

Romans 8:19-23

Part 4

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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 would like to begin by saying that I understand that there are very deep philosophical implications to some of the verses contained in Romans chapter 8. And while it is not my goal to be philosophical, we cannot truly get everything we're meant to get out of this chapter without considering those implications.

With that being said, our doctrine as contained in Paul's letters constitute a progression of doctrine which is meant to save sinners and then to perfect them as sons of God, and it is ordered in a specific doctrinal order. This progression of doctrine is essentially a curriculum, and we cannot just breeze through information. We need to have understanding and we need to allow truth to take root in us and incorporate it into our thinking and into our lives. If you do not pass ninth grade, you don't get to go to tenth grade. That's how a curriculum works. I am not saying you have to understand every nuance to every word contained in the scripture, but what I am saying is that what is presented to us is presented to us in a very specific way and it is meant to accomplish a number of very specific things in a specific order. And so, while it may seem as if I'm just trying to wax poetic at times, I'm not. I am trying to lay the most solid foundation I can for us to build upon. Once we have these things, and we move forward, we won't be going back except for the case of occasional reviews. But what you will see is that all

the things we learn here at the beginning will come back up over and over again as we progress, so the doctrine in some sense has built within it its own mechanism for review.

We have an entire life to study the word of God. Unfortunately, most people do not have the attention span to engage with the doctrine chronologically as it was meant to be engaged, and they spend their lives being tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. I say they don't have the attention span, but the truth is, they do. They have the attention span for many other things in life... But when it comes to spiritual truth, we've become addicted to it being packaged and delivered to us in a very specific way, and if it deviates from that pattern, we run away.

If we could really see the eternal implications of what we're engaged in, this would become to us the most important thing in our lives, as it should be. And so, with all of that being said, let's turn our attention back to Romans 8.

Now, we have seen that the word *creature* itself, in a strict literary sense, means exactly the same thing as the word *creation*, and in fact the underlying Greek word *ktisis* is the same for both here, and yet the translators chose to use two different phrases: *the creature*, and *the whole creation*. And the reason for that is contextual and grammatical: the creature *itself* (v21); *the whole creation* (v22); and not only *they*, but ourselves *also* (v23). Thus within this passage you have three distinct things in view: the creature, the whole creation, and ourselves, who, as verse 23 says, are those which have the *firstfruits of the Spirit*, a phrase which we will discuss later.

We have also defined what the phrase *the creature* refers to, and that is, generically speaking, *the hosts of heaven*, and we arrived at that conclusion by comparing the first occurrence of the phrase *the creature* in Romans 1 with a passage in Deuteronomy 4. If you'll recall, in Romans 1, Paul pulls directly from Deuteronomy chapter 4, but instead of using the phrase *host of heaven*, Paul simply refers to this as *the creature*. The word *host* itself can refer to a vast quantity, or it can by implication refer to, and in the Bible often *does* refer to, a great army. The angelic armies are referred to as *hosts*, and that is why God is sometimes referred to as *the Lord of Hosts*, or *the Lord of sabaoth*, which means, *the Lord of armies*.

We also saw that the phrase *heavenly host* or *hosts of heaven* could refer to one of three things: it could refer to the literal, physical *sun, moon and stars*; it could refer to spiritual or angelic beings who are in *rebellion against God*—and we considered just a few references to demonstrate this; or it could refer to spiritual beings who are *not* in rebellion against God. The phrase *hosts of heaven*, and the phrase *the creature*, therefore, could be used in any of those three ways. The context in which we see those phrases needs to be the determining factor.

The way in which Romans chapter 1 uses it is of course in the context of mankind's worshipping of false gods—of *idolatry*—therefore we know that what is being referenced there is not the “good angels,” or the heavenly beings who are *not* in rebellion against God, but is a reference specifically to the sun, moon and stars *and* the heavenly beings who *are* in rebellion. When we

traced idolatry in Israel's history, we saw that their worshipping of the sun and moon was in fact associated with false gods, which Paul says were actually *devils*. Thus, the worshipping of the sun and moon and stars was mankind inadvertently worshipping fallen spiritual beings.

In Romans chapter 8 however, we see in verses 19-21 that *the creature* that is being referred to has an *earnest expectation for our manifestation as sons of God* (v19), that God Himself subjected this *creature* to vanity against its will, not because God is cruel or unjust, but because of the future hope that He has for it, which is directly connected to that future manifestation (v20), and that, this *hope* has to do with *the creature* being delivered from *the bondage of corruption* into the *glorious liberty* of those *sons of God*.

We also spoke about how this creature was made subject to vanity *against its will*. This creature therefore has a will. Many scholars and commentators no doubt take this to be language of accommodation, or an *anthropomorphism*—they take it to be a figure of speech only. But as we really consider what's being said in this passage, I don't believe it's necessary to take this as merely a figure of speech. When we understand that some of the heavenly hosts who were not participants in Satan's rebellion were still made subject to Satan's corruption, we do not need to make this merely language of accommodation, as if God is speaking of the natural world.

I am not saying that the physical world won't be delivered from the bondage of sin and death—of course it will, but that is a task that only God Himself can perform. And I am not saying that the natural laws of space which are responsible for the death of stars and planets won't change—they may, they may not, we don't actually know because the Bible doesn't speak to that specifically. But we do know that the heavens and earth will be changed—will be made *new*.

Now, here is an excellent point at which to clarify one issue. The new heaven is specifically a reference to *the second* heaven. The third heaven does not need to be made new. I may have mischaracterized this issue in previous lessons, and so I want to set the record straight now before we go any further. The second heaven is not going to entirely go away in and of itself—there will still be a second heaven, but the one *which we know* will be done away with. That word *new* in this case doesn't just mean *new in time*, but new in *nature* and *quality*, and as we discussed, the new heaven is going to function along with the earth, so that God's very light and glory fills all of creation, so that man will not even have need of the sun. Revelation 21:23 however does not say there will be no more sun, but that in the New Jerusalem there will be *no need* of the sun, because of God glory being the light thereof. And so, the second heaven will still exist in the new creation, but it will not be the same as the one we know now.

And so, God not only created Satan knowing that he would rebel, and *allowed* that rebellion, but is *allowing* that rebellion *to continue* for a certain amount of time. Of course we may ask the question, *why did God create Satan at all* if He knew Satan would just rebel, but the truth is, God created many angelic beings who would choose rebellion over Him. God created Satan, knowing

what Satan would become, because Satan was going to reveal what was already in the hearts of other angelic beings.

We see this all the time in everyday life: people will generally do something only after seeing someone else do it—even if they know it's not the right thing to do... and yet, it was in their heart all along. Through Satan, God revealed what was in the heart of his angelic hosts, and through Satan, God revealed what was in the heart of man. God is not going to violate our free will, but neither is He going to tolerate hypocrites in His eternal kingdom. God sees the wickedness in someone's heart, even if they obey outwardly, and God used Satan to manifest what was in the hearts of His angelic hosts, and in the hearts of man, so that they would, of their own free will, manifest the rebellion which was already in them.

Even though *physical corruption* or *decay* is most certainly in view here in Romans chapter 8, which we deduced from verse 18, and which we will encounter again in verses 22 and 23, physical corruption is not the only thing in view. Physical decay, physical corruption, is a consequence of *sin*. How sin affected creation *physically* is actually not as straightforward as you might think. Sin was already in the universe *before Adam*, because of the angelic rebellion. Did this produce consequences of a physical nature? Scripture is clear that death passed specifically upon *all men* because *all men sinned*, because they are sinners by nature, and death is the consequence of sin, but there's actually nothing that tells us that the law of entropy for instance, a natural law, was put into place because of man's sin. There is nothing that tells us that the death and decay of physical matter such as *plants* was the result of man's sin. In fact, "death" in the natural world is necessary for it to operate. The reproductive part of a plant has to be severed from the life of the plant in order to generate new life—as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:36 *that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die*. A seed must first fall off of the plant into the ground before it can sprout. Adam was told to dress and keep a garden of plants whose seed was in itself *before His fall*. And so, death in that sense already existed.

God of course cursed the ground on account of Adam's sin, so that it would bring forth thorns and thistles, but it doesn't say that God cursed nature as a whole to experience natural decay. The natural decay of material things such as plants is necessary, and is even the basic premise of man's digestion. Are we to believe that the very laws of nature which govern such an essential aspect of life as *digestion* weren't put into place until man sinned?

See, we've read certain things into this phrase "bondage of corruption" that I don't think it's intending to communicate. Scripture never says that death passed upon animals as a result of man's sin either. The scripture is vague on that issue, but my only point is that *the bondage of corruption* in verse 21 is not speaking to the death of man, or even necessarily to physical processes, it is speaking of something in relation to *the creature*. As we said before, angels don't die and they don't decay. We have already established that there are three subjects in view between Romans 8:19 and 8:23—there is *the creature*, there is *the whole creation*, and there is *ourselves also*.

If the creature was referring to mankind, then *the bondage of corruption* in a physical sense would be perfectly fitting, because mankind is reaping the physical consequences of sin, and is therefore in bondage to death and decay, and yet we've established that the phrase *the creature* is *not* speaking about mankind. While it is undeniable that there *are* and *have been* effects that sin has had on creation, we can't simply attribute the same effects to all parties involved when they differ in their essential nature.

The angelic realm is fundamentally different in nature from the physical earthly realm, and so too the beings that inhabit them. And so when we speak of *the bondage of corruption* which these heavenly hosts are under, what does that mean? How do we define it?

Physical corruption of course exists in the world, but that was preceded by *moral* corruption. Corruption can be defined in multiple ways. And it is the *spiritual* and *moral* corruption which must be in view here specifically. The word *corruption* in the Bible is used in reference to both physical corruption (decay) and moral corruption. I would like us to consider just two passages to demonstrate this:

2 Peter 2:19

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

Notice how the apostle Peter uses the same exact words and phrases we are familiarizing ourselves with here in Romans 8—*liberty, corruption, bondage*... all concepts we are seeing in our doctrine. What Peter is discussing here is the danger the believing remnant of Israel will face in their last days, because of false teachers and false prophets, who promise them liberty, but in fact will only place a yoke of bondage upon them because they will not be teaching the truth of Christ, but instead a false religious system, even the Old Testament Law itself—and we know that this only recruits the flesh to try and perform, which it ultimately cannot do. But these false prophets and teachers, Peter says, are servants of *corruption*; this is not corruption in the sense of physical decay, but a spiritual and moral corruption, and this leads to bondage, slavery, servitude, oppression.

Consider 2 kings 23:

2 kings 23:13-14

¹³ *And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.*

¹⁴ *And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.*

King Josiah here destroys the pagan high places built by Solomon on the *mount of corruption*, which was a southern portion of the Mount of Olives. This mount of corruption was a place of idolatry, where Israel served and worshiped pagan gods... pagan gods which we have established were actually *devils*, spiritual beings in high places. Thus, this *mount of corruption* Israel had dedicated to worshipping *the creature*. Ashtoreth was associated with the moon; chemosh was associated with the sun; Milcom was associated with the sun but also with the stars in general. And so we just happen to see the word corruption used in regards to a place where Israel worshipped the hosts of heaven. This is not physical corruption in the sense of decay, but it is spiritual and moral corruption, just as we saw in 2 Peter.

Typically, we as Christians have read this passage and have linked *the sufferings of this present time* concept to *the creatures* "bondage of corruption," as if this passage is speaking about the suffering of the natural world, and how *the natural world* is going to be delivered into the liberty of the sons of God. And of course the natural world *will* be subject to the sons of God, both in heaven and earth, and of course it will be delivered from the curse of sin and death, but the sons of God are not going to *remove* the curse over creation—that is a task only *God* can perform. They are not going to *sustain* the new creation—again, that is a task only *God* can perform. In other words, the *sons of God* are not going to prevent the corruption of natural decay and entropy—how could they, as *created beings*?

The question is, what will the sons of God be given charge over? Are sons of God going to regulate natural processes such as death and decay? Of course not—that is an operation only God Himself can perform. And so, if we are not going to be given charge over natural processes, then what will we be given charge over?

We have just left Romans 8:17 which introduces a certain concept to us: we are not only *children and heirs of God*, but heirs of God *and joint-heirs with Christ*, if so be that we suffer with Him. What was introduced to us was the concept of being a *joint-heir* with the Lord of heaven and earth Himself, thus, we were introduced to the idea of receiving a *position of authority*. Being a joint-heir with Christ is a position of authority. And yet we come along and read into this passage that the *physical creation* itself is literally waiting *for us*, as if there's something we can

do about it on an organic level, and I don't see any evidence whatsoever in the entire Bible that it is even possible for created beings to do such things.

If the creature is taken from the bondage of one thing to the liberty of something else, there must be a *likeness* or *comparability* there. If it is taken *from* "the bondage of corruption" *into* "the glorious liberty of the sons of God," then there has to be a way in which our glorious liberty *answers to* that bondage of corruption, but how will *our liberty* provide a solution to the physical decay of the natural world? We will have to define what *liberty* even *is* of course, and we will do that later in this lesson.

What's in view here in Romans 8 is not the decay of the natural world really, but it is *the authority structures* of heaven, which are currently under *the bondage* of Satanic *corruption*, and which are going to one day be *delivered*. That is why this concept is stuck right in between verses that speak of being *joint-heirs with Christ* (8:17) and *the adoption* (8:23), which is *our placement* into places of authority as sons in the future. What is in view here is not the decay of organic matter, but the oppressive forces who are operating in places of authority and who are going to one day be cast out and judged.

Of course things are not as they should be in the natural world, and certainly suffering is a part of that, but *the sufferings of this present time* concept is not to be confused with the bondage of corruption that the creature itself is under.

All that Paul says is that *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*. He doesn't say that *the suffering of this present time* concept is correlated with *the bondage of corruption*, but that it's correlated with *our future glory* specifically. We tend to interpret *corruption* to be *physical corruption*, that is, *decay*. But we know corruption *politically*, do we not? And *that* is in fact what is in view with this phrase *the bondage of corruption*.

And so, *the sufferings of this present time* are connected to *the glory that is to be revealed in us*, and that *glory* is connected to *the creature*, who is currently under *the bondage of corruption*.