

Romans 8:19-23

Part 6

Romans 8:18-23

¹⁸ *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

¹⁹ *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*

²⁰ *For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,*

²¹ *Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

²² *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

²³ *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

I feel at this point we all understand what the creature *is*, that, in this context, it is the heavenly hosts who have not joined in rebellion against God, but who still occupy positions in the heavens, and that the creature is earnestly awaiting *our* future manifestation as *sons*, as adult heirs. We understand that God subjected the creature to the vanity of Satan's rebellion *against its will*, not because God is cruel or unjust, but because of the ultimate hope He has for it, which is vested *in us*. The creature is specifically said to be subjected to vanity because God is not fulfilling His eternal purpose in Christ *through them*—thus they are awaiting that future purpose to be fulfilled, and it is going to be fulfilled through *redeemed man*.

God therefore has a future *hope* for the creature, and that hope is quite literally vested *within us*, in our *inner man*, as God, *through the doctrine*, works within us something *spiritual*; this work that God is doing within us *by His word* is going to produce within us a *glory*, and this glory will one day be openly revealed.

If you will notice in verse 18, we are told that there is a glory which shall be revealed *in us*, which is not worthy to be compared with the sufferings we encounter as a result of living in a fallen world. If you will recall, we are to *reckon* that truth to be so. We cannot see this glory, but are to esteem the truths of the word of God to the extent that we are willing and able to reckon this to be so. We are to place such importance upon it that it outweighs the struggles we face in life.

As I have said, we are going to be given truths from the word of God that cannot be physically perceived, and though you cannot see them, we are meant to take them on with the same child-like faith as we did when we believed that we were sinners in need of a Savior and casted all of our trust on Jesus Christ *to be* that Savior. We have to trust the doctrine here in the same manner of selfless abandon. If we do not do this, the word will not work effectually within us. We must live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God—and we know that *this is the word of God to us today*. We must trust that *every word is pure*, and that what we have is exactly what the Father wants us to have—we cannot continue to ride the fence on this issue. It is *the word* which is going to produce what God wants to produce.

So, in verse 18 we see a *glory*, a glory to be revealed *in us*, and then if you will notice in verse 21, we see that *glory* show up again. *Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*. We see here that the creature is going to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, from the corruption of sin and its effects, into *our glorious liberty*. And so now we have a further defining characteristic of this *glory*. This glory is associated with *liberty*. And so, in this lesson, I want us to discuss what this liberty is.

This is the first use of the word *liberty* in the epistle to the Romans, and if Paul is using it, then that means we should already know *something* about what it means, since the doctrine and concepts contained therein naturally build upon themselves. Paul will use this word 9 times in total in our epistles, all of which occur in Romans through Galatians. The fact that it only occurs in these epistles should indicate something to us. It is necessarily spoken of in our foundational doctrine here in Romans, and it is specifically addressed in the letters written to churches who had *misunderstood* that foundational doctrine, the Corinthians and the Galatians. One took this liberty to be an approval of licentiousness, the other did not truly see it for what it was, and began seeking other ways to reach spiritual maturity.

First, let's get a basic definition for *liberty*. The following definitions are taken from *Noah Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language*:

1. Freedom from restraint, in a general sense, and applicable to the body, or to the will or mind. The body is at liberty when not confined; the will or mind is at liberty when not checked or controlled. A man enjoys liberty when no physical force operates to restrain his actions or volitions.

2. Natural liberty consists in the power of acting as one thinks fit, without any restraint or control, except from the laws of nature. It is a state of exemption from the control of others, and from positive laws and the institutions of social life. This liberty is abridged by the establishment of government.

We see then that on the most fundamental level the word *liberty* denotes *freedom*. Freedom from any force opposed either to the body, mind, or will. Now, as we consider this, I want us to remember what we have learned already in the book of Romans. We have learned that we are free from *sin* (Rom. 6:18, 6:22), which essentially *told us what to do*; in Adam, we were servants of sin, and slavishly followed after it and did what it demanded of us. We have also learned that we are free from *the Law* of Moses (Rom. 6:14, Rom. 7:3-4), which, as an external command, tells man what to do as well.

Because of our freedom from these things, we have therefore not received *the spirit of bondage again to fear*, and are thus also *free* from a fear-based motivation to serve God, to try and appease God by our deeds. We have instead received *the Spirit of adoption*, and thus relate to God as *our Father*. We do not need to try and appease God by our deeds because He *is* pleased with us simply on the basis of our new identity in Christ.

We see this very issue of *liberty* at the center of the Galatian controversy:

Galatians 2:1–5

¹ *Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.*

² *And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.*

³ *But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:*

⁴ *And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:*

⁵ *To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*

Galatians 5:1

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Members of the Jewish congregations at Jerusalem had come to the churches of Galatia which Paul had established under the dispensation of grace and tried to impose *their* doctrine, which God had ordained before for a different purpose, upon *them*; they had effectively tried to bring them into the bondage of the Law. Paul then recounts his meeting with the apostles of the circumcision in Jerusalem, and how he contended for the truth of the gospel that was specifically committed to him. These believing Hebrews from Jerusalem knew nothing of Paul's doctrine for us today. They of course thought they were doing the right thing, but what they were doing by imposing the Law upon these Galatians was in effect making their sanctified life in Christ *functionally dead*. You'll notice in Galatians 2:4 that Paul uses the word *liberty* and that it is drawn in contrast against *the bondage of the Law*.

And so while we generally understand that we are not under the Old Testament law, what we fail to take to heart is that we are not under any system of performance *at all*, but are rather called into a *relationship* that has absolutely no strings whatsoever attached. This can be a little harder for people to accept. But if God wanted you to just perform—if He were to require something of you, it would be according to His Law, not our own subjective standards.

And so I want us to ask ourselves, in any of the doctrine we've received so far in Romans have we seen any indication that God is trying to tell us what to do? Or is every indication that He is rather trying to raise us up and *educate* us? God is not interested in telling man what to do—He already did that through the Law of Moses, and in so doing demonstrated conclusively that an external command cannot fix the inner man, that an external command cannot change one's heart or identity, and that it in fact cannot even fix one's actions. God is not concerned with "bossing us around," He is concerned with *who and what we are*, and what we are *becoming*. He is interested in our welfare as His sons and daughters.

Again, this is a fundamentally different disposition than many have in relation to God. Not that God's disposition to them is any different, but that they themselves approach God in ignorance and fear. The carnal man regards God in His omnipotent power and is concerned merely with God's demand for justice, knowing they themselves are accountable. The Spiritual mind however knows the solution in Christ is absolute, and approaches God *on that basis alone*, and can then not only see in God those attributes of *Fatherhood*, but see *in themselves* the attributes of His offspring. In this relationship, both properly value the words, ideas, feelings, and desires of the other. We therefore not only value the Father's words and desires, His will and purpose, but we understand that He actually values what we think as well. Of course, what we *think* may be so far removed from the reality of what's important, or from reality in general, that there is not

much He can do but pity us, as we pity the imaginative rants of a four year old. And yet, He doesn't condescend us, He doesn't punish us—and He loves us no less.

This relational quality we now have the privilege of sharing with the Father forms the fundamental basis of what *liberty* is. But this relationship in turn has its basis in the things which the gospel itself provides: things such as our justification, which deals with our legal standing, and our sanctification, which deals with our very identity itself. God's disposition towards us who are in Christ is the same disposition He has towards Christ Himself. Is the Father pleased with Christ? Yes. Does He love Christ? Yes. Can He be any more or less pleased with Christ than He already is? No. Can He love Christ any more or any less than He does now? No. And so then our relationship with the Father, because of the imputed righteousness and identity of Christ, ensures that God cannot be any more or less pleased with us, and that He cannot love us any more or any less, because it is the same love the Father has for the Son. What the Son accomplished cannot be improved upon—it was and is perfect.

Now, *liberty* may be generally equated with *freedom*, and indeed it is in respect to our freedom from *the law of sin*, from *the law of Moses*, and from the fear-based motivation to serve God. But *liberty* also differs in some sense from the word *freedom*. To define words, we use other words which convey similar ideas, and yet, those words may also carry an additional shade of meaning which doesn't fit the word we are trying to pin down and define. I want us to consider George Crabb's entry for liberty in his book on English Synonyms:

Freedom, Liberty. — Freedom, the abstract noun of free, is taken in all the senses of the primitive. Liberty, from the Latin liber, free, is only taken in the sense of free from external constraint, from the action of power.

Freedom is personal and private; liberty is public. The freedom of the city is the privilege granted by the city to individuals; the liberties of the city are the immunities enjoyed by the city. By the same rule of distinction we speak of the freedom of the will, the freedom of manners, the freedom of conversation, or the freedom of debate; but the liberty of conscience, the liberty of the press, the liberty of the subject.

Freedom serves, moreover, to qualify the action; liberty is applied only to the agent; hence we say, to speak or think with freedom; but to have the liberty of speaking, thinking, or acting.

Freedom and liberty are likewise employed for the private conduct of individuals toward one another: but the former is used in a qualified good sense, the latter often in an unqualified bad sense. A freedom may sometimes be licensed or allowed; a liberty, if it be taken, may be something not agreeable or allowed. A freedom may be innocent and even pleasant; a liberty may do more or less violence to the decencies of life or the feelings of individuals. There are little freedoms which

may pass between youth of different sexes, so as to heighten the pleasures of society; but a modest woman will be careful to guard against any freedoms which may admit of mis-interpretation, and resent every liberty offered to her as an insult.

(George Crabb's English Synonyms)

Freedom can mean free in any sense, and yet liberty refers to being free from external constraint—meaning no one is going to stop you. And that is exactly our disposition as sons of God who are free from the law—God is not giving you a set of commands, He is not restraining you, and He is not punishing you for your actions.

Freedom often describes the carrying out of the act itself, we may say *I come and go freely*, while *liberty* refers to that which the person is endowed with, which *allows* them to act (*I have liberty to come and go*). We have been endowed with certain liberties by God because of the things the gospel provides.

Liberty however has an additional connotation that cannot be overlooked. A man might take a certain liberty that, while they certainly have the right to do so, may or may not be frowned upon by others, for one reason or another. Now, I have said *liberty* is the freedom to do what is right, and that is true, but that is an incomplete picture of what this word encapsulates in our doctrine. We know of our justified standing before God, and thus know we are not legally obligated in any way, but have received *total pardon* and *perfect immunity*; we know of our sanctified identity in Christ, and therefore we know that we are free from sin so that we *can* live unto God. And so our legal standing and functional capacity has been dealt with, and we understand this. We've been set free from both the debt and the power of sin.

But why then would scripture describe what we've been given and what we will have as *liberty*, if *liberty* carries with it the idea of perhaps doing something that may or may not be *ideal*, as the word implies? Other translations of the Bible almost universally use the word *freedom* here in Romans 8:21, but *freedom* here is not adequate. There is something implied by the word *liberty* that relates to our position in Christ *doctrinally*.

Just because you are dead to sin does that mean you will always live in accordance with that? No. Just because you are a saved member of the Body of Christ, does that mean you will always live in accordance with the righteousness and character of Christ? No. God has left our free will intact and, and rather than giving us a rigid set of commands, we now have a position which *allows us to learn by trial and error*; we have a position and status that allows us *to learn by experience*. We have the status as adult sons, and rather than punish us for getting it wrong, He is giving us the liberty to learn so that we get it right.

What have we learned about who we are as *sons of God*? We've learned that we are free from the spirit of bondage and any fear-based motivation to serve God. We are free from *any* fear based motivation, and so God actually wants us to learn to exercise our free will in the context of His eternal purpose, *for* His purpose. He doesn't want us doing things "just because," He wants us to actually know *the why* behind it. In this way we are going to learn to *prove* His will.

What we are going to receive, starting in Romans 12:3 is an education in four basic decision-making skills: *wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity*. All of these things operate in tandem *with* our free will, with our personality and our own unique characteristics to allow us to function righteously *without having a law*. Rather than having a set of "do's and don'ts," we have principles by which to make decisions *as adult sons*. This is an aspect of *liberty*. God is not *telling* us what to do. He is expecting us to know out of any given set of choices which ones are the most excellent, and how to accomplish His purposes within them.

I want us to consider Proverbs chapter 2:

Proverbs 2:6-9

⁶ *For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.*

⁷ *He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.*

⁸ *He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints.*

⁹ *Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path.*

Notice here that the Lord keepeth the *paths* of judgment, and preserveth *the way* of His saints. Thus, there are *many* paths of judgment. And when we say "judgment" here, we mean judgment as in learning to judge between one matter and another—in the sense of *exercising good judgment*. But there are many paths, and yet notice, there is only one way. The Lord preserveth *the way* of His saints. And so there is only one way. Jesus Christ said *He* is that way. And yet within that way there are many paths, and they are all paths of *judgment*.

Proverbs 2:10-20

¹⁰ *When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul;*

¹¹ *Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:*

¹² *To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things;*

¹³ *Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness;*

¹⁴ *Who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the frowardness of the wicked;*

¹⁵ *Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths:*

¹⁶ *To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;*

¹⁷ *Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.*

¹⁸ *For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead.*

¹⁹ *None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life.*

²⁰ *That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.*

When we consider here in Proverbs 2 *the evil man*, and *the strange woman*, what we see is that not only are there many *paths*, but there are also many *ways*. There are multiple ways of darkness, as verse 13 says. Their ways are crooked (v15). And so, when God warns of two possible snares to the son, He warns not only of their *paths* but of their *ways*, plural. There are many *ways of darkness* in this world, and within those many ways are many paths.

But there is only one true way, one good way... and yet within that singular way, there are many paths, and that is the point I am trying to make here. When we think of God's will in relation to us, we tend towards the *superstitious*. We think God must have some perfect will for our lives, and that in any given circumstance, with so many possible options for us to take, only one of those options is "God's will," and if we make the wrong choice then this somehow adulterates His will for our lives. Some even go so far as to think that this impacts their relationship with God, as if, when they make the wrong choice, God is somehow less pleased with them. But all of that is *completely contrary to the principle of our liberty*. That type of superstitious thinking is entirely contrary to what our doctrine has revealed to us.

That does not mean that God *doesn't care* what choices we make. Of course He cares. And that is why He is going to continue to educate us in our doctrine. But to presume that there is only one choice which is in line with His character is not always true. Some situations may have several "paths" one could take by which they could demonstrate the character of the Father. Some may indeed have only one. Some may have *none*, and the only way to demonstrate the Father's nature and character and wisdom is by removing yourself entirely.

In this way, when we operate according to the things set forth in the Father's word, we carry out His manifest righteousness in life, and we thereby *prove* His will. And that is exactly what Romans 12:2 says:

Romans 12:1-2

¹ *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

² *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

Our typical disposition is to ask God to reveal His will to us; ironically He already has, and He has in fact told us to prove it for ourselves in our lives. There is therefore a necessity for some basic decision making skills to educate us in how to do this. Again, as with this entire process, none of this is subjective. It is objectively grounded in the actual words of God contained in our scriptures; it is based in the word of God. God is not going to come along and give us a set of laws as He did with Israel under the Old Covenant; what He is going to do instead is give us the skills to make choices as we should, based upon certain qualities which He Himself possesses.

Everything we need to function in eternity was given to us the moment we trusted Christ as Savior. We possess those things now, and we will possess them then. Our liberty is a result of those things. And so this liberty is not going to change when we go to heaven. God is not going to begin micromanaging us when we receive our placement in the heavenly places above the creature. And because *all* of the children of God are given *liberty*, only those who are properly educated and edified unto godliness are rewarded with positions of authority—the Father cannot place individuals who are not prepared or equipped into those positions, because He is not going to be telling them what to do.

We have received the Spirit of the adoption already, we have received all of the Spiritual things we need to be sons of God. All the spiritual things we need to function in eternity have already been given to us—thus, God's disposition to us now is the same as it will be in the heavenly places. And if He has given us liberty *now*, and is respecting our choices *now*, then He's going to do so there as well. God is not going to dispense with our free will when we get to heaven, and He isn't going to force us to do anything. We will *all* however fit into a *unified functioning body*, thus *the creature* is going to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of *all of the children of God*, and we, as the children of God, will each individually operate out of what was developed *within us*, to the extent that we allowed the doctrine to actually form Christ within our inner man.

If you were to say to any given Christian, *I believe that we are going to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ*, they will all universally agree with you. But if you ask them *how* God is going to accomplish that, you invariably get little to no answer. In the best case scenarios, the response is that this is something automatic, but they can't tell you *how* God is going to accomplish that, or what part we have in it.

They may say it's something God does automatically throughout your life, that it is something the Holy Spirit does naturally and seamlessly within the believer, but we know that's not the case. We know believers who change very little. We know Christians to be some of the most judgmental, unChrist-like people we've ever met.

Or they will say that God is going to conform us to the image of Christ when we die, or at the judgment seat of Christ. But if God is going to do that to all believers at the judgment seat of Christ, then what's the point of the judgment? The judgment is there to take things away, to burn them up—not to add anything.

In all scenarios, there is no actual process or mechanism by which this gets accomplished where we ourselves are in any way involved; it is always something God does in contradiction to our own free will. But we know that free will is an essential aspect in God's great plan of raising up a family. Not only so, but that free will is a part of the image He bestowed upon us when He created us. He does not violate our free will in this life—He does not reach down and supernaturally change our soul—so why would He do so when our soul leaves this physical body? The thing is, God does have an actual mechanism in place by which we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, and that mechanism involves our own free will cooperation, and it is accomplished through the word of God, it is accomplished through the systematic understanding and application of our doctrine working effectually in our inner man.

And God has given us the liberty to be able to take the doctrine and apply it in our daily lives so that we learn by experience. As I said, we are not always going to get it right, it is sometimes trial and error, but our liberty provides the context within which we are able to go through this process.

And while the topic of liberty extends beyond what we have discussed here, the summation of it is this: the proper use of Christian liberty in this life is for *edification*—both for yourself and for others. Consider Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:13

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Edification, in a word, is *how* we are conformed to the image of God's son, and liberty is the context within which this edification process is able to exist. As we will see in future lessons, our concern cannot just be for ourselves, but must include other members of the body as well. And this is what is in view here in Galatians 5. We were not given this liberty to use as an occasion for the flesh—either for sin or for dead religion—but were given this liberty so that we can by love serve one another, build one another up in truth, so that we all come to the knowledge of the son of God, unto a perfect man.

Thus, what is developed within us through this process is going to be what we take with us to the heavenly places, and the creature is waiting for the manifestation of those sons of God who

have used their liberty for *glory*, for God's eternal purpose, thus, it is the *glorious liberty* of the sons of God.