

Romans 8:19-23
Part 7

Romans 1:18-23

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.*

In the previous lesson we began to discuss this issue of *liberty*, and we saw that the fundamental things which the gospel provides ensures a real Father/son, Father/daughter relationship with God in which we enjoy the freedom of personal agency apart from the fear of punishment. God, in treating us as sons and daughters, is actually more interested in seeing us educated by experience, thus we are given the ability to make choices apart from the fear of punishment, we are given *liberty* in other words.

Of course when I say that God is interested in us being educated by experience, I am not saying He expects us to be educated only by the things we go through in life, or by the world—this education is *directly correlated to His word*. It is through the doctrine we are receiving that He wants to educate us, but this doctrine will have application in our life experiences, and it is by applying it in our lives in this way that we are being educated. It is experiential education which is meant to affect the heart to produce an edification. Without the doctrine—without the word of God abiding in you, rather, without it *dwelling* in you, as our apostle says in verse 11 of our present chapter—the Spirit is not working within you to produce *anything*. This is what it means to suffer *with* Christ. To engage in the process that Christ Himself engaged in as a man, utilizing

the word of God, by which the Father dwelt in Him and worked through Him, so that He was able to accomplish God's will, even unto death, and by which He was forever perfected as a *Son*. And when we do this—when we *mind the things of the Spirit*, allowing the actual words of scripture to take up residence within our minds and begin to dwell there, to actually go to work within us, what is happening is *Christ is being formed in our inner man*. Thus, when we suffer, if we do so *Spiritually*, by properly responding to those situations by the word of God, we are doing so *with Christ*. That is the process we are meant to be engaged in and working through. This process is the basic format of our edification.

This *liberty* however is the context within which our edification itself takes place. Of course this liberty provides for some basis of trial and error within the context of our present lives, here and now, and thus the very word *liberty* carries a connotation that freedom itself simply doesn't. Liberty allows for our own decision making, but obviously trial *and error* is not what the creature is earnestly expecting. The heavenly realm is awaiting the manifestation of the sons of God who have been led by the Spirit, who have been educated and equipped to bring the life and righteousness of Christ back into creation, who have used their liberty for God's eternal purposes.

Did Christ have liberty? He did. He was free from sin in every way, and He even had the freedom to choose whether or not He engaged in the work of redemption as a man for man. When Christ was about to be arrested, did He not say Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But, He concludes, *how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?* (Matt. 26:53-54). Jesus, though He had liberty as a son, used that liberty to prove the will of God.

Liberty in our mortal lives now is also meant for the purpose of *proving the will of God*, and this of necessity includes the salvation of sinners and the edification of the saints. And so, though we may not make every decision we will ever make perfectly, the core idea is that we are to, *by love*, serve one another, just as *Christ* used His liberty to serve *us*, rather than use this liberty as an occasion for the flesh, as Galatians 5:13 tells us.

Liberty in a general sense means *to be free from external constraint*—and so we understand God is not stopping us or trying to personally control our every decision in the way some superstitiously think. We saw in the last lesson that while He *does* have a desire for us to make decisions that reflect His nature, and character, and will, there is not always only one viable avenue to take. Sometimes there are multiple choices we could make, and perhaps none are necessarily wrong. Sometimes there may only be one choice that reflects God's character and His will. Sometimes there may be none and we simply remove ourselves or choose not to act. And in the course of our being educated by the word of God, and being edified unto godliness, we may or may not always make those choices exactly the way we should.

This is why we took the time to try and differentiate the word liberty from freedom, and we saw how liberty sometimes carries with it a negative connotation. Not that the liberty itself is *bad*, but that *what we may do by our liberty* may not always be *beneficial*. This is why Paul will write in 1 Corinthians 10:23, *All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*

This is an important distinction because *liberty* can be abused. The fact that we have letters of corrective doctrine which address this issue *demonstrate* it can be abused; the fact that Paul says *use not liberty as an occasion for the flesh* shows us just how absolute our standing in Christ *is*, as that liberty can be used even for the wrong reasons.

The word *freedom* often speaks to a man's state of being, whereas *liberty* is best understood as one's ability to act within the context of others. Cambridge Dictionary defines liberty as *doing something that will have an effect on someone else without asking their permission*. We see within that very definition the concept of *decision making*, and decision making that has an impact *on others*. That is the idea behind our Christian liberty, that, while we do not need legal permission from God the Father to do things, we must consider the impact our decisions have on ourselves and one another—whether they advance God's will and purposes, or hinder them.

We are actually not free in the sense that freedom absolutely denotes. We are free from certain consequences, but we must still answer to the Lord. We are actually made servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:18). Paul will say later in 1 Corinthians 6:20 that *we are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*. And so, we are to be servants now *of righteousness*—we are not *free* in the sense that we are not meant to serve *something*. But though we are servants of righteousness, we *are* given liberty. See a servant, though he may not be *free*, may still be given *liberty* to do things, and such is the case with us. We have been set free from the power of sin, and we are no longer servants of sin, but now we are made servants of righteousness, though we may not always do so.

We of course need to understand just how total and complete this liberty is, but we also want to learn to use it for the correct reasons. We must understand it as it is in truth, so that, as we go about our edification, we are not confusing the voice of our conscience with God Himself, as we may not always do things exactly as they should be done. By this point we should understand that the Father has spoken to mankind already *in His word*, and that this objective standard is how we know the Father and His will—not by our own thoughts and feelings. And yet we may still think and feel certain things within the discourse of life when we fall short or make choices that do not reflect God's character or will—it is easy to condemn ourselves in those moments, and so it is important to understand the total efficacy of the gospel, the standing and relationship it secures for us, and the liberty it provides. It is important to know how the Father sees us, as His adult sons and daughters.

And so the ability to exercise *our own judgment* in certain matters, that is a facet of *liberty*, and that is going to remain, even in the heavenly places. If you will remember, there are three aspects of what we term salvation: we are saved from the debt and penalty of our sins in our justification; we are saved from the power of sin itself in our sanctification; and we will one day be saved from the very presence of sin in our future glorification. We will be *caught up*, and receive a new body, one fit for the heavenly places, we will go through the judgment seat of Christ and receive our placement, our *adoption*, and then we will actually be presented to the Father as His Church, the Body of Christ, with Christ Himself as the Head.

Thus, we will be free from the presence of sin itself; we will also have gone through the refining fire of the word of God at the judgment seat of Christ, where the inner-man work that is meant to take place in our mortal lives will be evaluated, and where a man will be saved, so as by fire. Thus, the inner man will also reflect *Christ alone*, to the extent that Christ was formed within them. Our placement then will reflect that for which we are equipped. *Liberty* then, in that final state, while it will reflect Christ, and while it will be free from sin, will still provide for our free will agency. God is not going to change our personalities, He is not going to take away our own unique characteristics, He is going to—at the judgment seat of Christ—use the refining fire of the word to do something in us that will eliminate the things which are contrary to Him, and to His nature and character. But we will still have the agency to make choices. He may appoint one to a task, but instead of telling them *how* to do it, wants to know rather what they think about it, how they think it should be done. And the Father will have full confidence in that individual because the judgment has resulted in a placement for them for which they are perfectly suited.

I want us to consider one passage to see this concept demonstrated:

1 Kings 22:19-23

¹⁹ *And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.*

²⁰ *And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramothgilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.*

²¹ *And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him.*

²² *And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.*

²³ *Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.*

We see here God, in the midst of this divine council of heavenly hosts, does not single out one being and command them what to do. Rather, God asks who will carry out a task, and actually hears what they have to say, and the way in which they plan to accomplish this task. Of course there are many things that could be said about this passage, but my only point is to show that God, even with these angelic beings, actually allows for their input on certain matters.

Now, this *liberty* is specifically said to be a *glorious* liberty. We know that the word *glory* in a basic sense means *brightness*, and while I do not doubt that we ourselves will display some form of *brightness* in our future manifestation, with *glorified* bodies, how can *brightness* properly be used to describe something that is not in and of itself of a physical nature, such as *liberty*? Our liberty is characteristic of our *status* and *ability*, it is not something that can be described by physical attributes such as brightness. This *glory* here is not a description of appearance but a description of how we will in fact display the righteousness and character of God Himself.

In Exodus 33:18, Moses says to the Lord, *Shew me thy glory*. The Lord responds with this:

Exodus 33:19-23

¹⁹ *And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.*

²⁰ *And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.*

²¹ *And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock:*

²² *And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:*

²³ *And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.*

In Exodus 34, the very next chapter, we see this actually transpire:

Exodus 34:6-7

⁶ *And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,*

⁷ *Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*

And so Moses asks to see God's *glory*, and in God's demonstration of His glory to him, the Lord announces certain characteristics which He possesses: mercy and grace, longsuffering, goodness and truth, and we have justice in the fact that he will by no means clear the guilty. He is therefore correlating His *glory* with *who He is*. Moses says, *Shew me thy glory*, and the Lord, when He passes by so as to fulfill this request, announces these aspects of His character.

Jesus Christ is of course the embodiment of these very things. The work which Christ performed on the cross is where all of these attributes and characteristics of God met in harmony and were reconciled on account of mankind. Jesus Christ and the work that He performed therefore was a manifestation and display of the very *glory* of God—of His nature and character itself. It is Jesus Christ who is ultimately the perfect manifestation of that glory:

John 1:14

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John writes that they *beheld* Jesus's glory. Did Jesus Christ come in the flesh in a display of brightness and splendor? Or did He come in the form of a humble servant? See, this *glory* that John speaks of here, that he and the other disciples visibly *beheld*, was not a glory of brightness and radiance, but of the character of the Father Himself. In John chapter 14, Philip essentially asks of Jesus the same thing that Moses asked in Exodus 33—*He asks to see the Father*. Jesus's response is of course, *he that hath seen me hath seen the Father* (John 14:9).

Well, did they actually see the manifest presence of God the Father? No, what they saw were the invisible attributes of God the Father manifested visibly *in the Son*. They saw His glory in that they saw *who the Father was* demonstrated in the Son. And isn't this the way it is with *us*—we know we are more than our outward appearance. Our most valuable attributes are not the visible ones, but the *invisible* ones, the ones that relate to our identity and character.

We understand that the Bible uses this word *glory* in multiple ways. We see this in fact with many words—words do not always have the same meaning. Meaning is dependent on the context in which it is used. Thus, any given word has what we call a *semantic range*. This word *glory* can refer to something that is *plentiful*, something that has *splendor* or *brightness*, it can be used to refer to *honor* (though it exceeds mere honor), it can refer to *taking pleasure, joy or pride in something*, it can refer to *heaven itself*, or even *God's manifest physical presence*, and it of course can be used to refer to *the weight of God's eternal nature and perfect character, His holiness*.

God of course possesses an intrinsic glory *within* Himself that no one can divest of Him. In this sense, it is not possible to *take away from it* or *add to it*; and yet we *ascribe* glory to God, or we glorify God in certain matters, whether by word or by faith or by deed—and yet we are not *adding* anything to the glory He intrinsically possesses, we are simply acknowledging and ascribing to Him that which He eternally *is*, in reverence of Him.

Because of the several ways in which *glory* can be defined, we sometimes have a nebulous idea of what's being communicated in verses such as Romans 8:21. We saw in verses 17 and 18 the concept of *glory*, and I feel I did not fully do the subject justice then.

Romans 8:17-18

¹⁷ *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

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.*

In Romans 8:17 if you will recall, you have a glory which is *conditional*—it is conditioned upon suffering *with* Christ; and yet in verse 18 we have a glory which is not conditional, in that *it shall* be revealed *in us*. It is this truth of unconditional glory which is meant to anchor us in the midst of our trials, in the midst of the things we suffer in this fallen world. Verse 17 then was meant to first introduce us to this concept that there is an ongoing forward momentum to the doctrine, one that is meant to take us from glory to glory. But what is this glory? We identified that being glorified together *with* Christ has to do with receiving a position of authority under Christ in His kingdom. The unconditional glory of verse 18 however is something that is said to be revealed in us. But they are in actuality both things which relate to the inner man. They are both things which relate to God's nature and character.

What we have to understand is that, just as there are different aspects to what God accomplished through the gospel, there are different *glories* which are associated with each as well. The glorious aspect of our *liberty* has everything to do with those things which regard Jesus Christ.

There is a glory to God the Father by Jesus Christ in regards to our *justification*:

Romans 15:7

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Ephesians 1:6

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

There is a glory to God in our *sanctification*:

1 Corinthians 6:20

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

If it's something by which we glorify God *in our body*, then what do we know? We know this is not speaking about simply doing things in our flesh that appear objectively good, but by living by faith out of the new identity we have in Christ, by *minding the things of the Spirit*, for *they that are in the flesh cannot please God* (Rom. 8:8). This is why this verse does not just say *in your body*, but also, *in your spirit*.

There is a glory to God *in our service* as we labor with Him in ministry:

1 Corinthians 10:30-33

³⁰ *For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?*

³¹ *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

³² *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:*

³³ *Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*

There is a glory to God by Christ's faithful performance to fulfill His promises in us, that is, to perform the work He has purposed to perform in our inner man:

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

These promises are in Christ and glorify God the Father *by us, through us*. These are things which God has promised and purposed to accomplish in us by Jesus Christ. They are not just any and every promise you can randomly find in the Bible.

And so we see that at every level of the work God is performing in the saints by Jesus Christ, there is a glory to Him. Every step in this process of taking a wicked sinner who's under God's wrath and turning them into a saint who's at peace with God, and cleansing them and freeing them from sin and then building them up and making them an able minister to further God's purposes *brings God glory*.

I am trying to make this as clear as possible because Romans 8:21 says that *the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*. And thus *the creature* is going to be delivered into the glorious liberty of *all of the saints* as a unified body. The entire heavenly realm is going to be subject to the governing agency of the Body of Christ and every member in it, no matter who they are. The entire heavenly realm is going to be delivered into the glorious liberty of all of the children of God. This means that every single saint will be operating out of a liberty that is, in some way, *glorious*. It is the glorious liberty of the children of God. Every believer will be functioning out of a *glorious* liberty.

This glory specifically has to do with our *liberty*, therefore, it has to do with our *function*—it has to do with our freedom and ability to exercise our will in light of who we are *in Christ*, and with the Christ which was formed *within us*.

And if this liberty has to do with our *function*, and it is something that brings God glory, and it's something that all saints will possess, what would it be? What is the one thing all believers received the moment they trusted the gospel that relates to our functional ability to serve God?

It's our new identity in Christ. It's the new spiritual nature we have that we received when we got saved.

And so when Romans 8 here refers to our *glorious* liberty, this is reference, not to physical brightness, but to our reflection of those attributes which so characterize God Himself. Thus, it is a reference to our *godliness*, our god-likeness. As I have said, every saved member of the Body of Christ is a child of God, and is so on the basis of the things the gospel provided, such as a new identity in Christ Himself. This identity is the one we will have forever; it is the only one we have presently and that we must learn to function out of, and it is the one that we will function out of in eternity.

Thus, everyone will be able to utilize this *liberty* in some capacity as saints living out of their identity in Christ, their new nature, having been saved from the presence of sin which exists in these fallen bodies, and having been set free from the persisting strongholds in our souls as the judgment seat of Christ. Every believer will be able to function freely out of that new nature in

eternity and by doing so will glorify God the Father, and we will do so through Jesus Christ—through what He provided.

And yet there is more that God wants to do within us now that we've received this new identity, thus you have a process of edification, and a joint heir inheritance to those who engage in it, who, as verse 17 says, *suffer with Christ*.

All of this is perfectly in line with what we have already learned—that this glory is something within us, that will one day be revealed, just as verse 18 says. *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*. And while every saint will have some measure of glory to be revealed, in that every saint has trusted the work of Christ, which in itself glorifies God the Father, and every saint has received a new identity in Christ, which allows us to function in liberty, and which glorifies God the Father, there is additional glory to be attained as we allow the word to produce Christ *in us*, in our inner man. Thus, if we suffer with Him, we shall also be glorified together.

It is *Christ in us*, God's very nature and character, which is the hope of this glory:

Colossians 1:27

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory...

This glorious liberty we will have then is *the capacity* we have in the inner man to operate out of *Christ in us*, whether it simply be out of the new identity we have in Christ which is free from sin, or whether it is the capacity to live out of that new identity and the doctrine in our soul to actually labor with the Father in His eternal will. Whether it is simply the new nature we've received in Christ, or whether it is additionally Christ's character that has been developed in us.