that "Since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (3:12). He conducted this ministry with boldness because of his hope in unveiled access to Christ (3:13), becoming more like Christ (3:18) and eternity in the presence of Christ through the resurrection (4:14). Paul says, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart" (4:1). It would be difficult to be discouraged with such hope-fueled motivation. Paul kept his courage-producing "hopes up" by reminding himself of the power of the gospel message.

2 Corinthians 4:7

Paul begins this section by highlighting that weakness is God's chosen mode of sharing the gospel. He explains, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Paul carried the gospel message in his body like a frail, cheap clay container (4:7a).⁴¹⁶ A metal jar could be repaired, a glass one melted down, but a broken clay jar must be discarded.⁴¹⁷ Despite the disposable container, the treasure inside was glorious. It offered an unveiled, personal knowledge of God's glory and eternity with him. Nevertheless, it was not stored in the glamorous chest it deserved but in a disposable, mass-produced, ordinary jar.⁴¹⁸

The apostle knew that man was taken from the clay (Gen. 2:7) and formed by the potter (Job 10:9, Jer. 18:1-10) to walk with God.⁴¹⁹ Soon enough, he would have a body "eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1-4), designed for a new earth (1 Cor. 15:35-58) to do that very thing. For

⁴¹⁶ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 440.

⁴¹⁷ Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 145, ProQuest Ebrary.

⁴¹⁸ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 253.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

now, he must deal with what Garland calls his “disintegrating morality.”⁴²⁰ He must groan in the "earthly tent" (5:1) by faith rather than sight” (2 Cor. 5:4-7). Until the resurrection, humanity will always be groaning (2 Cor. 5:2,4) because he is in a chronic state of returning to the dust (Gen. 3:7). Until the resurrection, saints will always carry the good news of Christ’s offer of peace and eternal life, in a humble, disintegrating vessel.

God prefers to present the glorious gospel in a clay jar since the common container only accentuates the treasure within. There is no confusion between the package and the present. God displays his power by using weak people to carry his marvelous gift (4:7b).⁴²¹ The focus remains on him alone. Guthrie observes that the "verb of being ἵ communicates that in the minister’s weakness, the power can only ‘be’ of God,” as Paul reinforces later in the epistle (2 Cor. 12:1-10).⁴²² The gospel’s power “belongs to God” τοῦ θεοῦ and “not to us” μὴ ἐξ ἡμῶν.⁴²³

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Paul describes ministry as a jar of clay; “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

Paul did not live a prosperous and easy life in the gospel ministry as WOF theology claims and promotes for its followers.⁴²⁴ His life demonstrates that he expected to suffer and

⁴²⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 220.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 249.

⁴²² Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 255.

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century*, 35.

practiced hope-filled endurance.⁴²⁵ Guthrie points out that 4:8-11 is only “the first of four hardship lists” Paul makes in 2 Corinthians.⁴²⁶ The others are found in 6:4b-10, 11:23b-33, and 12:10.⁴²⁷ Suffering is expected. The structure of the text indicates that “in every way” (4:8), Paul and fellow ministers are “afflicted,” “perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “forsaken” (4:8-9).⁴²⁸ This is not an easy life or a comfortable ministry, yet tremendous help exists to help the fragile ministers of the treasure of the gospel.

Garland notes that “the four pairs of participles set in antithesis in 4:8-9 illustrate what Paul means about being fragile and how God’s power restores him.”⁴²⁹ The fragile, commonplace minister is “in every way- afflicted,” yet God's power within him is greater than the external forces and keeps him from being “crushed.” “Crushed” comes from στενοχωρέω which means to be in a narrow place.⁴³⁰ This word shares the same root word with στενάζω "groaning," used in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4. The root of both words is στενός, which means narrow or strait.⁴³¹ The weak minister is “in every way- perplexed,” but God’s greater joy keeps him from being “driven to despair.” The minister of the gospel is “in every way- persecuted" but "not forsaken." God has promised that that will never happen (Heb. 13:5). The minister of the gospel (in a jar of clay) is “in every way- struck down” in this life, but the greater power of God comes

⁴²⁵ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 251.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 179.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 180.

⁴³⁰ Thayer, et al., "G4729 - Stenochōreō" - *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*.

⁴³¹ Thayer, et al., "G4728 – Stenos" - *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*.

and sustains him so that he is “not destroyed.”⁴³² There is a continual dying to self so that Christ may be glorified through a resurrected life, both in this life and the one to come.⁴³³

Paul experiences difficulty in the gospel ministry, which is normal, constructive, and God-glorifying. He had been "afflicted in every way." Afflictions are typical for followers of Christ and ministers of the new covenant. They are part of the ministry he has experienced and will be the norm of what others should expect. The difficulties are constructive. They help him gain confidence that he will not be “crushed,” “driven to despair,” or “destroyed.” Difficulties are normal, constructive, and opportunities.⁴³⁴ They allow God to show himself strong in the weak, fragile clay vessels that represent him. They also bind the church together in love as believers share one another’s burdens.

2 Corinthians 4:10-11

Paul demonstrates that difficulty also validates the authenticity of gospel ministry. He writes that he and other “jar of clay” ministers are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:10-11).

Garland observes that Paul uses a word for “death,” *νέκρωσιν* that describes the final decaying condition of a corpse.⁴³⁵ He probably uses the word to show that, unlike manmade religion, authentic Christianity does not manifest itself in comfort or privilege. It shows itself in

⁴³² Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 147.

⁴³³ Nauss, *God's Glory and Our Hope in Suffering: Romans 8:18-30*, 1.

⁴³⁴ Voorwinde, “Paul’s Emotions in 2 Corinthians,” 84.

⁴³⁵ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 183.

suffering from the opposition to the world's system, the flesh and the devil (James 3:15). This causes the same suffering, for the sake of others, that Christ modeled in his ignominious death. The verb Paul uses in 4:11 παραδίδωμι, translated as "being given over," is the same word he used when describing Jesus being handed over to death (Rom. 8:32, 1 Cor. 11:23).⁴³⁶ Garland explains that Paul understands himself to be "handed over" as Jesus was.⁴³⁷

The life of Jesus is manifest in Christians who take up their crosses and suffer as he did.⁴³⁸ The accusations against Paul, that his suffering is evidence of God's displeasure, are turned on his opponents.⁴³⁹ He reasons that suffering, far from showing he is not a true apostle, validates his ministry. He is like Christ, the ultimate sacrificial sufferer. Guthrie clarifies:

The Christian minister's 'dying' and 'death' lays the foundation for people to experience the life-giving ministry of the Spirit." In other words, the suffering that Paul experiences as a normal course in his ministry, rather than invalidating his work, serves as another mark of authenticity, for he follows the pattern of his crucified Lord.⁴⁴⁰

2 Corinthians 4:12

Paul's experiences of death and suffering were not a loss. They were valuable because they worked life in the Corinthian church. He concludes his thought on the death-to-life dealing power of suffering, "So death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:12).

Paul explained a similar sentiment at the beginning of the letter; "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation" (1:6a).⁴⁴¹ Paul was afflicted for their salvation, sanctification, and

⁴³⁶ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 183.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 148.

⁴³⁹ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 440.

⁴⁴⁰ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 251.

⁴⁴¹ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 184.

joy in the Lord. Even his sufferings, which were not directly related to the church, still worked out for their good because they allowed him to comfort them with the comfort he received from God (1:5). The sufferings of persecution emboldened others (Phil. 1:14-17) as they humbled him and glorified God (4:7). They produced greater endurance in him to share with others (12:3). Spiritual life was at work in the Corinthian church because death was at work in Paul. The apostle is motivated to continue suffering in ministry because of the spiritual life he knows it will bring to others.⁴⁴² This delight in others and especially the joy that he will feel at the resurrection and coming of Christ (1:14, 4:14) is Paul's driving motivation to carry on the difficult, death-dealing work of gospel ministry.

It is unrealistic and even spiritually dangerous to work to avoid persecution and suffering, as WOF theology does. Moo points out, "Committed Christians living will always rub the world the wrong way at some point, and friction is inevitable."⁴⁴³ Paul knew that God's good purpose to transform his children into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) is most often worked out in the pain and sweat of suffering. His own desire to "know Him and the power of his resurrection" came as saints share in his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10).⁴⁴⁴ Word of Faith theology does not rejoice in suffering and persecution as the apostle did. It does not groan in hope. It focuses on escaping hardship and finding the easy road to health, wealth, comfort, and pleasure in this life. As a result, WOF followers miss out on the best treasures this life has to offer. They miss spiritual maturity,

⁴⁴² Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 148.

⁴⁴³ Moo, *Romans: The New NIV Application Commentary*, 266.

⁴⁴⁴ Nauss, *God's Glory and Our Hope in Suffering: Romans 8:18-30*, 2.

knowledge of God, and treasures in heaven while not looking much like Christ's disciples (called to take up their cross [Matt. 16:24]).⁴⁴⁵

2 Corinthians 4:13

Paul continues, "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak" (2 Cor. 4:13).

He finds a parallel between his situation and the psalmist writing Psalm 116:10. Both had the same spirit of faith.⁴⁴⁶ The psalmist believed that God would deliver him from the wicked. Paul believed it, too. Like the psalmist, Paul's complete belief in God's deliverance propelled him to speak.⁴⁴⁷

Paul spoke the life-giving gospel despite the death active in him and the suffering he experienced because he knew God would deliver him in life or death. It is clear that he is speaking the gospel because the gospel message is the repeated context of this chapter. Speaking, it was his ministry of mercy (4:1), what he must proclaim (4:5), and how he revealed the treasure (4:7).⁴⁴⁸ He must speak "in order that the life of Jesus might be manifest" (4:10-11), and so others might live (4:12).⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁵ Nauss, *God's Glory and Our Hope in Suffering: Romans 8:18-30*, 2.

⁴⁴⁶ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 150.

⁴⁴⁷ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 263.

⁴⁴⁸ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 440.

⁴⁴⁹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 262.

2 Corinthians 4:14

Paul reveals why he can speak up confidently. He speaks, "knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (2 Cor. 4:13-14).

The apostle was confident enough to continue to speak the gospel despite constant suffering because of his overwhelming confidence in the resurrection. This belief had given him confidence in the face of death before in Ephesus when he and his companions despaired of life (1:8) and felt they had received the sentence of death (1:9a). The encounter with death only bolstered his faith. It made him further "rely on God who raises the dead" (1:9b). Guthrie clarifies, "Paul's boldness and endurance stems from his relationship with God, whose work in this world includes the defeat of death and hope of a future that transcends the present afflictions he experiences in his ministry, even if those afflictions lead to a premature death" (4:16-18).⁴⁵⁰

Paul's entire ministry is built on the resurrection. If it were not so, he would be a liar and the most miserable man on earth (1 Cor. 15:19). The hope that fuels him is the resurrection of the body to eternal life and fellowship with God.⁴⁵¹ Death may be at work in him now, wearing him down physically, but it ultimately holds no power.⁴⁵² Armed with this certainty, he boldly speaks and faces the inevitable suffering that follows.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 263.

⁴⁵¹ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 152.

⁴⁵² Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 186.

2 Corinthians 4:15

Paul shares the great motive for sharing the gospel; “For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:15).

The apostle continues to speak the gospel in the face of suffering for the good of people ("for your sake") so God would ultimately get the glory he deserves.⁴⁵³ God will be glorified as people become worshipers.⁴⁵⁴ This will increase thanksgiving to God. For too long, people lavished their praise on what is not praiseworthy. They had not acknowledged God’s glory and worshiped creation (Rom. 1:21). The thanksgiving of man at salvation abounds to the glory of God. The spread of the gospel also causes those with a right worshiping relationship with God to rejoice. They give thanks because hearts of flesh love God and people. They delight in more praise to their Father and more people spared from the horrors of hell. Real saints will rejoice and give thanks as Paul speaks because they know more worshipers have been dedicated to the Lord. The glory of God was Paul’s ultimate goal. It is usually given while simultaneously blessing people.

Paul clarifies that God's grace in the gospel continually leads to gratitude.⁴⁵⁵ Gratitude leads to glorifying God. The apostle would bring as many souls as possible to saving faith (1 Cor 9:19-23) so they might experience this new gratitude. Paul was motivated by the desire for praise, ringing from the dirty streets of Corinth and the golden streets of the new Jerusalem.

⁴⁵³ Voorwinde, “Paul’s Emotions in 2 Corinthians,” 84.

⁴⁵⁴ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 2003), 17.

⁴⁵⁵ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 186.

Garland summarizes that “Paul expresses confidence that his suffering is for the glory of God, that it is temporary, that it affects the renewal of the inner person, and that God is preparing an eternal abundance of glory beyond all measure for him (and other Christians). He sets his sights on eternal, invisible realities.”⁴⁵⁶

Groaning for the Resurrection Empowers Not Losing Heart (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

2 Corinthians 4:16

Paul summarizes, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16).

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection was essential to Paul’s gospel ministry because it helped him not to “lose heart.” Paul begins the verse with $\delta\iota\omicron$ “So” in order to tie 4:16-18 back to 4:7-15. Because he knew that God “would raise him” and bring him “into his presence” (4:14), he did not lose heart.⁴⁵⁷ He remained confident and bold, sharing the gospel despite the overwhelming pressure of being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down in every way (4:8-9).⁴⁵⁸ This confidence came from seeing things as they truly were. Guthrie points to an OT parallel of Paul’s correct spiritual vision.

Like Elisha, whose servant only saw the armies of Syria surrounding the city and not the greater number of horses and chariots of fire in the hills surrounding the Syrians (2 Kings 6:15–19), Paul incessantly points the Corinthians to the greater spiritual realities behind what could be understood as a discouraging situation.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁶ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 186.

⁴⁵⁷ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 442.

⁴⁵⁸ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 150.

⁴⁵⁹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 269.

From the outside, it appeared that Paul's ministry was in dire straits; his suffering was not sustainable, and he should have every reason to be discouraged. The reality behind the scenes was not dire at all. Even though the "clay jar" (4:7) and "tent" (5:1) of his body were wasting away physically now, he would soon receive a superior resurrected one. In the meantime, the struggles and physical pain were working out all sorts of incredible, long-term benefits. They made Paul a better comforter (1:8), caused greater reliance on God (1:9), displayed the glory of God and treasure of the gospel -in contrast to his weakness (4:7), allowed God's grace to match and exceed all the afflictions that tried to crush, drive to despair and destroy him (4:8-9), manifested the life of Jesus in their dying (4:10-11), and were preparing an eternal weight of glorious rewards in heaven (4:17). Despite appearances, hope and confidence were the actual reality of Paul's situation, all because the body he currently inhabited was only a temporary fixture.

Paul does not lose heart because his "inner self is being renewed day by day," even if the "outer self is wasting away." His ἔξω ἄνθρωπος (outer self) was his physical self, the part visible to others.⁴⁶⁰ The "inner self" was his spiritual self, only visible to God. Even though his outer self was wearing down and heading towards an inevitable date with death, his inner self was constantly being renewed day by day. It was heading towards an inevitable date with increasing glory (3:18, 4:11) because it had been united with Christ as a new creation (5:17).⁴⁶¹

Paul argues that the sufferings he experienced on mission for the gospel had tremendous value in making him more like Jesus. The contrast between the outer self (wasting away) and the

⁴⁶⁰ Thayer, et al., "ἄνθρωπος" - *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, 123.

⁴⁶¹ Voorwinde, "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians," 84.

inner self (renewed) became starker by the day.⁴⁶² As the outer self became more wrinkled, feeble and frail, the inner self became more exquisite. The inner self is what is renewed after the image of its creator, and what becomes more and more like Jesus by the power of the Spirit (3:18). As the trials increasingly turned the outer man of dust back into dust, they simultaneously turned the inner man into an increasingly more perfect image of the man of heaven (1 Cor. 15:49).

WOF theology is out of step with Paul in accepting and embracing the destruction of the outer self. He gloried in his weaknesses (1 Cor. 1:27, 9:22, 2 Cor. 11:30, 12:10). If Jesus himself was subject to weakness for the sake of humanity's redemption (Heb. 5:2), it does not follow that those who claim to follow him (Christians) can avoid suffering, persecution, and weakness.⁴⁶³

2 Corinthians 4:17

Paul continues to explain why he does not lose heart as he considers the hope of the resurrection. He explains, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17).

The apostle puts the turmoil he was experiencing into perspective. He describes the affliction as ἐλαφρόν “light” in contrast with βάρος “the weight” of glory he will receive later in the verse.⁴⁶⁴

Paul’s resurrection perspective helps him to see that his afflictions are momentary. It is only light and momentary affliction when he considers the eternity he will see in his resurrection body. The seventy to eighty years (he knows he probably will not see) are a mere “watch in the night” (Psalm 90:4) compared to the timeless existence he will share with his Savior and the

⁴⁶² Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 190.

⁴⁶³ Nauss, *God’s Glory and Our Hope in Suffering: Romans 8:18-30*, 2.

⁴⁶⁴ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 269.

saints in the new Jerusalem. This long view of the reality of his life defines his suffering.⁴⁶⁵ The perspective helps him to see that the trials are only momentary.⁴⁶⁶ The afflictions only flicker on and off “the screen of his life,” but pleasures in his resurrected body will endure.

Paul’s resurrection perspective also helps him to see that his afflictions are light. Pain is lessened by knowing that suffering is short. The brevity of his life in this earthly body compared to his new one, like Christ’s, helps him realize that his suffering is not all that significant because it will not last. His afflictions are only light and momentary compared to the life his resurrected body will lead.

The outer self’s affliction also fades in the light of his resurrection because all of it is preparing for him an “eternal weight” of glorious reward. Paul uses βάρος, which the ESV translates as “weight.” It is a difficult word to translate because it means to be brought down by an excessive burden.⁴⁶⁷ Some ancients used the word to describe an excessive burden that is oppressive.⁴⁶⁸ Here, Paul uses it positively and memorably to speak of the fullness and excessive weight of an accumulated mass of glory.⁴⁶⁹ Garland points to Paul’s OT background and adds, “The expression ‘weight of glory’ echoes the etymological depth of the Hebrew word for glory kābôd” which describes the heaviness of Paul’s expected reward in heaven.⁴⁷⁰ Paul’s afflictions were light and momentary in the view of his rewards.⁴⁷¹ They were actually not sacrifices at all

⁴⁶⁵ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 154.

⁴⁶⁶ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 442.

⁴⁶⁷ Thayer, et al., " βάρος" - *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*.

⁴⁶⁸ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 272.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 190.

⁴⁷¹ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 154.

but wise investments in eternity. They were such good, wise investments that they were hardly worth noticing because of the benefits they yielded.

The yield of reward for suffering in service to the King was probably not a new concept to the Corinthian church. They had likely heard Jesus' instructions, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matt. 5:11). The Master explains why his disciples are blessed (or happy) when persecuted, like Paul. They are blessed because they are making long-term, high-yield investments. Jesus says, "Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12).

2 Corinthians 4:18

Paul explains that affliction prepares reward "as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Paul knew that light and momentary suffering for Christ brings eternal and extravagant rewards (4:17).⁴⁷² Those are the facts about God's reward and suffering.

The facts of reward are only encouraging and only keep suffering ministers from losing heart when those ministers keep their eyes on the resurrection. Paul is only encouraged because he actively looks to heaven and the rewards stored there. Guthrie points out that the present participle translated "look" "derives from the verb σκοπέω, which can be used to mean "to look out for," "notice," or "pay careful attention to" and has to do with giving special scrutiny to or being thoughtfully aware of something."⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 441.

⁴⁷³ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 273.

The unseen things Paul looked to are outside of the physical world. This spiritual dimension is not only the dwelling place of God but also where saints receive spiritual blessings from heavenly places (Eph. 1:3) and where Christians are seated with Christ (Eph. 2:6). It is the same place where the enemies of God operate and Christians wrestle against “spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). The “unseen” spiritual realm, outside of time and space, is the place that is not transient but eternal. It is a safe place to store rewards because there “moth and rust do not corrupt” (Matt. 6:19-21). This spiritual realm cannot be observed physically. It requires diligent looking, reminding, and grace to see with the eyes of faith (Eph. 1:18-19). For Paul, there was tremendous discouragement-killing power in setting his eyes on this unseen place and unseen things. His continual focus on them gave him a proper and victorious perspective on his transient suffering.

Groaning for the Resurrection Empowers Good Courage (2 Corinthians 5:1-8)

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection was essential in Paul's gospel ministry because it helped him to remain courageous. He faced suffering for the gospel with "good courage" (5:6,8). He knew that "to be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord" (5:8). Suffering in this life as he proclaimed the gospel was a regular part of his life and worked out for his good, making him more like Christ (3:18, 4:16). It helped him to continue to "look" (4:18) to the only reward he could keep.⁴⁷⁴

This hope of the resurrection, which allowed Paul to remain confident and joyful, is most explicitly explained in 5:1-8.⁴⁷⁵ It is the living hope (1 Peter 1:3-4) that WOF theology does not

⁴⁷⁴ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 156.

⁴⁷⁵ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 442.

know or promote. It empowers believers to suffer while living a godly life (2 Tim. 3:12). It does not set its sights on health, wealth, and prosperity (which will only be lost in this life) but on true prosperity that will be kept into the next.⁴⁷⁶

2 Corinthians 5:1

Paul explains the hope of the resurrection; “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1).

The apostle begins with “For we know.” He explains why he continues looking to heaven (4:18); “he looks because he knows that the resurrection is coming.” If “the tent” of his body is destroyed, he has a “building” of a new glorified body waiting. It is instructive to remember that chapter breaks (not developed until the early thirteenth century) were not a part of Paul’s letter.⁴⁷⁷ The discussion about the resurrected body Paul is groaning for continues from chapter 4.⁴⁷⁸ He also begins with the confession “For we know” because it is the fundamental theological conviction on which his faith is built.⁴⁷⁹ Οἶδαμεν means that he “knows” his own resurrection is coming in a deep, experiential, and confident way.⁴⁸⁰ He knows his resurrection is certain because Jesus promised it (John 6:40). He is sure of it because he has seen a resurrected man

⁴⁷⁶ Jesus often describes investing in the kingdom of heaven as trading this life for the next. The best life is to come. Jesus tells his disciples to be motivated by what they can get and keep there. He tells his servants to watch and wait for the time of his coming (the Parousia) and the inauguration of the future kingdom. He will come again when they least expect. Like a householder (Matt. 24:44), wise servants (24:55), and virgins (25:12), true disciples need to be ready, watching, and waiting, for they “know neither the day nor the hour” (25:13) of his return.

⁴⁷⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations* (London: Oxford University Press., 1977), 347.

⁴⁷⁸ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 194.

⁴⁷⁹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 277.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

personally. He remembers his own encounters with the resurrected Christ (Acts 9:1-9, 2 Cor. 12:2-9) and what he has heard from other eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:3-8).⁴⁸¹

The “tent” of his earthly body compares to the “jars of clay” (4:7). It is cheap, quickly set up and taken down. It is a dwelling place meant to be transient in the transient world (4:18).⁴⁸² Here, as in LXX of Isaiah 38:12, death is likened to someone ὁ καταλύων σκηνὴν taking a tent down.⁴⁸³ If his tent is taken down, Paul has nothing to lose. He stands to gain because a permanent resurrected building, like Christ’s resurrected body, ultimately awaits.

This building is in the same place he has been looking (4:18). It is eternal in the heavens, just like his reward. This house is not made with hands, meaning it is not made with human hands.⁴⁸⁴ It is not made with hands because it is what God alone can do. He uses the exact phrase to speak of spiritual circumcision that only God can do (Col. 2:11). Of the eighteen times οἰκοδομή occurs in the NT, six are translated “building” in the ESV.⁴⁸⁵

Most commentators understand the building to refer to the resurrection body Paul had described in detail in his first letter to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 15:44-45).⁴⁸⁶ Karl Barth understood the hope of the resurrection body to be such an essential part of 1 Corinthians that he called it “the secret nerve of the whole (letter).”⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸¹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 277.

⁴⁸² Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 194.

⁴⁸³ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 277.

⁴⁸⁴ Voorwinde, “Paul’s Emotions in 2 Corinthians,” 83.

⁴⁸⁵ Thayer, et al., “οἰκοδομή” -*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*.

⁴⁸⁶ Thiselton, *2 Corinthians: A Short Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 64.

⁴⁸⁷ Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 18.

The building is a fitting analogy for the saint's promised new resurrected body (fitted for permanent life on a new earth).⁴⁸⁸ Its permanence stands in contrast to the believers' σκηνούς, “tent” of a body that will soon be folded up. The Adamic tent (1 Cor. 15:49) in which the saints groan will be replaced with a building from God “eternal in the heavens.”⁴⁸⁹ This knowledge gave Paul hope and confidence.

It is interesting to note how most English translations treat the word. The KJV, ESV, NASB, NIV, and CSB all translated οἰκοδομὴν “building,” except the NLT, which calls it a “house.” The Message (as a paraphrase) skips past Paul’s housing analogy entirely, calling it “resurrection bodies.”

2 Corinthians 5:2

Paul continues describing life in the present condition awaiting the resurrection, “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling” (2 Cor. 5:2).

In the tent of the temporary body, we στενάζω “groan.” Στενάζω (groaning) is the natural reaction to longing for the “heavenly dwelling” (the new glorified body). The crushing pressure of longing for the building from God, the resurrected Savior, and the eternal weight of glory causes a discontented groan.⁴⁹⁰

Paul describes his own experience of groaning and that of his traveling companions. However, he is also describing the groaning of all Christians with a proper perspective of “looking to what is unseen” (4:18). Voorwinde supports this view, arguing that it is clear from

⁴⁸⁸ Kruse argues that since Paul wrote Romans 8:18-24 shortly after this 2 Corinthians passage “it is reasonable to interpret 2 Cor. 5:1 in the light of Romans 8:23 and so conclude that the building from God refers to the resurrection body promised to believers.” See Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 160.

⁴⁸⁹ Schreiner, “A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10,” 122.

⁴⁹⁰ Thayer, et al., “στενάζω” - *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*.

his use of the first person plural “we groan” in context. He argues that typically, Paul uses it to identify himself with his fellow missionaries (1:8; 4:8; 5:14: 6:6, 10), but in the present context, the first person plural is to be understood as the experience (not just of the missionaries) but of the readers as well.⁴⁹¹ He calls this communal groaning “the expression of the eschatological tension felt by all those who, because of the Spirit’s work, already belong to the age to come but are still living under the old order, ‘this present evil age’” (Gal 1:4).⁴⁹²

This longing for the heavenly dwelling is undoubtedly a healthy, lively, vitality-giving groaning. It is the groaning of a child waiting at the top of the stairs on Christmas day. It is the groaning of a young man ready to meet his bride at the altar. Such longing, whether the groaning is inward or outward, has one’s heart and mind focused upward.⁴⁹³

2 Corinthians 5:3-4

Paul says, "If indeed by putting it on, we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Cor. 5:3-4).

Paul groans for his new body. It is challenging to interpret what Paul is speaking of when he refers to not being "found naked" (5:3).⁴⁹⁴ He could mean that he does not anticipate a bodiless existence.⁴⁹⁵ He could also mean he wishes Christ to return and receive his glorified

⁴⁹¹ Voorwinde, “Paul’s Emotions in 2 Corinthians,” 84.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Nauss, *God’s Glory and Our Hope in Suffering: Romans 8:18-30*, 1.

⁴⁹⁴ Thiselton, *2 Corinthians: A Short Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 64.

⁴⁹⁵ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 442.

body rather than some type of body in an intermediate state.⁴⁹⁶ Either way, the apostle clarifies that he eagerly anticipates his resurrected body, the building from God (5:1). He changes the illustration here to clothing. His new resurrected body will be like new clothing for his inner man. Wright points out that, “He looks forward to eventual bodily resurrection, to a new body which will have left behind the decay and corruption of the present one, and which will function in relation to present life like a new and larger suit of clothes to be put on over the existing ones.”⁴⁹⁷

He and his companions στενάζω “groan” and are burdened that what is mortal (their current earthly bodies) would be swallowed up (or taken directly up) by life. He probably anticipates the Parousia, the coming of Christ, which would involve an immediate transfer from the mortal tent to the heavenly building.⁴⁹⁸ He knew that when Christ called his saints to him at his return, they would immediately gain all the fullness of their resurrected bodies.

Daugherty supports this view, confronting those who have followed the background of anthropological dualism, which holds that Paul's groaning was a fear of a disembodied state.⁴⁹⁹ He states that their interpretation “does not accord with other Pauline references to groaning, which has longing desire rather than fear in view and other statements of Paul’s attitude toward death.”⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁶ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 284.

⁴⁹⁷ N. T. Wright, *Resurrection Son of God Volume 3: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 368, ProQuest Ebrary.

⁴⁹⁸ Schreiner, “A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10,” 122.

⁴⁹⁹ Daugherty, “Naked Bodies and Heavenly Clothing in 2 Corinthians 5:3,” 221.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

Paul groans for this in 5:2 and again in 5:4. He longed for his resurrected body with such intense delight that living in this one caused him to groan. Garland explains that for Paul, “sighing is the natural language of one whose heart has turned toward God and hungers for God’s final redemption.”⁵⁰¹

There is a stark contrast between the saints' current, Adamic, earthly bodies and future, resurrected Christ-like bodies (1 Cor. 15:42-49).⁵⁰² They naturally groan “with longing” (5:2) and “being burdened” (5:4) because they are caught in the tension between their present reality and future hope.⁵⁰³

2 Corinthians 5:5

Having concluded his statements on the nature of the believer’s future hope in 5:1-4, Paul returns to his discussion of God's preparation and wonderful eternal purposes in the resurrection in 4:17.⁵⁰⁴ He says, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor. 5:5).

God’s mysterious plan for the fullness of time is “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10). His superb goal is to dwell with the saints as they walk in resurrected bodies on a glorious, new earth (Rev. 21:3). The future is meant to be a bodied existence with God. Paul says he has "prepared us for this very thing." It is no surprise that Paul is groaning for what he was prepared for.

⁵⁰¹ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 205.

⁵⁰² Voorwinde, “Paul’s Emotions in 2 Corinthians,” 83.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 161.

God confirmed his plan and promise of resurrection by giving the "Spirit as a guarantee." Paul repeats the Spirit's guarantee he explained in 1:22 and would later explain to the Romans (Rom. 8:23) and Ephesians (Eph.1:14). The comparison with Romans 8:23 is especially striking. Both texts look forward to the resurrection, view present suffering as transient, and attribute the groaning to the Spirit's presence.⁵⁰⁵ Daugherty concludes, "Whether described as 'first fruit (Rom. 8.23)' or 'down payment' (2 Cor. 5.5), the Spirit causes Christians to yearn for more of what they experience in part now."⁵⁰⁶

Paul illustrates the legal practice of his Roman world. Just as a down payment guarantees goods and services, the installment of the Spirit in a believer guarantees the resurrection.⁵⁰⁷ Evidence of the Spirit's work in a saint's life (such as fruit) is evidence that he can confidently know that when the tent of his life is folded up, he has a building from God waiting in the heavens (5:1).⁵⁰⁸

2 Corinthians 5:6-7

Paul continues, "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:6-7).

Knowing that he has a resurrected body waiting in the heavens when his earthly life is over, a building from God waiting when the tent is taken down, causes great boldness in Paul's gospel ministry. It fills him with "good courage." Resurrection expectation is the solid reason he

⁵⁰⁵ Daugherty, "Naked Bodies and Heavenly Clothing in 2 Corinthians 5:3," 217.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 284.

⁵⁰⁸ Voorwinde, "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians," 83.

does not fear persecution.⁵⁰⁹ After all, it is only light and momentary and is accumulating a weight of glorious rewards (4:16). Even if the enemies of the gospel take his earthly life, he has a better one waiting (5:1). Resurrection expectation is also the reason he can boldly correct the Corinthian church. He is free to speak the truth in love because he knows their approval of him is as fleeting as his earthly life. He must answer to God (5:10). Heaven's higher court overrules their lesser ones.

2 Corinthians 5:8

Paul confirms, “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

Again, as in the previous verse and 1 Corinthians 15, he affirms that resurrection hope gave him “good courage” for gospel ministry. He is courageous because he “would rather be at home with the Lord” than still be in this body.⁵¹⁰

This sounds like a strange thing to say. Paul is not saying that he did not love the ministry or have a desire to live. He just loved heaven more. He expressed the same preference to the Philippian church: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). To live means more service to the church he delights in; to die is the greater delight of being with Christ. He explains his dilemma, “If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell. I am hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account” (Phil. 1:22-24).

⁵⁰⁹ Thiselton, *2 Corinthians: A Short Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, 64.

⁵¹⁰ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 442.

Paul expects to be with the Lord instantly upon death. “To be away from the body” is to be “at home with the Lord.” There is no room for “soul sleep” here. Guthrie argues that Paul assumes believers are conscious upon death.⁵¹¹ If death brought on a state where they are not conscious of the Lord it would actually be worse than life since the saints’ great delight is knowledge of Christ’s abiding presence (Phil. 1:20–23, Luke 23:43, Acts 7:59).⁵¹² Paul likely had the intermediate state in mind if he died before Christ's return.⁵¹³ The apostle prefers the final state with a new glorified body, like Christ's, to walk on a new earth with his Messiah in a new physical existence.⁵¹⁴

Groaning for the Resurrection Empowers Living to Please God (2 Corinthians 5:9-10)

Paul explains, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

Paul’s hope of the resurrection drives him to please Christ wherever he is, in his body, now (away from home), or before the judgment (at home). Daugherty supports this interpretation from 5:10 in two ways. “First, ‘for’ in v. 10 introduces impending judgment as the reason he wants to please the Lord. Secondly, v. 10 specifies that believers will be judged for the deeds committed while in the body, not for the deeds committed in the intermediate state.”⁵¹⁵ Not all

⁵¹¹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 287.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ The intermediate state is a little-known form where it is understood the saint is awake, alert, and delightfully aware of the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 5:8) between death and the final resurrection at Christ's return. The believer likely has a form of a body that is not yet in its final glorified state. For more information see Wright, *Resurrection Son of God*, 367.

⁵¹⁴ Wright, *Resurrection Son of God*, 367.

⁵¹⁵ Daugherty, “Naked Bodies And Heavenly Clothing in 2 Corinthians 5:3,” 220.

agree. Lambrecht dismisses Paul's understanding of where he intends to please the Lord as "less careful writing" and rhetoric "that should not be pressed."⁵¹⁶

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection was essential in Paul's gospel ministry because it helped him to live to please God.⁵¹⁷ As Paul looked forward to his building from God (5:1) and longed to be home with the Lord (5:8), he realized that he must give an account for the life spent in the clay jar (4:7) and tent (5:1). There is a day of accountability for "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ (5:10)." With the tribunal of Christ looming, whether he found himself "at home" in the earthly tent or "away" with the Lord, he made it his ambition to live a life that pleased him.⁵¹⁸

Paul may have had his own judgment before the bema (judgment) seat of Gallio in Corinth (Acts 18) in mind as he wrote about Christ's ultimate bema seat. Christ's coming judgment is a common theme throughout the New Testament.⁵¹⁹ Jesus says, "The Father judges no one but has given all judgment unto the Son so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (John 5:22-23).

Paul confirms Christ's universal judgment here. Jesus is the judge who rewards believers at the bema seat (5:10).⁵²⁰ Jesus is the judge on the great white throne before whom the small and great must stand and earth and sky flee (Rev. 20:11). He is the only judge with perfect justice;

⁵¹⁶ Jan Lambrecht, *Sacra Pagina: Second Corinthians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 86.

⁵¹⁷ Jesus' teaching demonstrates how essential resurrection hope is in pleasing him. He teaches his disciples that the only way to follow him truly is to "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:25). The one who tries to save his life by not trading it for the next will end up losing it, but the one who "loses his life" (leverages everything in this world for the sake of his Master and the life to come) "will find it" (16:25).

⁵¹⁸ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 442.

⁵¹⁹ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 160.

⁵²⁰ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 210.

“No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

This eschatological vision of Christ as the judge is essential to understanding him. With it, his incredible holiness is displayed entirely. He is the judge who will right every wrong of all the unregenerate at the great white throne. He is the judge who has righted every wrong for believers, bearing perfect justice on the cross. His justice and mercy show themselves brilliantly in the descriptions of the judgment seat he will occupy.

Paul looks to this judgment seat with expectation. The healthy fear of displeasing Christ and a loss of reward drives him to please the Lord.⁵²¹ The healthy longing for the reward he will receive for the good "eternal weight of glory" (4:16) pushes him on.⁵²² Groaning (στενάζω) for the resurrection was an essential part of gospel ministry for Paul. It motivated him to keep speaking the gospel (4:7-15), not lose heart (4:16-18), remain courageous (5:1-8), and live a life of holiness that pleased God (5:9-10).

The Broader Context of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10 Against the Word of Faith Movement

The broader context of both passages and their use of στενάζω demonstrate the necessity of groaning in hope in salvation, sanctification, and gospel ministry. This necessity for discontentment in this life (groaning) opposes WOF theology's claim that God desires Christians

⁵²¹ Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 442.

⁵²² Rewards in the coming kingdom at the resurrection feature prominently as motivation for receiving prophets and righteous people into their homes and offering something as small as a cup of cold water in Jesus' teaching (Matt. 10:40-42).

to be in constant health, wealth, and prosperity and that if they are not, it is a result of a lack of faith.⁵²³ WOF theology sounds more like the logic of Paul's enemies than the apostle himself.

Paul uses στενάζω in Romans 8:18-25 to demonstrate the necessity of suffering and groaning in hope. Suffering with Christ is a necessary proof of saving faith. “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” and heirs... “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:16-17). The promise of glorification (or resurrection) produces a longing inside those with the “firstfruits of the Spirit” (8:23).⁵²⁴ They groan “στενάζω” inwardly as they “wait eagerly for the redemption” of their bodies (8:23). This is the good news of the gospel: “The gift of God is eternal life” (Rom. 6:23) in a resurrected body.

The prosperity gospel and WOF theology preach a different gospel than Paul's. Their good news is that the treasures of prosperity can be had now. In contrast, Paul demonstrates in Romans 8 that suffering (8:16-17) and groaning in the hope for the next life (8:23) are expected. These sufferings demonstrate the Spirit's indwelling and provide opportunities to glorify God and experience spiritual growth.⁵²⁵

Paul uses στενάζω “groaning” in 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10 to demonstrate the necessity of suffering and groaning in hope. He did not seek prosperity, health, and wealth in this life as WOF theology does. He embraced suffering. It made him spiritually strong and more hopeful. It showcased the glory of God in his weakness (4:7). Suffering caused him to trust in God, who repeatedly showed himself strong by keeping him from being crushed, despairing, or destroyed

⁵²³ E.W. Kenyon in Jones, and Woodbridge's, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 23.

⁵²⁴ Schreiner, “A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10,” 124.

⁵²⁵ Garland, *2 Corinthians: The Christian Standard Commentary*, 210.

(4:8-10). It was the death at work in him that spread the life of Christ (4:12).⁵²⁶ Knowing that God would raise him and bring them into his presence (4:14) gave him confidence to share the gospel. Knowing that even when the "tent" of his earthly body was taken down, a "building" of a resurrected body was waiting (5:1) caused him to στενάζω "groan" for this resurrection (5:2,4).⁵²⁷ This unshakable hope helped him remain in good courage (5:5-8) and live a life "to please" God (5:9-10).

WOF theology does not promote suffering as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. It obsesses about the "tent" rather than looking forward to the "building from God eternal in the heavens" as Paul had done (5:1). It does not look to what is unseen (4:17-18), so it does not experience the light and momentary suffering that yield an eternal weight of glory (4:16). Unlike the empty promises of WOF theology, Christians can follow Paul's example and experience abundant life and empowerment for service by looking in hope to their resurrection.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has explored the context of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10 to find the meaning of Paul's use of στενάζω in his own historical and literary context. It has been demonstrated that Paul used στενάζω in both passages to show the early church that the Holy Spirit's groaning for the resurrection within him motivated him to greater ministry.

As demonstrated in this chapter, Paul's groaning opposes empty WOF's claims to prosperity and health. It opposes the claim that "if you have the anointing, you don't have the curse of poverty."⁵²⁸ Paul's groaning opposes the claim, "When you apply faith and operate in it

⁵²⁶ Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, 148.

⁵²⁷ Thayer, "G4727 – Stenazō" - *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*.

⁵²⁸ Hagee, *The Seven Secrets*, 232.

by keeping the Word of God in your heart, that faith of God will flow through your body to keep it well and whole."⁵²⁹

Paul experienced nearly crushing persecution and difficulty in gospel ministry and expected it to be the norm for others. The difficulties that come with living in a fallen world and wrestling against evil produced a longing inside of him for his resurrected body.⁵³⁰ In this longing, he and his missionary companions groaned (Rom. 8:23, 2 Cor. 5:2,4). He expected this groaning in discontented expectation of the resurrection to be the norm for all Christians filled with the Spirit. Paul's understanding of the necessity of discomfort in this life and the groaning for the next is a needed message against Word of Faith theology. Groaning in hope also corrects the problems WOF theology presents to orthodox Christianity by encouraging it to embrace biblical doctrine, sensible and helpful desires, seeking God's promises, and evangelism and sanctification as it did in Paul's ministry.

Modern Christians can imitate Paul by keeping low expectations for how comfortable this life should be and high expectations for the next. Saints who live a rugged "tenting" lifestyle, traveling light and remembering their true heavenly home, will experience the same good courage to share the gospel and speak out against sin that Paul experienced. Like the apostle, the blazing hope of the resurrection drives Christians to complete challenging assignments to please their King. Groaning as Paul did, for the coming, physical, perfect resurrected body like Christ's (Phil. 3:21) helps Christians in gospel ministry stay in the ministry. It keeps them from making idols out of things (like health, wealth, and prosperity) that pass away (4:18).

⁵²⁹ Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 14.

⁵³⁰ Schreiner, "A Building from God—2 Corinthians 5:1-10," 124.

CHAPTER SIX: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The previous chapter focused on Paul's use of στενάζω (groaning) in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, demonstrating that Word of Faith theology seeks to avoid the discontented groaning Paul experienced and prescribed to the church.⁵³¹ The apostle argued that life in this body (during this time of sin and death) is meant to include suffering from persecution and the world's brokenness. It is the crushing pressure that leads to groaning in resurrection hope.

This chapter will examine some theological reasons why groaning in discontented hope is necessary for Christians. WOF theology's emphasis on ease and comfort in this life is detrimental to the spiritual lives of its followers (and a blight on Christianity) because it trades groaning for heaven for groaning for the stuff of earth.⁵³² WOF robs its followers of the opportunity to be assured of their faith and grow in it by trading this life for the next. This chapter will show that groaning is necessary. Groaning in hope is necessary because it is essential evidence of salvation and essential in the process of sanctification.

Groaning in the Hope of the Resurrection is Essential Evidence of Salvation

Christians must know they have saving faith and be assured of their salvation (2 Cor. 13:5, 1 John 5:13). This assurance is a source of great comfort for them when they suffer. It is also essential for them to be sure they have saving faith before it is too late. Groaning in hope of the resurrection (along with a holy life and love for other Christians) is terrific evidence that they have gone from death to life.

⁵³¹ Paul's doctrine of the resurrection is found throughout his epistles, but the groaning that naturally flows out of that resurrection hope is specifically recorded here. He consistently models the pressures of his apostolic ministry to the churches encouraging them to stand fast under persecution for a future reward waiting in heaven.

⁵³² McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 17.

Groaning is evidence of saving faith because authentic saints are uncomfortable and discontent with this life. They are discontent because the Spirit inside them is (Rom. 8:23). They long to be with Jesus, and the passing pleasures of health, wealth, and prosperity do not satisfy them. Christians are discontent because they are constantly persecuted for righteousness sake, as Jesus was, since they are constantly speaking up for the gospel and out against sin. They are discontented because they despise their sin. Faithful saints are discontent with this life because their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20-21). They look and long for the New Jerusalem as the heroes of Hebrews 11 did. They move forward like Jesus, not for temporary pleasures, but for the joy set before them in heaven (Heb. 12:2).

Groaning is Evidence of a Correct Understanding of Saving Faith

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is evidence of a correct understanding of saving faith because saving faith requires an understanding of the resurrection, the coming kingdom, and the coming King.

Saving Faith Requires an Understanding of the Resurrection

Christians only possess saving faith in Christ if they believe the correct facts about what Christ has done on their behalf.⁵³³ Paul tells the Corinthians that the correct fact everyone must believe is “the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved” (1 Cor. 15:1–2a).⁵³⁴ The gospel is “that Christ died for our sins in

⁵³³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 694.

⁵³⁴ Grudem devotes a chapter to soteriology, “The Gospel Call and Effective Calling” in *Systematic Theology*. He includes: “1. Explanation of the Facts Concerning Salvation, 2. Invitation to Respond to Christ Personally in Repentance and Faith, and 3. A Promise of Forgiveness and Eternal Life” as the “three important elements must be included” in preaching the gospel. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 694.

accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3b–4). Everyone must receive this by faith, and this faith, like Abraham, is what is counted to them as righteousness (Rom. 4:3).⁵³⁵ When Christians believe that Christ’s resurrection is the reason they will also rise, they are taking him at his word. Jesus promised, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19). Paul expands, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom. 6:5).

Groaning is evidence of a correct understanding of justification. This hope in the resurrection to eternal life is part of what a sinner must believe wholeheartedly to be justified before God. The classic gospel verse (John 3:16) illustrates this. Jesus says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Believing in Christ’s substitutionary death on his behalf saves a person from perishing. However, it also means believing in Christ’s substitutionary death to give eternal life.⁵³⁶ The promise of eternal life is the promise of the resurrection. A sinner trusts in Christ’s righteousness before the Father that he will be accepted and resurrected to eternal life.

This essential belief in the resurrection in justification appears in other famous “gospel-in-one-verse” texts like Romans 6:23; “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The sinner believes that he deserves death as the wage for his sin and simultaneously believes that God holds out the promise of eternal life through Christ. This positive belief in amnesty and eternal life is also the belief in the resurrection, for one cannot live forever in a mortal body. “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor

⁵³⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 454.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 694.

does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50). The new saint believes he gets the eternal reward Jesus deserves and that Jesus took the hell he deserved on the cross.

To believe in justification means a person necessarily believes in the resurrection to eternal life. Paul says we “groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (Rom. 8:23-24a). He argues that this future hope of escape from the wrath of God and reward is, by definition, “not yet seen” (8:24b) and also a part of the gospel. The whole gospel extends from predestination to calling, to justification, and ultimately to glorification (8:29-20).⁵³⁷

Believing in the hope of the resurrection is how people are saved.⁵³⁸ Paul confirms this elsewhere in his letters. He calls the gospel the “hope laid up for you in heaven. ...the word of the truth, the gospel” (Col. 1:5). He admonishes the Colossians not to shift “from the hope of the gospel” (Col. 1:23). He prays that the saints in Ephesus would have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). This (future hope element to the gospel) is even why Paul endured persecution.⁵³⁹ He cries out before the high council in Jerusalem, “I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6)! His “hope in the resurrection of the dead” was both his message and his motive for sharing it.

⁵³⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, Third Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 924.

⁵³⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 694.

⁵³⁹ Osborne, *Romans: IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, 215.

Saving Faith Requires an Understanding of the Coming Kingdom

Paul would also say that to be saved, a person must believe the entire gospel. The good news that Jesus paid the price for sins is inseparable from the good news that Jesus is coming again. This good news of the kingdom is “the gospel of the kingdom” that Jesus preached in every town and synagogue in Galilee (Matt. 4:23, 9:35). A sinner must believe the gospel that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). Without understanding the coming kingdom in the new heaven and new earth, and without knowing who will be excluded, it would be difficult to form a concept of what a sinner is being saved *from* and *to*. These consequences and places of eternal punishment and reward are foundational for basic gospel understanding.

Accurate hope is also essential to a proper understanding of salvation.⁵⁴⁰ Hope in “all things being made new” can be a rudimentary understanding but must be present because it is part of the good news of the gospel, for “in hope, we were saved” (Rom. 8:24). Hope is synonymous with saving faith because in this context refers to a “joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation.”⁵⁴¹ People are saved by the hope or faith that Jesus will deliver them from hell and, in their resurrected bodies, usher them into the holy city. This essential positive belief in deliverance to a resurrection to eternal life with God is the other side of the coin to the essential negative belief in Christ’s deliverance from deserved resurrection to eternal hell (Dan. 12:2, John 5:28-29, Acts 24:15, Rev. 20:5). A basic understanding of both the resurrection of the just and unjust must be believed to understand the consequences of sin and the grace of God for a person to possess accurate faith in Christ.

⁵⁴⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 694.

⁵⁴¹ Thayer et al., "G1680 – Elpis" - *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, 143.

Saving Faith Requires an Understanding of the Resurrected King

To believe in Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16) is to believe in him as the actual person he really is. It is to have faith in the correct facts about who he was and what he will do. To believe in anything less is to believe in a different Jesus. He is the promised Messiah of the OT, the King to end all kings.⁵⁴² As this King, Jesus will rule a physical kingdom on a new, pristine earth inhabited by his disciples in actual remade physical bodies (2 Cor. 5:1). To not have all the facts at conversion (or even to be longing for more) is excusable, after all, “it does not yet appear what we shall be” (1 John 3:2). To have no hope in the future kingdom is not excusable, for to hope in Jesus the King is to agree with the facts and believe in him as he has presented himself in his word. Correct faith in Jesus believes in his kingship of an actual, coming physical new world.

Groaning is Evidence of the Indwelling of the Spirit

No one can be saved or remain saved unless the Holy Spirit lives within him. It is the law of the Spirit of life that sets him "free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). It is only those "who are led by the Spirit of God" who “are sons of God" (8:14). It is only when Christians receive "the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father” (8:15)! that they can cry out (in truth) "Abba! Father!" It is only those "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit,”...who “groan inwardly” (8:23a), that “wait eagerly for adoption as sons” (8:23b). It is only "through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5:5).

⁵⁴² Timothy Keller, *Jesus the King: Understanding the Life and Death of the Son of God* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 4.

Paul believed groaning is an essential sign of salvation because it demonstrates the indwelling Holy Spirit. The apostle clarifies this when he says, "Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved" (Rom. 8:23-24a). The saint's inward groaning because of the Holy Spirit (8:23) is crucial evidence of hope that saves (8:24a). Without groaning for the "redemption of our bodies" (8:23), there is a lack of evidence of genuine conversion. Hope causes groaning, and it is "in this hope we were saved" (8:24a).

The Holy Spirit is the down payment of the believer's glorification. If he lives within them, they will groan for the resurrection. The Holy Spirit allows Christians to think as God does (1 Cor. 2:6-16). If they have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), they will groan with eager expectation for glorification as the Spirit does. The Holy Spirit brings an awareness of and a hatred of sin. If the believer hates his own sin (like Paul), he will "groan inwardly" as he waits "eagerly for adoption as sons" (Rom. 8:23). Without this essential element of groaning, there is not sufficient evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Groaning is Evidence of love for Christ Jesus

Love for Christ is synonymous with salvation.⁵⁴³ Jesus tells his disciples, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (John 14:21). James writes the scattered churches that the one who stands the test "will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). To love Jesus above all when he cannot be seen

⁵⁴³ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John: The International Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 477, ProQuest Ebrary.

takes a supernatural act. The person who begins to love Christ is only able to do so because God loved him first (1 John 4:19) and the Father drew him (John 6:44a). Jesus assures the one who loves and comes to him that he “will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44b).

This supernatural love for Jesus is manifest by groaning to be with him. Paul tells Timothy at the end of his life that he looked forward to the “crown of righteousness” awaiting him in heaven, “which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). Paul and all true saints love the thought of Jesus' appearing. They long to be with him. This longing to be with Jesus is why Paul could write that going and being with Christ was far better than living (Phil 1:23).⁵⁴⁴ He looked forward to seeing Christ face to face and knowing him as he had been known (1 Cor 13:12).

A Christian's groaning for home, a new glorified body, and the return of Christ is a sign of saving faith. It is a sign that he has truly believed the facts of the gospel and is, at this moment, placing his hope in its good news. It is a sign that the Spirit of God indwells him and that he loves Christ Jesus. Groaning is as natural as breathing for authentic Christians. It is part of the DNA of the “new man” (Eph. 4:24), because in hope he was saved. Hope in the resurrection not only saves, but it is what God uses to make his children like Jesus.

Groaning in the Hope of the Resurrection is Essential for Sanctification

Groaning in the discontented hope of the resurrection is an essential evidence of salvation and an essential exercise in sanctification. It is one way that believers grow to be more and more like their Savior. Looking forward to their glorious future is a way to be more conformed to the

⁵⁴⁴ Richard J. Cassidy, *A Roman Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Chicago, IL: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2020), 130, ProQuest Ebrary.

image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) because it produces a deeper love for God, a deeper love for people, refines motives, and an earnestness in service.

Groaning in Hope Produces a Deeper Love for God

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is essential to sanctification because it gives the believer a deeper love for God. "Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb. 11:6). The way to draw near is correct belief in his person and his promise of reward. "Drawing near" (growing in love for God and clinging to God) is foundational for becoming "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:29) and is driven by the hope of his reward in the new earth.

Groaning in Hope Produces a Deeper Love for People

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is also essential to sanctification because it gives the believer a deeper love for others. The more a hope-filled believer longs to see God, the more he will quite naturally love his brother. Whenever heightened affections for God are in place, right affections for others follow.⁵⁴⁵ Whenever heightened affections for God (the greatest commandment) and others (the second) are present, action and sacrifice follow. This is the upside-down principle of the kingdom.⁵⁴⁶ Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for Christ's sake and the gospel will keep it (Matt. 16:25).

⁵⁴⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 16.

⁵⁴⁶ Timothy Keller, "The Upside Down Kingdom," (Sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, March 21, 1999), gospelinlife.com.

Groaning in Hope Refines Motives

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is also essential to sanctification because it gives the believer a healthy motivation to see and please God. Jesus motivated his followers often with promises of reward. It was the poor in spirit who really would inherit the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3). It was the persecuted who were the ones, in fact, who should be rejoicing because great is their reward in heaven (Matt. 5:11-12). The people who lose their lives for his sake find it. They trade this life for the next. The disciple who stores up treasure in heaven keeps it. The wise servant who is faithful in a little will be rewarded in the new earth with much. All this promise of reward in the eternal state drives Jesus' true disciples. Ultimately, it will not be the gold (the pavement of the new Jerusalem) or a crown, but the sheer delight of laying those crowns down at Jesus' feet that are the true currency of resurrected life in the new heaven and new earth. This promise of reward is what drives disciples to love and good works. Hope in the new earth is the way to that sanctification.

Owen states that the heavenly-minded man will “press forward towards farther attainments and farther degrees of spiritual strength in the life of God.”⁵⁴⁷ The early church is an example of this drive that is caused by heavenly-minded hope. Unlike the pagan culture outside, enslaved Christians obeyed out of love for God, fear of disappointing him, and hope for future kingdom rewards.⁵⁴⁸ Enslaved Christians served their masters not out of fear but in respect for God (Col. 3:22), for the praise of God (Col. 3:23), and for reward from God (Col. 3:24).

⁵⁴⁷ John Owen, *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually-Minded Declared and Practically Improved* (London: Elibron Classics 2005), 265. ProQuest Ebrary.

⁵⁴⁸ Derek S. Dodson and Katherine E. Smith, eds., *Exploring Biblical Backgrounds: A Reader in Historical and Literary Contexts* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 243.

Groaning in Hope Produces an Earnestness to Service

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is also essential to sanctification because it gives believers an earnestness to their work. Jesus tells parables about not knowing when the master will arrive (Matt. 24:45-51). Because his return is imminent, this desire to work hard is crucial to productive Christian living. It is a mark of Christlikeness to be a hard worker for the kingdom. Knowing the time is short makes a believer say, like his master, that his “food” (all-consuming business) is to do the will of him who sent him (John 4:34). C.S. Lewis memorably credits this heavenly-mindedness for much earthly good.

If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven, and you will get earth "thrown in": aim at earth and you will get neither.⁵⁴⁹

Groaning in the Hope of the Resurrection Against the Word of Faith Theology

Word of Faith Theology Limits Groaning an Essential Evidence of Salvation

Christians must examine themselves and demonstrate signs of true saving faith so they have "confidence on the day of judgment" (1 John 4:17). This evidence displays itself in a holy life and deeds of love for people (3:10). It is evident in undeniable personal experiences with God (4:15). Saving faith is also demonstrated by groaning in the hope of the resurrection. This groaning produces a deeper love for God, a deeper love for people, an earnestness in service, and refines motives.

⁵⁴⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: William Collins, 2012), 134.

WOF theology limits this essential evidence for saving faith because it primarily focuses on health, wealth, and prosperity in this life. When groaning in the hope of the resurrection is not evident, the person not groaning may have cause for genuine concern about the state of eternal position. It may indicate that he loves this world more than the next, and the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). It may indicate that he does not love God or long for his appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

Word of Faith Theology Limits Groaning an Essential Means of Sanctification

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is only increased by suffering, pain, and poverty. WOF limits this groaning in hope of the resurrection by its fixation on health, wealth and prosperity in this life. Pain in this life is actually beneficial because it causes believers to find their greatest hope outside of the world. When they do, they look to things that are unseen (2 Cor. 4:17-18) as Paul did and find the lasting confidence and joy he found.

Suffering, Pain, and Poverty Help Believers Become More Like Christ

Like good medicine, strenuous exercise, and discipline, everyone would prefer not to endure what is best for them. Similarly, no one willingly chooses suffering, pain, poverty, and persecution, but they are good because they make true believers more like Jesus (James 1:2-4). This painful process of sanctification is a part of God's good plan. It is the will of God for them in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 4:3). It is why they stare into the blazing glory of Christ; that they might be transformed into his image from one degree of glory to the next by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18b). Transformation to the character of Christ (sanctification) is a slow process that God mainly uses trials to accomplish. Spurgeon recounts, "I am afraid that all the grace that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I

have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library."⁵⁵⁰

Paul explains how God works events out for sanctification; "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:28-29). This often misunderstood verse (8:28) is not a promise that all things will work out for good for all people. It only promises a silver lining to every cloud for those who "love God." It is also not a promise that "all things will work together" for the good anticipated.⁵⁵¹ All things were working out for Joseph's good even while he was being carried to Egypt and slandered. The good is the providence of God -the good believers would have chosen if they could have seen it. It is mainly the good of their sanctification. The good, for which all things work, is that the predestined believer would be "conformed to the image of his Son" (8:29).

WOF theology would remove suffering, pain, and poverty that refine and turn saints more into the image of Christ. As a result, they rob them of a greater blessing than health, wealth, and prosperity. They also diminish the groaning for heaven that results from suffering.

Suffering Pain and Poverty Allow Believers to Demonstrate Persevering Faith

Enduring suffering is a gift that increases longing for the resurrection because it demonstrates saving faith. Knowing they have saving faith is an excellent gift for God's children. Assurance of their salvation will fill believers with confidence and hope as they encounter

⁵⁵⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, *We Shall See God: Charles Spurgeon's Classic Devotional Thoughts on Heaven* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2011), 298.

⁵⁵¹ John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Grand Rapids MI: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 172, ProQuest Ebrary.

persecution and trials. It is a great comfort for them to know that they actually possess saving faith because the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches do not choke the seed of the gospel in their lives (Mark 4:19). When they do not go out from the church because they are genuinely of the church, Christians will know they have persevering faith (1 John 2:19). Apart from the testing of their faith they would not know that their faith is genuine. If they fail the test, they can repent and believe before it is too late.

Suffering, persecution, and pain all test and reveal the mettle of faith. Peter said Christians can rejoice in their faith even when God is testing them because "the tested genuineness of your faith" is "more precious than gold" (1 Peter 1:7a). Because of the trials that tested them, they have assurance. Peter affirms, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9).

Every Christian must question assurance before it is too late. Paul instructs Christians to test themselves to see if they are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).⁵⁵² Assurance of salvation is the reason John wrote his first epistle. He says, "I have written these things that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). No one would choose trials that test and prove the validity of faith.

WOF theology aims to remove suffering, pain, and poverty that God uses to reveal faith and love for him. As a result, the theology strips its followers of the greater blessing of assurance of their resurrection. Instead of assurance, they settle for the passing pleasures, health, wealth,

⁵⁵² Kruse, *2 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 270.

and prosperity. They trade delightful and empowering groaning in the hope of the resurrection for anxious groaning on the "hamster wheel of achievement." They trade groaning for what they will gain for what they cannot. WOF followers are the real victims of such a misdirection of theology.

Suffering Pain and Poverty Wean Believers from Love of the World

John tells the early church not to love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:15a). Loving the world's system (the desires of the flesh, eyes, and pride of life) can reveal that the love of the Father is not in them (1 John 2:15b-16). Love for the world can reveal an unregenerate heart, but it can also be a constant source of idolatry for those with regenerated hearts. Their love of the world holds them back from obedience and radical risk-taking faith. They lapse into cowardice and "playing it safe" because they cannot afford to lose friends' approval or the comforts they enjoy. They look back with their hands to the plow and act in a way that is unworthy of Christ (Luke 9:62).

Pain, poverty, and suffering are helpful ways of weaning believers from their over-love of the world and giving them a greater delight in heaven and their resurrection. The constant discouragements, suffering, poverty, and persecution produce Paul's deep longing for heaven. Christians who are the most enamored with heaven are the boldest and happiest on earth.⁵⁵³

WOF theology would remove suffering, pain, and poverty that wean saints from the world. If they can, they rob them of the tremendous blessing of actual confidence that results from a greater desire for heaven. Groaning for heaven is weak or nonexistent in a theology focused on groaning for prosperity on earth. Ultimately, no one gets to keep what they crave in

⁵⁵³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 134.

this life (1 Tim. 6:7). If they had groaned for heaven, they would not have been disappointed. Similar to how Lewis explains it, if they had aimed at heaven, they would get earth thrown in, but aiming at earth gets them neither.⁵⁵⁴

Suffering Pain and Poverty Reveal the Idols in Believer's Hearts

God condemns the elders of Judah's idolatry; "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces" (Ezek. 14:3a). It is easy for Christians to follow their example. Calvin says about humanity's propensity towards idolatry, "The human heart is a perpetual idol factory."⁵⁵⁵ God commands that he is to be loved first and above all; "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5). Idolatry is the failure to do this. It occurs when someone places anything (even spouse, family, or comforts) in the top position on the pyramid of his affections. Idolatry is as simple and easy as loving anything as much or more than God.

Idolatry manifests itself in undue honor to God's creation rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Just as idols are physical statues or pictures of gods, humans continually give undue honor to a physical representation of their gods. Christians have no reason for confidence because they think physical idols are less commonplace than in the ancient world. Idolatry has only become more challenging to detect. An over-love of the praise of man can result in undue honor to whatever generates that praise. People obsess over and give undue honor to jobs, houses, clothing, and vehicles because those are a source of status and praise. Vacations can become

⁵⁵⁴ Adapted from Lewis's classic quote is: "Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in." Aim at earth, and you will get neither." See Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 134.

⁵⁵⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ed. John T. McNeill. Trans. Ford Lewis, (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 108.

idols when they replace God as the saint's primary source of comfort and adventure. Even spouses or children can become idols when loved more than God because they provide tangible love. An over-love of control can result in an obsession with planning, budgets, and calendars. Idols are lurking in the hearts of saints and legion in the hearts of the lost. The greatest material surface idol that reveals the idols of the heart is money.⁵⁵⁶ That is why Paul warns that “the love of it is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10).

Suffering, pain, and poverty are unwelcome friends because they identify and smash idols. They identify good things that have ascended the pyramid of affections to become ultimate things.⁵⁵⁷ Like the psalmist, when he suffers, the Christian can always ask, "Why are you downcast O my soul" (Psalm 42:5)? The undue anguish from suffering is the check engine light that identifies God's blessings that had begun to be loved more than the Bless-or. They reveal idols of the heart by taking their physical manifestations out of their hands. Pain and poverty also smash every idol in a person's life. When they do, it is only a preview of things to come. Everything will be taken from a Christian one day, except God. Everything that can be shaken will be shaken, “in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:27). Suffering, pain, and poverty are Josiah removing idols from the house of the LORD (2 Kings 23). The way to clean the heart-house meant for the worship of Yahweh is to embrace the rough hand that removes competing loves and groan for the resurrection.

WOF theology tries to remove suffering, pain, and poverty that do the good work of identifying and removing idols from Christians' lives. As a result, the theology robs God of the

⁵⁵⁶ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2009), 240.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

(top of the pyramid of our affections) worship he deserves. It robs people of the greater blessing, of pure worship of their Creator, and higher delights in the one who is infinitely more glorious than any idol. It plunges people into endless disappointment, encouraging worship of what will never satisfy. No idol delivers what they promise.⁵⁵⁸ WOF theology silences the worship for which God's sons and daughters were created (Is. 43:6-7). It keeps Christians playing with the dust from which they came and not setting their affections on the one who is the delight of eternity. WOF theology diminishes the groaning for resurrected eyes to see him directly, resulting from suffering. Prosperity preachers are in league with the spirit of the age. Promoting the acquisition of health, wealth, and prosperity is blowing on the flame of idolatry intrinsic to human nature (Eph. 2:3). Teaching such doctrine is wicked and cruel.

Suffering Pain and Poverty Allow Believers to Comfort Others

A new capacity to comfort others is an often overlooked benefit of the believer's suffering, pain, and poverty. Paul reveals that this is what his suffering in Ephesus had done. He blesses the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Suffering and poverty give saints a new empathy for fellow sufferers they would not have had. The trials give them a new credibility with the hurting and poor. People will listen and be impacted by those who have walked through the trials they are facing. Those who have lived a comfortable life of health, wealth, and prosperity will have little weight to their words.

WOF theology seeks to remove suffering, pain, and poverty, which would help its followers become better comforters. As a result, it robs them of a greater blessing than health,

⁵⁵⁸ Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 240.

wealth, and prosperity could have provided. It is more blessed to give than to receive comfort from others (Acts 20:35).

Suffering Pain and Poverty Draw Believers Closer to God

Paul learned to rely on God, who raises the dead from his terrible ordeal in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:9). Job only exclaimed, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5), after he endured excessive misery. David's psalms draw readers closer to God because he wrote out of his experience of persecution and suffering, which had drawn him close.⁵⁵⁹ Every believer would prefer to know God and delight in him from the comfort of a beach chair, but that is rarely the way to a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with God. Comfort and prosperity most often lead to a superficial relationship. Cancer survivors gain a rugged and beautiful closeness with God from the wilderness of suffering they have endured. As with human relationships, the closest and most satisfying friendships are forged in the fire of affliction.

WOF theology would remove the suffering, pain, and poverty, that draw its followers closer to God. It robs them of a better blessing than health, wealth, and prosperity can afford. It also diminishes the groaning for heaven, the evidence of salvation, and the source of sanctification. The good results from suffering are discarded in a futile attempt to gain temporary blessings.

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion

Groaning is essential evidence of saving faith and an essential practice for Christ-like sanctification. It is essential evidence of saving faith because it is evidence of a correct understanding of saving faith, evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and evidence of

⁵⁵⁹ Bullock, "The Psalms and Faith/Tradition," in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, 53–54.

authentic love for Christ. Groaning is also an essential component in the believer's sanctification. Groaning in the hope of the resurrection produces a deeper love for God, a deeper love for people, refines motives, and produces an earnestness to service.

Word of Faith teachers do not encourage their listeners to groan in the hope of the resurrection despite its importance as evidence of salvation and the benefits of producing sanctification. This is a cause for concern because groaning in the hope of heaven naturally occurs in the heart of a person who cannot wait to see Jesus, longs for heaven, despises his sin, and is persecuted for righteousness sake. WOF theology's focus on health and wealth in this life also limits the sanctifying work of suffering. Suffering, pain, poverty, and persecution help believers become more like Christ, allow them to demonstrate saving faith that perseveres, wean them from the love of the world, reveal the idols in their hearts, allow them to comfort others, and draw them closer to God.

CHAPTER SEVEN: APPLICATION

The previous chapter examined why groaning in the hope of the resurrection is necessary. It argued that WOF theology harms its followers by failing to focus on true prosperity in the next life, as Paul did. This dissertation has argued for the necessity of groaning and how WOF theology fails. This chapter will be a decided shift towards application. It will answer "how?" for those who want to groan more and admit they do not groan enough. It will provide practical methods of encouraging groaning for the resurrection among saints individually and corporately. These strategies will focus on helping them gain an eternal perspective so groaning becomes a natural part of their Christian experience.

Applications of Paul's Theology of Groaning for the Individual

Groaning in resurrection hope begins with God as the Spirit convicts an individual (John 14:16). People begin groaning to be with the Lord when they believe in Jesus' death and resurrection for them. Then, they grow in anticipation as they cultivate it, longing for heaven.

Believe in Jesus' Death and Resurrection and Believer's Resurrection

The first step to living with a greater expectation of the resurrection is the certainty of eternal life. Not all will be raised to the resurrection of everlasting life with God. Some will be raised to "shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). Not all will be part of the first resurrection. Many more will be part of the second who stand before the great white throne (Rev. 20:4-14). Believing in Jesus' death and resurrection as the only hope of resurrection is the essential first step.

Salvation from sin and death requires sinners to realize they stand condemned before the holiness of God. When they see (like Isaiah) that they are unclean in relation to God (Is. 6:5)

they acknowledge the desperate need for salvation. Without honest and shocking brokenness over sin, in view of God's holiness, there is no genuine repentance and desperate looking to Jesus for salvation. Without repentance, faith in Christ, and the Spirit's regeneration, they will not enter the holy city (Luke 13:3, Rev. 21:8).⁵⁶⁰ Only the righteous, who have embraced Jesus as their only hope of salvation, can enter the kingdom of God. They are the ones who rise from the dust to eternal life and shine like stars (Dan. 12:2). Hope in this resurrection from the dead (however primitive) is the beginning of the groaning that grows, empowers, and delights true Christians.

Continue to Groan in the Hope of the Resurrection

Once this initial hope in the gospel has begun, believers increasingly hope in the good news. They do this by continually thinking, imagining, and setting their highest hope on heaven. Increased hope in the resurrection occurs by remembering the facts, cultivating eager expectation, and working the hope out in action.

Remember the Facts of the Resurrection

The first thing believers in Christ must do to grow in this overcoming hope in the resurrection is to remind themselves often of the facts of the coming new creation.⁵⁶¹ God says, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true" (Rev. 21:5). To grow in hope, Christians must look to God's word often, take those words to heart, write, and memorize them. When Christians do this, they put the correct facts in their minds that they will often remind

⁵⁶⁰ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary - The New Testament Library*, 398.

⁵⁶¹ This is an overcoming hope in the resurrection that causes new saints to become overcomers. They become overcomers of the world and its brokenness (1 John 5:5). They become overcomers of sin. Hope in the resurrection has tremendous power in the believer's lives to propel them to sanctification.

themselves of. Revelation 21:1-22:5 is an excellent section of Scripture to memorize or internalize. It produces an enduring hope for saints who meditate on its truth in times of need.

If they want to know and believe the facts, they must obey the Lord and be a part of a church. When they join a local church, they receive instruction on the resurrection and continually encourage one another. The teaching they regularly hear must present the resurrection accurately (as a bodily existence in the new heaven and earth). They will also know and believe the truth when their brothers and sisters encourage them to look towards heaven by speaking of it often. This steady diet of accurate teaching and community groaning will strengthen believers' knowledge and help them continue to have hopeful faith in the facts about their resurrection.

Cultivate Eager Expectation of the Resurrection

Devoted Christians cultivate an individual, eager longing for the resurrection by reading Scripture. Bible study promises reward in this life while setting their minds on their eternal home.⁵⁶² As Christians groan for the resurrection, their boldness to speak up for the gospel or out against sin grows, their fear of man diminishes, and their anxiety over "light and momentary afflictions" (2 Cor. 4:17) decreases. The more they groan now, the less they will groan standing before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), considering how many more crowns they could have laid at his feet.

Believers increase hope in the resurrection of their bodies by meditating on descriptions of the new heaven and earth. Paul tells the Colossians, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2), and "seek the things that are above" (3:2). Christians

⁵⁶² Kevin B. Barnes, "A Bible Study About Studying Bible: An Introduction to Inductive Bible Study" (DMin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2018), 36, ProQuest Ebrary.

can cultivate longing for resurrection bodies by reading about the new heaven and earth in Revelation 21:1-22:5 and imagining what it will be like.⁵⁶³ It is, after all, those who "long for his appearing" that receive the crown of righteousness from "the Lord the righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8).

Dedicated Christians cultivate an eager longing for the resurrection by gathering together with brothers and sisters in the church. When they do not forsake the assembly, they are there to spur one another on to love and good works all the more as they see the Day of the Lord approaching (Heb. 10:25). When brothers and sisters (who groan for all things to be made new) talk about that hope, they strengthen each other in the Lord. When they sing songs about the new earth and God dwelling among them, they give one another a gift of hope that kills sin and propels them to share the gospel.

Believers can also use positive and negative events of their lives to think and speak more about the resurrection, cultivating groaning. Whenever pain occurs, Christians can remind themselves that soon there will be no more sorrowful tears. They can also joyfully remind fellow sufferers that soon they will receive a new body and live in a place with no more cancer, misunderstandings, and parting. When a joyous event occurs, Christians can use it to cultivate their hope of heaven by reminding themselves that this is just a foretaste of the greater joy they will experience with perfect emotions, a perfect environment, and their perfect Savior. The use of everyday ups and downs will enhance a believer's hunger for resurrection and be the regular pattern of individuals and the local church.

⁵⁶³ Erickson, *Christian Theology: Third Addition*, 292.

Work the Hope of the Resurrection Out in Action

Caring Christians also enhance their resurrection hope and put it to work against sin by acting on it. Hope in the resurrection is meant to be exercised like a muscle against discouragement, temptation, and boredom.

Hope in the resurrection has tremendous power against discouragement. Discouragement is a favorite tool of Satan. A discouraged believer will not walk by faith towards victory over sin or obedience. He will not be asked to "give an answer for the hope that lies within" him (1 Peter 3:15) because it will not be evident. He will be too consumed with himself and defeated to think about others. Hope in the resurrection frees him from the trap of discouragement.⁵⁶⁴ It is an anchor for his soul (Heb. 6:19).

Hope in the resurrection has tremendous active power against the sin that can sideline Christians. Besetting sins haunt believers, promising pleasure and bringing pain and death. However, a greater hope in the new heaven and earth can trump the promise of sin. The child of God must put his hope to work against it. When tempted, the believer can remind himself of the superior hope of pleasure, acceptance, and delight awaiting him at the resurrection. He will not be enamored with Satan's bait when he has a superior delight in a new body in the new Jerusalem. Hope will help him see the hook hidden in every temptation.

Hope in the resurrection has tremendous power against boredom. Boredom in the Christian life looks like daydreaming, distraction, weak worship, inattention to preaching, and wasted time. Boredom with spiritual things is caused by loving this world too much and not loving the next enough. The hope of heaven destroys boredom. It melts before the glories of the new heaven and earth and the resurrected body designed to live in it. Christians who glimpse

⁵⁶⁴ Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary - The New Testament Library*, 398.

their glorious future realize there is an urgency to preach the gospel to the lost and live a holy life. Resurrection hope propels the listless saint from boredom to meaningful activity.⁵⁶⁵

When a Christian works out the hope that he has understood and longed for, he will have tremendous power against the bitterness that can sabotage him. Bitterness towards others (inside and outside the church) comes from injustice done. The way to be free to forgive is not to attempt to balance the scale of justice but to remember that Christ will judge every offense (Rom. 12:16-21). This judgment will occur for believers after the rapture at the Bema Seat and for unbelievers at the Great White Throne. Paul reminds the Corinthians, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10). This knowledge that (in the resurrection) perfect justice will be served frees believers up from bitterness at those who have wronged them. They know that "whatever a man sows, he will reap" (Gal. 6:7). Jesus is the judge who will right the scale of justice, so they are free to release their anger and return to work for him.

Applications of Paul's Theology of Groaning for the Church

The biblical church makes a pattern of cultivating resurrection hope by corporately looking for Jesus. They do this as they gather together for biblical preaching, share conversations of longing for heaven, and sing hymns (whose final verse is often about heaven) that draw affection from the old earth to the new. It sets the mood for worship as heavenly longing. These emotions of longing and groaning in the current world are right and holy and need stirring. One of God's good purposes for the church is to stir up these longings in believers continually.

⁵⁶⁵ Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-7:12)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 2 (2003): 285, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3268446>.

Continual Reminders of the Resurrection in Corporate Fellowship

Pastors and elders are charged to preach and teach on the hope of the resurrection and coming kingdom of God as a recurring theme. Christian educators must make a conscientious effort to point people to their true homeland (Heb. 11:16) and provide an example of hope.⁵⁶⁶ Teachers in the church should long to make their hearers so heavenly-minded that they are indeed some earthly good. They will point out the necessity of resurrection hope for a courageous Christian life (2 Cor. 5:8-10) and a holy Christian life (1 Cor. 15:58, Col 3:1-10, 1 Peter 1:3-7, 2 Peter 3:13-14, and 1 John 3:2-3).

The doctrine of the resurrection has not been given its proper place because of misguided ideas in some congregations. Some Christians erroneously believe the adage that they should not be "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good." That may sound wise, but it is not Scriptural. Saints are to "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2). Lewis clarifies that "a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do."⁵⁶⁷ Some have taken on a dualistic Platonic vision of leaving this earth behind to go home to heaven, leaving the church with a vague disembodied hope.⁵⁶⁸ This fear of "heavenly mindedness" and disembodied ideas of heaven has led to a lack of preaching and teaching on the resurrection.

⁵⁶⁶ Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-7:12)." 270.

⁵⁶⁷ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 134.

⁵⁶⁸ N.T. Wright, "N.T. Wright on the Future of the World," *Fuller Studio*, October 16, 2019, YouTube video, 41:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWNKp3jYyRo>.

The lack of robust and dynamic resurrection preaching destroys the church's hope, courage, and holiness. Without a continual focus on the reward taught and modeled by leadership, churches lapse into fear or an idolatrous love of the world. Churches fear the world when they fixate on the present life the world can take from them. They become courageous when they fix their eyes on the next life that the world cannot take from them (Matt. 10:28). The gospel boldness of Paul is lost because this life is so precious. Without continual longing for the resurrection, churches lapse into an idolatrous love of the world (James 4:4, 1 John 2:15-17).

When churches (such as those influenced by WOF theology) preach and teach health, wealth, and prosperity, they appeal to those without a hunger for spiritual things. People are naturally more in love with God's gifts than with God himself (Rom. 1:25). Friendship with the world "spoils them" against working hard to share the gospel or storing up treasure in heaven. Lackadaisical churches that do not groan in resurrection hope find themselves self-centered, disunified, unholy, and spiritually poor (Rev. 3:17).

Church leaders can also encourage the kind of groaning for the resurrection Paul experienced (Rom. 8:23) in the church by creating a culture where all members are expected to practice spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are ways in which believers can work out their salvation with fear and trembling as God works within them to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). These synergistic actions (believers practice to cultivate their affections for God) include Bible reading and meditation, prayer, listening to preaching, singing, praying, giving sacrificially, fellowship with other believers, and more.⁵⁶⁹ The Spirit works with these means of grace to produce greater love for Christ. With greater affections for Jesus in place, right

⁵⁶⁹ Alexander Whyte, *An Exposition on the Shorter Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Christian Heritage, 2004), 137, ProQuest Ebrary.

affections for others and right actions soon follow.⁵⁷⁰ As the believer grows in his affection for Christ, his love of the world wanes, and his longing for the resurrection increases.

Continual Reminders of the Resurrection in Corporate Singing

Pastors and elders can assist believers by often speaking and singing about the coming hope of the new heaven and earth. Wonderful hymns of heaven should be on members' lips every Sunday and in their minds throughout the week. The hope of the resurrection is hope in Jesus' coming kingdom, being with the Lord, new glorified bodies like his, inability to sin, and reward. This hope saves sinners, sanctifies saints, defeats discouragement, provokes evangelism, and glorifies God. This hope is also a powerful antidote to the hyper-focus on earthly blessings and material concerns brought about by WOF theology and modern secularism.⁵⁷¹

Applications of Paul's Theology of Groaning Against Word of Faith Theology

Applications of Paul's Theology of Groaning for Individuals

Christians benefit from following Paul's example in Romans 8:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:2,4 as they groan in hope for their new physical resurrected bodies and being with Jesus. The new bodies will allow them to live in the new Jerusalem with God. They long to experience the kingdom and the King drives them to acts of courage that demonstrate they are citizens of the heavenly city (Rev. 21:8). Hope drives them to live lives of holiness and truth that make their destination clear (Rev. 21:27). Their greatest delight is in God himself, so they look to the next life when they see him face to face (1 Cor. 13:12). As Whyte explains, "The Scriptures

⁵⁷⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 16.

⁵⁷¹ Michael Allen, *Grounded in Heaven: Recentering Christian Hope and Life on God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018) 58, ProQuest Ebrary.

constantly teach that man's only true happiness is in God, and that his full happiness in God cannot be attained in this life, but that believing men have that happiness assured to them in the life to come."⁵⁷²

These Christians do not automatically long for their true country. Naturally, they enjoy the things that they can see and touch. It takes supernatural eyes to see with faith and imagine the city whose builder and foundation is God (Heb. 11:10). They continually set their hopes on heaven (Col. 3:2). It requires guidance from the Holy Spirit to groan for heaven (Rom. 8:23 and look to "the things that are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Along with supernatural help, it takes spiritual discipline, time in Scripture, and encouragement to hope in the gathering of believers.

WOF theology engages the natural man at his most basic desires for the world, and all it contains. It engages his desires of the flesh, eyes, and pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). It causes many never to reach the New Jerusalem because they do not love God (1 John 2:15). They only love his gifts. Heavenly hope wars against the desire for this world (2 Cor. 1:9) that is passing away, and desire for the things of the world (promoted by WOF theology) wars against heavenly hope. A person who is a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:3-4). He cannot serve God and money (Matt. 6:24). WOF theology works against Paul's prescribed groaning for the resurrection because it sets the hope of health, wealth, and prosperity above the hope of heaven.

Applications of Paul's Theology of Groaning for the Church

The biblical doctrine of the resurrection and heaven, spoken in spirit and truth, causes groaning for the resurrection. When truths about Jesus' resurrection and the bodily resurrection in

⁵⁷² Whyte, *An Exposition on the Shorter Catechism*, 137.

a body like his (1 Cor. 15, Phil. 3:21) are taught with accuracy and preached by gifted men with the right spirit of longing, they encourage the saints to groan for the resurrection, too. This longing for the life to come corrects the errant doctrine of WOF theology. It reminds saints that their faith is in God, not a force; they are not gods; Christ's atonement for their sins to buy them the earth in the next life, wealth is coming, and suffering is only light and momentary and not worthy to be compared with the glorious reward awaiting (2 Cor. 4:17).⁵⁷³

Christian fellowship in the local church includes groaning for the resurrection that Paul demonstrated and prescribed to all saints. Saints who share suffering and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15) encourage each other with the hope of heaven. Saints who lose loved ones are encouraged by other members of their local church that they need not sorrow as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13). This regular gathering of the saints and fellowship that encourages and strengthens hope in the resurrection is a good vaccination against the short-sighted hopes of the Prosperity Gospel. Empty promises of perpetual health are exposed where sufferings are evident and shared. A desire for wealth will seem hollow in light of the blazing hope of heaven the saints regularly present to each other.

Singing about heaven in the local church causes the essential groaning for the resurrection Paul demonstrated and prescribed to all saints. When the saints sing the songs of their homeland (the new Jerusalem) together as the congregation, they will encourage each other to hope more and more for the resurrection. When they are full of hope in the life to come, the empty promises of WOF theology will hold little appeal.

⁵⁷³ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 52.

Chapter Seven: Summary and Conclusion

It is essential to encourage groaning in the hope of the resurrection. People are saved in hope (Rom. 8:24) and grow to be more like Jesus in hope. This chapter has provided practical methods of encouraging groaning for the resurrection among saints individually and in the gathered assembly of believers.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Summary of the Problem with the Word of Faith Movement

Word of Faith theology presents several problems to Christians who hold to traditional, orthodox doctrine. The problems (discussed in chapter one) are that WOF theology encourages the embrace of unbiblical doctrine, senseless and harmful desires, seeking what God does not promise, and complacency in evangelism and sanctification.

Word of Faith Theology Encourages the Embrace of Unbiblical Doctrine

Fundamental doctrines of WOF theology (Faith-Little Gods-Atonement-Wealth-Suffering) do not originate from Scripture.

Word of Faith theology's concept of faith is problematic for those who have formed their view from a plain reading of Scripture but from metaphysics.⁵⁷⁴ Biblical faith does not trust in words or self but is a living channel of trust in God's person and promises.⁵⁷⁵ WOF theology defines faith as a force. Words are important because they are the "containers of that force."⁵⁷⁶

WOF theology's concept of God and man is problematic for those who have formed their view of God and themselves from a plain reading of Scripture. Scripture presents God as a spirit (John 4:24) and man as "a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:5). Although God made man in his image, he is finite, dead spiritually, and utterly dependent on God for anything good. WOF theology, alternatively, presents God as a man. He does not act according to his sovereign will, as Scripture confirms (Eph. 1:11), but is dictated to and demanded of by man.⁵⁷⁷ Man is a little

⁵⁷⁴ Hanegraaff, "F is for Faith Force," 0:48.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 0:50.

⁵⁷⁶ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 52.

⁵⁷⁷ Hanegraaff, "L is for Little gods," 0:36.

god who can speak physical things into existence as God does.⁵⁷⁸ The prosperity preacher recasts God in his own image. God is like a man (complete with a physical body), and man is a god.⁵⁷⁹

WOF theology's concept of Christ's atonement is problematic for those who have formed their view from a plain reading of Scripture. Scripture affirms that Christ's atonement was for the sins of all who place their faith in him (Is. 53:6, 1 Peter 2:24) and once for all on earth (Rom. 6:10, Heb. 9:26-28). WOF theology unbiblically extends the payment to the "sin" of material poverty.⁵⁸⁰ It also adds a death spiritually in hell that Scripture does not support.⁵⁸¹

WOF theology's concept of wealth is problematic for those who have formed their view of riches from Scripture. Saints who have sought to live by the words and examples of Scripture have kept themselves from the love of money (Heb. 13:5) and sought to live a simple life focused on treasures in heaven as Jesus and Paul did. In opposition to the clear teaching of Scripture, wealth in this life is the prime goal and a "watchword of prosperity."⁵⁸²

WOF theology's concept of suffering is also problematic for those who have formed their view from a plain reading of Scripture. Christians who read their Bibles see suffering as the normal experience of the faithful (Heb. 11:38) and working out for their good (Rom. 8:28-29). It is "through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). WOF theology

⁵⁷⁸ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 54.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 216.

⁵⁸¹ Atkinson, "A Theological Appraisal of the Doctrine that Jesus Died Spiritually," 170.

⁵⁸² Hanegraaff, "W is for Wealth and Want," 0:46.

teaches that God never desires his children to suffer.⁵⁸³ In their view, symptoms are illusions designed to trick God's children away from their Father's guarantee of health and healing.⁵⁸⁴

Word of Faith Theology Encourages Senseless and Harmful Desires

WOF theology encourages senseless and harmful desires that plunge its followers into ruin and destruction, for "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1Tim. 6:6). Paul affirms that godliness along with contentment is "great gain" because setting hope on material things brings frustration (6:7) and necessities satisfy (6:8). Godly contentment protects from the spiritual danger of the love of money (the root of all kinds of evil), and wondering from the faith (6:10).

WOF theology also encourages senseless and harmful desires that rob God of the glory of providing. Contentment demonstrates trust in God that glorifies him.⁵⁸⁵ The reason for keeping one's "life free from love of money" and being "content with what you have" is the ability to "confidently say, the Lord is my helper" (Heb. 13:5-6).

Word of Faith Theology Encourages Seeking What God Does Not Promise

WOF theology instructs its followers to name and claim their health, wealth, and prosperity because this is God's desire for them.⁵⁸⁶ They just need to agree with God and speak those things in existence by faith.⁵⁸⁷ These claims are not evident in Scripture. God does not promise his children health, wealth, and prosperity in this life. Christians' lives within their current bodies are fraught with difficulty. They find themselves subjected to the confines of the

⁵⁸³ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 262.

⁵⁸⁴ Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis*, 55.

⁵⁸⁵ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," 44.

⁵⁸⁶ Fee, *The Disease of the Health & Wealth Gospels*, 10.

⁵⁸⁷ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 216.

sin-cursed world (Rom. 8:23), waging a civil war with their fleshly desires (Rom. 8:13) while engaging in spiritual warfare with the devil (Eph. 6:12). God promises something much better than temporary health or prosperity they cannot keep. He promises eternity with him in new bodies, walking on a new earth (Is. 65:17). Since God only promises health, wealth, and prosperity for the resurrected body in the new heaven and earth, hardship and hope-filled groaning fill the pages of Scripture. Instead of prosperity, the heroes of the faith groaned in hope for the resurrection and a better country (Heb. 11:16) and their resurrected bodies, which are required to experience it (1 Cor. 15:50).

Word of Faith Theology Contributes to Complacency in Evangelism and Sanctification

WOF theology does not motivate its followers to radical evangelism and sanctification as suffering and groaning do. Those whose goal is a life of comfort, prosperity, and ease will not deny themselves, take up their cross, suffer, and be persecuted.⁵⁸⁸ They will not find themselves conditioned for the life and death struggles of dangerous evangelism that Paul faced. They will not proceed far in sanctification since most growth in Christ's image comes from the suffering they seek to avoid.

Summary of the Solution: A Historical-Grammatical Examination of Paul's Theology of Groaning for the Resurrection in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

The necessity of groaning and discontentment with this life in the hope of the resurrection, as described in Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, has been undeveloped until now. However, it may be the most decisive criticism of Word of Faith theology. Groaning in resurrection hope corrects WOF's theological problems. Paul models and commends a

⁵⁸⁸ Piper, "Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly," 42.

healthy, discontented groaning for the life to come in these two passages. This groaning encourages embracing biblical doctrine, sensible and helpful desires, seeking what God promises, and evangelism and sanctification.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages Embracing Biblical Doctrine

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages embracing a biblical definition of faith anchored in the hope of the resurrection. Faith is not a force directed at God, but “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Heroes of biblical faith do not assert their own will and live lives of wealth now but look “forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).⁵⁸⁹ Paul’s faith in the resurrection allows saints to persevere like the heroes of Hebrews 11.

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages the embrace of a biblical doctrine of God and man. When a Christian groans in the hope of eternal life, the longing reminds him of his mortality, sin, and the price Jesus paid to give him eternal life. The thankful saint discards the foolish notion of his own (little god) importance. He suspects his desires and does not long to speak physical changes from his misguided spiritual words.⁵⁹⁰ His longing for the resurrection focuses on the one true God who will make all things new, not on himself.

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages the embrace of the biblical doctrine of the atonement. Longing for the resurrection affirms the plain, time-tested reading of Scripture: that the atonement is limited to Christ's atonement for sins and the actual event on the cross.

⁵⁸⁹ Simpson, “The Significance of Andrew Perriman’s Faith, Health and Prosperity in the Word of Faith Debate,” 86.

⁵⁹⁰ McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, 55.

Those who groan for the resurrection reject that Christ's atonement extended to the "sin" of disease and material poverty.⁵⁹¹ They realize that disease, misery, and poverty are normal and even good for them because God works them out for their good and his glory (Rom. 8:28). Saints who groan do so with their "heads out of the sand." They are not blind to the suffering in this world. It causes them to groan. They groan, longing for a world where tears, poverty, and pain will be no more (Rev. 21:4).

Groaning in resurrection hope encourages embracing the biblical doctrine of wealth. Paul warns the rich "not to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches" (1 Tim. 6:17). Groaning helps them heed the apostle's warning. Groaning for the treasure that they can actually keep in heaven stops Christians from clinging to what they cannot on earth. When Christians set their hope on the heavenly city, the over-desire for present wealth leaves them like a passing ridiculous thought. They see that wealth accumulated in this life is not worth comparing to it (Rom. 8:18). They long for the "better and more lasting possession" to come (Heb. 10:34) that makes riches in this life seem like trinkets. Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is the antidote for the man-centered focus on wealth of the WOF movement.

Groaning in resurrection hope also encourages the embrace of the biblical doctrine of suffering. WOF theology teaches that God never desires Christians to suffer, but faithful saints with a biblical understanding of suffering know this is not the case.⁵⁹² They know that while suffering is never pleasant, it is always training, refining, weaning them from the world and yielding "the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are being trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). Groaning in the hope of the resurrection helps believers put their suffering into perspective as the

⁵⁹¹ Jones, "The Five Errors of the Prosperity Gospel," 29.

⁵⁹² Copeland, *Freedom from Fear*, 14.

positive character-building test it is. Groaning like Paul in the hope of the resurrection helps Christians see clearly with the eyes of faith that their sufferings are only light and momentary and not worthy of being compared to the eternal weight of glory awaiting (2 Cor. 4:17). It helps make it clear that this life is meant to include purifying suffering and the next is not. Groaning in the hope of the resurrection is the cure for the WOF movement's misdirected focus on avoiding suffering in this life.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages Sensible and Helpful Desires

Groaning in the hope of the resurrection encourages sensible and helpful desires. WOF theology encourages a senseless and harmful craving for money that plunges its followers into ruin and destruction (1 Tim. 6:10). Groaning with discontentment in this present body surprisingly produces contentment with earthly status that, along with godliness, is "great gain (6:6)." Those who see the age to come as the priority will not fret about a lack of prosperity now. They will fill their lives with sensible and holy desire to glorify God by setting their hopes on him (6:16). The hope in God that comes from the longing for heaven helps believers reject placing their hope in their wealth. Groaning with discontentment in this present life also encourages Christians with the helpful and sensible desire to pursue treasures in heaven they can keep. Paul commands Timothy to charge the rich to be rich, not in material goods, but in good works, generosity, and treasures in heaven (1 Tim. 6:18-19). Groaning for the resurrection is the cure for senseless and harmful desires. It is the cause of sensible and helpful desires because it produces contentment, causes saints to hope in God, and encourages storing treasure in heaven.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages Seeking What God Promises

Groaning in discontentment with this life and the hope of the one to come encourages believers to focus on what God promises in Scripture. Contrary to WOF theology, God does not promise his children health, wealth, and prosperity in this life.⁵⁹³ God promises tribulation (John 16:33), persecution to all who live godly lives (2 Tim. 3:12), and a greater reward than temporal prosperity could ever offer. He promises the resurrection to eternal life (Dan. 12:2) with him in a new heaven and earth (Is. 65:17). God also promises abundant life that is not dependent on earthly circumstances (John 10:10). This abundant life looks like “perfect peace” (Is. 26:3) for those whose minds "are stayed" on him. It looks like more joy than what the "grain and new wine" of prosperity can bring (Psalm 4:7). It looks like the constant and enduring friendship and love from the most praise-worthy being (Heb. 13:5). The blessings of eternal life and abundant life are far greater than the promise of health, wealth and prosperity. They bring the joy that those who search for prosperity crave. They can have it if they repent and seek God (the giver) for his own sake and not merely his gifts.

Groaning in Resurrection Hope Encourages Evangelism and Sanctification

Groaning with discontentment in this present body encourages evangelism and sanctification in a way that WOF theology cannot. WOF theology encourages its followers to seek a life of ease and comfort.⁵⁹⁴ The pursuit of ease and comfort is impossible for those who intend to obey the Lord’s command to share the gospel (Mark 16:15) or become increasingly like Jesus (1 Thess. 4:3). Evangelism will bring persecution. Sanctification requires pain, poverty,

⁵⁹³ Hagee, *The Seven Secrets*, 232.

⁵⁹⁴ Piper, “Prosperity Preaching: Deceitful and Deadly,” 42.

patience, and periods of humbling. Unlike WOF theology, holy discontentment with this life (that Paul experienced [Rom. 8:18-25, 2 Cor. 4:7-5:10] and groaned in) gives the toughness it requires to do the demanding tasks the Lord requires of his servants while at the same time giving the joy and hope it takes to press on to complete those tasks (Phil. 3:14).

Groaning in resurrection hope propels believers to share the gospel proactively. The longing for home brings a desire to bring all who will listen into the New Jerusalem. The reward of seeing the saints he had led to the Savior at the resurrection was Paul's great motivation for evangelism. He says, "For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you" (1 Thess. 2:19)? He tells the Corinthians, "We are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 1:14).

The groaning for heaven also encourages them to progress in their sanctification. Knowing the "mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53) causes saints to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (15:58). Waiting "for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells," causes believers to be "diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace" (2 Peter 3:13-14). Knowing that they will receive a resurrected body like Christ when he appears and knowing they will see him as he is, causes "everyone who has this hope" to purify themselves as he is pure (1 John 3:2b-3).

Restatement of Thesis

Through a historical-grammatical examination of Romans 8:18-25 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10, this dissertation has demonstrated that, in contrast to WOF theology, Paul saw groaning for the resurrection as an essential element of both saving and sanctifying faith. The apostle's overwhelming focus was on the life to come. His singular focus caused groaning for the resurrection and discontentment with this life unseen in the WOF or Prosperity movement.

Paul's elevated view of the discontented suffering in this life and the groanings for the resurrection it produces is a needed critique of and means of correction for Word of Faith theology.

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