

Romans 8:19-23
Part 3

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.

So, having reviewed Romans chapter 8 all the way from verse one, we've seen that the entire essence of what's been communicated to us is *walking after the Spirit*, which is how one is set free from the power of sin. As God said to Pharaoh in Exodus 4:23, *Let my son go, that he may serve me*. God has set us free from the metaphorical Egypt of our bondage to sin so that we can in fact serve alongside Him *as sons*.

We have made the distinction also between *sanctification* and *edification*. Sanctification means *to be set apart for God's purposes*. When we believed the gospel, we were set apart for God's purposes, and God even provided things through the gospel that we would first need to allow us to fulfill those purposes. He provided our legal *justification*, and He provided our *sanctification*. Our *sanctification* is rooted in our new identity in Christ, and that is where our freedom from sin practically resides.

Edification however is how we are to then be *built up* in Christ unto godliness. It is the process whereby we are progressively conformed to the image of God's Son. We have not yet actually received the doctrine that is meant to *edify*, because edification cannot be done if one does not first have their sanctified life in proper working order. This is, again, all an issue of *faith*. God

already sanctified you—will you believe it, and will you walk in it? We also must first be established as sons by understanding what God *is* and *isn't* doing—something we are receiving right here in Romans chapter 8.

And so we reached a pivotal moment in Romans chapter 8 where we learn that those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God (v14). This of course is not about the believers *status*, but their function. If you are not led by the Spirit you are not walking as a son, and if you are not walking as a son you cannot be *edified* or *built up* as a son. We have received the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit working in us to prepare us for our eventual placement as sons in eternity, and we have the potential to be *joint-heirs with Christ* who is *the* Son of God, if so be we suffer with Him. Christ lived a life as a man in reliance on the Father, and walked after the doctrine contained in the word, and was perfected as a son through those things which He suffered. We too then must live a life in reliance on God through Jesus Christ, we must walk by faith in the word of God, and we too will be perfected through those things we find inconvenient, those things which are painful, those things which we suffer.

The process of edification itself takes place within the context of *suffering*. God is more interested in our character than our temporary comfort, and we cannot count on His physical deliverance from circumstances when He has not promised to do so, and when it is clear that the sufferings themselves provide the necessary context within which our spiritual growth is to occur. The sufferings of this present time are the most fundamental sufferings we will face and we are expected to approach them from the same godly perspective as Christ Himself did—that is, that God is not only *allowing* them, but that He is actually *using them* to accomplish His purposes.

Physical deliverance *does not* teach us to live out of our identity in Christ, it does not allow our inner man to be conformed in the image of God's son by *perfecting Christ within us*, and it does not allow the grace of God and the power of God to be put on display in our circumstances. But in order for those things to occur, we have to learn what it means practically to walk after the Spirit.

Walking after the Spirit is all about minding the reality of our spiritual unity to Christ. And so, when we encounter the pain or tribulations of this world, are we doing so by minding the things of the Spirit, so that the life of Christ is lived in us in those moments, so that the life of Christ quickens our mortal bodies (v11)? When it seems as though everything around us is falling apart, that we have lost all control, and that it's all just too much for us to handle, do we die to ourselves and let the grace of God through Jesus Christ minister life to our hearts? Is God's grace sufficient in our lives? When we face sinful temptation, do we reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and realize that who we are in Christ are actually *dead to sin*—that we are no longer sinners by nature, because God has already won that battle *for us*, so that God Himself *causes us to triumph* over those things without our own striving and self-effort? *Do we actually walk by faith?* These are things we need to be asking ourselves and evaluating in our lives. We

can have all of the theological information, but if we don't actually engage with the doctrine, it profits us nothing.

And so, as we proceed with this topic of *the creature*, I want us to understand that there is a fluid flow of thought here in this chapter, and that it is all connected. Learning to walk after the Spirit is not a separate issue—it is the first and most fundamental step for sons of God who are going to be educated by God for placement as sons in eternity. That identity in Christ is the identity you will have *forever*, and we must learn to live out of it now so that our soul itself is brought into conformity with that spiritual truth.

As Romans 8:19 says, *the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God*. The creature is waiting for the manifestation of those who have learned to live out of that new identity in Christ, and who have been educated and edified unto godliness, so that they can function in God's creation just as Christ Himself would, in any given situation. Romans 8:19 does not say *children of God*, it says *sons*, because what's in view is not just being a child of God, or a saved member of God's family. *The creature* is not just waiting for a bunch of *sinners saved by grace*—it's waiting for sinners who have been saved by grace *who've learned to walk in their new identity*, and who have been conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and this is accomplished of course by faith and the word of God.

And so, with all of that being said, I hope we are beginning to see how this chapter is one continuous flow of thought, and how our *practical sanctification* here and now, by *walking after the Spirit*, is directly correlated to this issue of *the creature*. Being educated as a son and being edified requires freedom from sin, and that freedom is only obtained through the work of Jesus Christ, and by faith in what He's accomplished—by walking after the Spirit, by minding the things of the Spirit. That is how we are set free so that we can then begin being progressively conformed to the image of God's Son.

Now, we've discussed how the grammar of Romans chapter 8 demands there be a difference between *the creature* and *the whole creation*, and what we have begun to discuss is the nature of what the creature *is*. It is obviously a *specific aspect* of creation—it is not *the whole* creation. In order to properly define what the creature is, we went back to Romans chapter 1, which is where we first encountered that phrase, and we saw that Paul is actually pulling from Deuteronomy chapter 4, where God warns Israel to follow His precepts under the Law, and tells them that when they were before Mount Horeb to receive that Law, they saw no image, no similitude, but heard the voice of God only. He exhorts them therefore to be careful not to corrupt themselves and make unto themselves any image of man or beast or creeping thing, and lest they lift up their eyes and be driven to worship and serve the hosts of the host of heaven themselves. We see in this a progression, from man, to birds and beasts, and to creeping things—things which man made themselves images of to worship. But in so doing, they were essentially serving themselves and their flesh. They were of course degrading the very image of God in which they were made, and dispensing with the dominion God gave to man over these creatures by

identifying with and worshipping them. But there was a point in man's idolatry which took it even a step further, where they made no image at all, but instead lifted up their eyes, and were driven, as if by some external force, to not only worship but *to serve* the hosts of heaven themselves.

Romans chapter 1 is recounting this very process. This process was true for mankind generally, and we see it was even true for Israel. They began at Mount Horeb before Moses even returned with the Law by fashioning a golden calf, and by the time of the Babylonian captivity, they were worshiping the sun in the temple of God itself.

And so, when we compare these two passages, we see that there not only appears to be a progression to this idolatry, but that this idolatry culminated with worshiping and serving the creature, or, as Deuteronomy 4 refers to it, all the *hosts of heaven*.

When we read the phrase, *the creature*, we may be inclined to think of it as a single entity, since the word *creature* is of course singular. But this is what we call a *collective noun*, where a singular word is used to describe a plural concept. We have plenty of examples of this in English. We might point to a grouping of mountain peaks on a hike and refer to it as a *range*. *Range* is singular, and yet it refers to *multiple peaks*. We might refer to a *class* of students, and while the word *class* is singular, it refers to more than one individual. And that is how we should understand the phrase, *the creature*. Collective nouns are usually preceded by a definite article, such as the word "the," as in our case here, signifying that what is being described is a specific, identifiable thing.

Thus, when we read in Deuteronomy chapter 4, *all the host of heaven*, in the place where Romans 1 refers to *the creature*, we know that this "creature" is referencing, not a *single entity*, but a plural concept, or a collection of things.

We also discussed how, though the phrase *host of heaven* is sometimes used in reference to the sun, moon, and stars, it is also used specifically in reference to *spiritual beings*, and these beings are sometimes associated with false gods, or idols:

1 kings 22:19

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.

2 kings 21:3

For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

In the first example, we see that the host of heaven is referring to the angelic realm in general, and we know this because in the context, the Lord is speaking to them, asking who will go and persuade Ahab, and a spirit comes forth and proposes to be a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets. And so the host of heaven here is obviously a reference to the angelic, spiritual realm.

In the second example, we see that *the host of heaven* here is specifically associated with *Baal*, a false pagan god.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, says that those things which the pagan worship are actually devils:

1 Corinthians 10:20

But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.

And so, the phrase *the creature*, we saw by comparing Deuteronomy 4 and Romans 1, is equivalent to the phrase *the host of heaven*, and *the host of heaven*, though sometimes used for the physical stars and planets, actually points us to the angelic beings that reside there, and which have dominion there. From this we can conclude that *the creature* is actually angelic in nature.

With that being said, scripture does not say in Romans chapter 1 that mankind *served* the images of man, or of the animal kingdom; but *it does* specifically say that mankind not only *worshipped* the creature, but *served* the creature.

How can you serve the sun, moon, and stars? They are, after all, *inanimate*. Servitude implies that you are subjected to a will outside of your own. It is because this phrase, *host of heaven*, involves not only the physical aspects of the universe, but the spiritual entities that exist there, that have jurisdiction there.

If you look for that specific phrase, *the creature*, in the Old Testament, you won't find it. But what you will find is the phrase, *the living creature*. Many times this phrase is used in regards to terrestrial animals here on the earth. But there is one other use that I find interesting, and that I think has relevance here.

In Ezekiel chapter 1, Ezekiel has a very peculiar vision. In this vision, he sees an angelic being which he proceeds to describe:

Ezekiel 1:3-11

3 *The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.*

4 *And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire.*

5 *Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man.*

6 *And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.*

7 *And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot: and they sparkled like the colour of burnished brass.*

8 *And they had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and they four had their faces and their wings.*

9 *Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.*

10 *As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle.*

11 *Thus were their faces: and their wings were stretched upward; two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies.*

While there is much that can be said about this passage, all I want us to see is that in this vision, there are what are described as four *living creatures*. The passage goes on to describe a *firmament* over their heads which is likened to crystal. This firmament is the sea of glass like unto crystal that John sees in Revelation 4:6, where God's throne is set. That sea of *glass* or *crystal* is actually the frozen waters above the heavens, which God separated on day two of creation. Thus, this firmament described in Ezekiel 1 is the third heaven—beyond the firmament of the second heaven, or “out space.”

Ezekiel 1:22-28

22 *And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible crystal, stretched forth over their heads above.*

23 *And under the firmament were their wings straight, the one toward the other: every one had two, which covered on this side, and every one had two, which covered on that side, their bodies.*

24 *And when they went, I heard the noise of their wings, like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host: when they stood, they let down their wings.*

25 *And there was a voice from the firmament that was over their heads, when they stood, and had let down their wings.*

26 *And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it.*

27 *And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of fire round about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about.*

28 *As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.*

Ezekiel later identifies these beings as cherubim:

Ezekiel 10:20

This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims.

And so this vision describes the activity of *cherubim*, of spiritual, heavenly beings, under the firmament of the third heaven. Satan himself is described as having been the *anointed cherub* in Ezekiel 28:14—and so, if you ever wondered what Satan looked like, it probably would have been something like what's described here earlier in Ezekiel. These cherubim, existing under that firmament of the third heaven, therefore must exist in the *second heaven*, what we would call "outer space." Some have speculated that these carry the throne of God itself, but was God's throne then literally carried to the river Chebar? Or was this a vision that was supposed to illustrate and communicate something to Ezekiel, and to us? While there's much I don't understand, it appears that these living creatures are somehow supposed to operate within the second heaven, under that firmament of the third heaven.

And so we have the phrase, the creature, referring collectively to spiritual beings operating in the heavens—*the heavenly hosts*—and we just so happen to have a description of cherubim in the second heaven, which are called *living creatures*. These living creatures appear to be serving God, as the voice from the firmament above their heads—the voice of *the Almighty*—seems to correlate with their activity (v24-25).

It appears that the spiritual entity referred to as *the creature* as referred to here in Romans 8 is a reference to the host of heaven who have not rebelled, but who are stationed in the second heaven all the same, and who have suffered the consequence of the firmament created on day two, and are now subjected to the vanity of that firmament, which has been co-opted by Satan's forces. Remember how we discussed that the firmament of space, created on day two, was actually made in response to the Satanic rebellion. The creature was made subject to the vanity of the firmament and to the corruption of the fallen spiritual beings who are now working within the second heaven. Notice what Romans 8 actually says:

Romans 8:20-21

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.*

The creature was made subject to vanity by someone who has a hope for it—and that someone is of course God. Does God have hope for Satan and his angels? No. And what is God's hope for the creature? That the creature will be one day delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of God's children. Is Satan going to be delivered from the bondage of corruption? No, he is corrupt and he's destined for the lake of fire. Is Satan going to be delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God? No. Again, he's destined for eternal judgment. And so, the creature is a reference to the heavenly hosts who have not rebelled, who God has a future hope for, who are under the bondage of corruption, and who are waiting for *us*. They are currently under the cruel oppression of satanic forces, and subjected to the vanity of the blackness of space in the second heaven, which was not their intended purpose. The angels were created before the foundation of the earth, and when heaven and earth were first created, God's presence was not separated from that earth—there was no *second heaven*. When considering the *chiastic structure* of the Bible, we see by comparing Revelation with Genesis that, as the new heaven and new earth will have no second heaven separating God's presence from the earth, neither then was that the case in the beginning.

The phrase *the creature* here is, again, what is called a *collective noun*. Though the phrase is singular, it's not referring to a singular entity, but is identifying a group of entities that are

associated with one another. It's referring to the angelic beings that operate within the realm of the second heaven specifically. Within this group of beings, it is clear that the majority is composed of an apostate element, a group who is in rebellion against God and is trying to accomplish their own purposes.

But there must also be some who have not rebelled, and who have been taken captive, in a sense, by the satanic forces, and who are waiting for our manifestation as sons of God, because then we will be given charge over those heavenly authorities and will bring the life and character of God the Father back into creation, so that it functions as God desires it to. All the foundations of the earth are out of course because of these *unjust gods*, ruling in the heavens, Psalm 82 says. But we are going to bring them back into course. We are going to bring the life of Christ to creature, and into creation.

Look what scripture says in 1 Corinthians 6:

1 Corinthians 6:1-4

¹ *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?*

² *Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*

³ *Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?*

⁴ *If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.*

Paul tells us that we are going to *judge angels*, and in the context of 1 Corinthians 6, that judgement is not judgment in the sense of carrying out a sentence of condemnation against judicially, its exercising judgment among, and thus, by implication, we are going to be making decisions that pertain to them. We are going to be given positions in other words which are above the angelic realm. And wouldn't this make sense, if Jesus was exalted far above all principality and power, and we are made a part of His body, that we too would be exalted above all of those positions. But where cruel bondage exists now at the hands of Satan, there will one day be the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself by His church.

That word *judge* in Greek, *krino*, also carries with it the idea of *avenging*. We will *avenge* angels. Romans 8 says the creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into our glorious liberty. Judge is of course the correct word because it has the fullest semantic range of what we will be doing, but we see here in Romans 8 even the ideas of avenging the creature, because we will be delivering it from the bondage of corruption.

Now, in the past, we have linked *the sufferings of this present time* concept to the bondage of corruption, both for the creature and the whole creation, as if this passage is only speaking about the sufferings of the natural world, but what's in view here in Romans 8 is not only the sufferings of the natural world but also the authority structures in heaven and earth, which are fallen and under the bondage of corruption as well. We understand that the word *corruption* can mean *physical corruption*, such as *decay* and *entropy*, or it can mean *moral corruption*, which implies *sin*. And both are in view here in Romans 8 because these are not actually disconnected concepts. Physical corruption and decay are a direct result of moral corruption, or *sin*. *By one man sin entered the world, and death by sin* (Rom. 5:12). Death was the consequence of sin, of *moral corruption*.

And so, when we consider *the creature* being under the bondage of corruption, we understand that, as spiritual entities, they are not subject to death or decay. They are however subject to the vanity of the second heaven, which is an intentional separation between the third heaven and the earth, preventing the angelic hosts from operating as they *should*, or as they *would*, and is itself in a state of entropy, and that these beings are also subject to the principalities and powers of satan who currently reside there.

The bondage of corruption for the creature is not physical decay. Do angels die? No. We think of the bondage of corruption here on earth in terms of physical death and decay. But angels don't die. Angels possess spiritual bodies fit for the heavenly places. The things of the heavenly places aren't subject to decay the way that earthly things are—there isn't even any atmosphere, any *oxygen*, for physical bodies to decay. It is an entirely different sphere of creation. And while the physical universe is subject to the law of entropy—the sun is of course burning out and everything is winding down—there is no way for us as created beings to fix that. God upholds all things and sustains all things, and the physical corruption of the creation is going to be restored by Him. But we are going to be in charge of the governmental aspects of creation under Jesus Christ.

The bondage of corruption for *the creature* is his bondage to the satanic rebellion at work in the second heaven. The creature will be delivered from the bondage of that corruption into what? Into renewed physical life? No, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. It's going to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the hands of governmental agencies who reflect the character of God. There must be a correspondence between the bondage of corruption and the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And as we will see, that phrase glorious liberty actually has to do with how we operate.

I know that if you were to read Romans 8 in isolation, it appears that all that is in view is the physical creation being delivered from physical decay, that what's in view is simply the physical processes themselves. But there is more in view than the physical. There is a spiritual element as well, and the corruption of the spiritual realm, who operate within places of authority. Thus it

is fitting that all of this comes on the heels of Romans 8:17 which speaks of our being *joint-heirs with Christ*.

And so, there is some nuance to this passage. We know we ourselves are physically under the bondage of corruption in the physical sense, in that we live in fallen bodies which will one day die, and which are currently subject to sickness and disease. *The entire natural world* is subject to entropy, and to death. And thus, what Romans 8 here is trying to communicate to us is that all of creation is under the bondage of corruption—not just the physical aspects, but even the spiritual—even the hosts of heaven who have not rebelled are affected by the moral corruption of those that have rebelled—and that the physical world, being governed over by spiritual forces, are under the bondage of spiritual corruption in the moral sense. Again, I appeal to Psalm 82, where we see God indicting the spiritual forces in charge of governing the earth for their unrighteous judgment.

And so to conclude this lesson, I simply want us to understand that the creature here in Romans 8 is referring to heavenly beings who have been rendered in some sense inoperable by God, because of the forces of satan, which God is temporarily allowing for the time being, so that His eternal purpose can be accomplished. Those spiritual beings, who have been subjected to vanity by God, were subjected in hope—and we are their future hope in Christ.

In the next lesson we will discuss what it means for *the creature* to be delivered from the bondage of corruption specifically into *the glorious liberty* of the children of God.