

ROMANS

8:18-23



Creation

And

Christians!

Part I

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INTRO

In Romans 8:18-23, Paul expands his discussion of the glory that awaits us on the Last Day into a broader context by also including all creation. Thus, Paul is pointing out the universal effects which all of humanity and, indeed, all of creation endure as a result of the corrupt entrance of sin and death into the world.

So in vv.18-30, Paul will point out how we long for the culmination of our Lord's deliverance.

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INTRO

Jesus came to redeem all of His creation from sin. Our eternal life in heaven will not solely be a “*spiritual*” existence on fluffy clouds as we float along strumming golden harps; rather, it be a restored creation much like Adam and Eve enjoyed in Eden before the Fall.

The universal effects of the redemption that Jesus accomplished are wonderfully expressed here: the creation groans as in childbirth, awaiting the Last Day when it will be set free from its bondage to decay!

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**Christians:
Present
Suffering -
Future Glory
(v.18)**

¹⁸Indeed, I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

Paul begins by using a Greek verb that forms an idiom of financial comparison: λογίζομαι (log-id'-zom-hee). It literally means to *compute*, "take into account"; *reckon* (come to a "bottom-line"), i.e., *reason* to a *logical conclusion* (decision). In the context that Paul uses this verb, it has a negative connotation: "... I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable."

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**Christians:
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(v.18)**

18Indeed, I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

Paul then introduces his major theme from this verse through 8:39 by the phrase: “... the sufferings of the present time” What Paul is driving at is a satisfactory answer for the Church (for you) to explain how and why these “sufferings” are to be endured and even overcome. This phrase is connected to v.17, where Paul has used a rare compound verb “...we are suffering with [Him].”

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**Christians:
Present
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(v. 18)**

18Indeed, I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

This then brings us to a theological conundrum and is an issue with many Christians, that being: Theodicy.

We may ask the question, “How and when will our righteous God deal with the problem of human suffering?” Paul deals with this question by pointing out how Christians are enabled to endure the whole gamut of suffering.

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**Christians:
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(v.18)**

¹⁸Indeed, I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

You know this full gamut well: illness, bereavement, hunger, financial loss, and death, itself!

Thus, Paul is actually instructing us to “*calculate*” for ourselves the value: the debits of present suffering, against the *unlimited positive balance* which God has already credited to us (cf. Romans 4:3)!

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**Christians:
Present
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(v. 18)**

¹⁸Indeed, I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

Now to be added to the credit or surplus side of the ledger is “... the coming glory to be revealed to us.”

There are two very important key terms for you in this last phrase: 1). “...to be...” expresses the imminence and the Divine certainty of the glory which about to be revealed! 2).

“...revealed...” points ahead to the full manifestation of our eschatological glory!

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(v.18)**

18Indeed, I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

However, what does it really mean for us that glory is “...to be revealed?” Jesus is now glorified in a manner that has yet to be revealed to the world; however, the eternal weight of our glory in Him has yet to be fully bestowed upon us! Still, it is surely coming “...to us....” The direction of the phrase is important for us.

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**Christians:
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(v.18)**

¹⁸Indeed, I reckon that the sufferings of the present time [are] not comparable to the coming glory to be revealed to us.

The NT generally doesn't stress our going to heaven nearly as much as it talks about Jesus coming back to raise, gather, be with, and glorify us! Notice that in v.18, glory is to be revealed "...to us!" This fits well with the talk of the creation which ensues in the next verse. We do not go somewhere as an "escape!" Instead, when Jesus is revealed on the Last Day, He will restore creation and glorify us in our bodies! [cf. v.24; 1 Cor. 15:23-24; 50-57]

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***Creation:
Present
Groaning -
Eager
Awaiting
(19-22)***

¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God..

As is seen often in the OT, Paul personifies creation. You should know that “creation” is not an idiom for humanity in general; neither can it be restricted to even further to believers, who are described in a more special manner in v.23. Yet, we can’t take this to the extreme as some do by teaching that Paul is referring to the non-human creation or the “sub-human” part. This isn’t necessary since throughout this section, “creation” [“of the creation”: τῆς κτίσεως] refers to ALL that God has made, including man!

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¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God..

This now brings us to a very interesting triple compound noun: ἀποκαταδοκία. It is the joining of three distinct Greek words: *apó*, “away from”; *kara*, “the head”; and *dokéw*, “thinking”) – properly, “*thinking forward*” (literally with head out-stretched), referring to *eager, intense expectation*. This triple compound noun is used twice (Rom 8:19; Phil 1:20).

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(19-22)**

¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God..

In our text today, Paul applies this term directly to each believer receiving a unique, glorified body at Christ's return (cf. 1 Cor 15:35-54; 2 Cor 5:1-10; Phil 3:11-21).

This intense expectation fosters earnest longing to see Jesus – portrayed as an Olympic runner straining forward to the end-goal with “head outstretched” (v.19)! This automatically, in addition, means turning away from what is lesser; to lay hold of the greater!

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¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God..

So what is this forward thinking, earnest longing, laying hold of the greater all about? “Revelation” (ἀποκάλυψιν)! This “unveiling” describes the glorious manifestation of “the sons of God.” Let’s consider Hebrews 11:39-40:

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (NKJV).

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¹⁹For the earnest expectation of the creation awaits the revelation of the sons of God..

Creation comprehends that it will only be made perfect together with “*the sons of God!*” Paul, therefore, clearly reminds us that creation will not be perfect apart from us. As we yearn to be perfected, as we yearn for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, creation also yearns for the complete and final unveiling!

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**Creation:
Present
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(19-22)**

²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but on account of the [One] who subjected [it], in hope

The present suffering of humanity (your suffering) takes place in the context of creation, which is also subject to futility! It is clear to us that at times creation's corruption is the cause of human suffering; and at other times, it's human activity adding to nature's futility.

Futility (ματαιότητι - mat-ah-yo'-tay-tee), is a noun that points to the worthlessness or the *aimlessness* due to lacking *purpose* or any meaningful end.

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²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but on account of the [One] who subjected [it], in hope

So you may ask, “How did creation end up in such a situation?” Paul clearly says it was “not willingly.” Rather, it was passively “subjected” by one who isn’t explicitly identified: “on account of the [One] who subjected [it].” Who could be the one? Adam? Satan? Man in general? Many liberal theologians blame Adam, therefore, all mankind by association. Is this true?

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²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but on account of the [One] who subjected [it], in hope

Adam - As with 7:7-11, Adam doesn't match well with what Paul is discussing. Adam's impact was actually very *indirect*, rather than *direct subjection!* Adam doesn't have the power or the authority to subject, in this case; unlike YAHWEH! No, as we have already studied, through Adam, sin and death entered the world (5:12). The futility referenced, therefore, is a result *because* of Adam, not *by* Adam! Once again, "*subjected*" in Greek is a Divine passive... therefore, the [One] who subjected is YAHWEH!

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*Creation:
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(19-22)*

²⁰*For the creation **was subjected** to futility, not willingly, but on account of the [One] who subjected [it], in hope*

Additionally, we cannot limit the subjection of creation to futility to only the Genesis episode.

More to Paul's point, he emphasizes the ongoing effects of that subjecting as it has forced creation and humanity to continue to be subjected to futility ever since Genesis 3.

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*Creation:
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*²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but on account of the [One] who subjected [it], **in hope***

Finally, there is a small bit of “hope” – “but on account of the [One] who subjected [it], **in hope[.]” This is a prepositional phrase that grammatically moves us forward into the next verse. Could this phrase be aligned with the **Proto Evangelium** (Gen 3:15) given to Adam and Eve in the Garden as a result of the subjection of creation to futility by their sin?**

As we see in v.21:

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**Creation:
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(19-22)**

21 that also the creation itself will be set free from its bondage of decay, into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Once again, the point must be made that creation will only be made perfect together with us at the eschatological moment when our role as God's children is fully and finally revealed to all. In order for creation to be made perfect, it "...will be set free from its bondage of decay...." This "...will be set free..." is another Divine passive that we see very often in Romans. And its future tense... pointing forward to the Great Last Day when creation will be freed from its "...bondage of decay..." at the moment of "...the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

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*Creation:
Present
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(19-22)*

²¹that also the creation itself will be set free from its bondage of decay, into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

It will be through Jesus Christ that creation itself will be set free! While creation's state of glory will differ from that of God's children (cf. 1 Cor. 15:40-42), the new creation will celebrate the eternal glory God will bestow upon His children.

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*Creation:
Present
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(19-22)*

²²Indeed, we know that all the creation groans together and travails together until now.

Paul now takes a step back and returns to the topic of v.18, namely, “...the sufferings of the present time.” These sufferings not only vex you and me (and all Christians), but also creation! And as we studied last week, Paul, once again, uses compound verbs to depict creation’s travails:

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*Creation:
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²²Indeed, we know that all the creation **groans together** and travails together until now.

1.) συστένάζει (soos-ten-ad'-zee) - literally, to experience a common calamity -- groan together. Again, this began in Gen. 3, and continues!

This verb is in the present tense and is a third person singular, therefore, **it (creation) groans together** with us in our sufferings as it also suffers the current “**bondage of decay.**”

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²²Indeed, we know that all the creation groans together and *travails together* until now.

2.) *συνωδίνει* (soon-o-dee'-nee) – From *συν* and *ωδινω*; to have birth pangs in concert, simultaneously with; i.e., (figuratively) to sympathize (in expectation of relief from suffering) -- *travail in pain together*.

The metaphor of birth pains, intense suffering resulting in great joy, occurs in the OT often in passages where the anguish and prospects were seen to have strong eschatological overtones (cf. *Is. 13:8; 21:3; 26:17-18, and 66:7-8; Jer. 4:31; 22:23; Hosea 13:13, and Micah 4:9-10*). Our Lord Jesus used similar language in describing His departure in St. John 16:21-22.

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²²Indeed, we know that all the creation groans together and travails together until now.

So, in light of Romans 8, however, creation is currently experiencing comparable trauma.

Even so, in light of v.21, the imagery points forward to a positive outcome, a rebirth “...into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

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**Christians:
Present
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(v.23)**

²³Not only [so] now, but even ourselves, having the firstfruit of the Spirit, also we ourselves in ourselves groan, awaiting divine adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul will now shift his discussion from the present futility of creation to the present suffering and future glory of the Christian (of you!). He begins with his classic “Not only...but even.” This Paul uses as a textual connection between creation and Christians in regard to both their present situation and their future, long-awaited liberation!

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²³Not only [so] now, but **even ourselves**, having the firstfruit of the Spirit, also **we ourselves in ourselves groan**, awaiting divine adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul's discussion of Christians is very emphatic, actually, a double emphatic, and is known as the "awkward repetition"¹ ("even ourselves [καὶ αὐτοὶ]... "we ourselves in ourselves groan" [ἡμεῖς καὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν]. It's easy to speculate about this, yet, we must remember that Paul is writing under inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

¹Moo, Romans, 519, n.57.

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(v.23)**

²³*Not only [so] now, but **even ourselves**, having the firstfruit of the Spirit, also **we ourselves in ourselves groan**, awaiting divine adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

Thus, in this context, God is making it so emphatic and so “awkward” that Greek hearers and also we, would have to perk up the ears...God is getting ones attention...Listen to what I’m telling you! You have which the **creation doesn’t have: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! How so? “[H]aving the firstfruit of the Spirit!” (cf. v.9).**

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**Christians:
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²³Not only [so] now, but even ourselves, having the **firstfruit** of the Spirit, also we ourselves in ourselves groan, awaiting divine adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

When we hear or read the word: Firstfruit(s) [ἀπαρχήν]; we usually think of the OT. That's because that's where firstfruit(s) is typically found (cf. Num. 5:9; Dt. 18:4; 2 Chr. 31:5-6). It's the first produce of the harvest which was offered back to God, with the hope that Israel would soon enjoy the fruit of the full harvest to come. The point of this is: it was a gift first given to man by YAHWEH, that man was to return to YAHWEH in thanksgiving!

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Christians:
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(v.23)

²³Not only [so] now, but even ourselves, having the **firstfruit of the Spirit**, also we ourselves in ourselves groan, awaiting divine adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Thus, by definition, Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit as that present gift given *from* God (**Holy Baptism**) that is a pledge of future gifts to come (Means of Grace and, later, the Kingdom).

Therefore, you who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you have an even more solid basis of hope (*"in hope"*, v.20) by which to endure present sufferings!

A Pentecost Addendum

Why would Paul connect the Holy Spirit with “firstfruits?” At the time when the firstfruits were offered was during the harvest festival of the Feast of Weeks, which we know as Pentecost (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Dt. 16:9-12).

This is the occasion when the Holy Spirit was first poured out in Acts 2. Surely the NT event was linked to the OT calendar date in the annual liturgical lives of the early Christians, just as Passover became inseparable from the Holy Triduum, the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter.



A Pentecost Addendum

Furthermore, in both the OT and NT, the agricultural harvest also serves as an eschatological image!

Paul will speak of eschatological fulfillment at the end of Romans 8:23. Yet, first, he admits that due to “the sufferings of the present time” (v.18), “we ourselves in ourselves groan.” So to close out this addendum, here are three very fascinating observations:



A Pentecost Addendum

1.) Not only is creation “*groaning together*”, but those of us with the Spirit are also groaning (v.23). But when Paul is speaking of people groaning, he deletes the prefix “*together with*” the **(συν)** of verse 22. He also eliminates the “*suffering birth pangs together*” (cf. v.22 - **συνωδίνει**).

Thus, the language of v.23 is “toned down” in reference to believers. What we should conclude is difficult to ascertain, but it does imply that Paul does not simply replicate apocalyptic language or buy into all of its implications. Rather, since there are no birth pangs, he is solidly laying the foundation of truth that we are eagerly awaiting adoption!



A Pentecost Addendum

2.) There is a present adverbial participle in v.23 (ἐχοντες) that asserts that we are still groaning within ourselves *at the very same time* as we are “*having the firstfruit of the Spirit.*” Since Paul is speaking of those who *have* the Spirit as a firstfruit, he can only be speaking of baptized believers! The present groaning “*within ourselves*” is striking in light of Paul’s definitive description of believers earlier in the chapter with the same preposition (ἐν): “[*the*] Spirit of God is dwelling in you” (v.9).



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Conclusion

The Divine solution promised by Paul, the bodily resurrection, is in marked contrast to the dominant Greek expectation of Paul's day, as well as those of our days. Physical creation is not something to be destroyed or from which one must escape. Neither does future redemption consist of being permanently delivered from a physical body. Paul's worldview is neither anti-materialist or dualistic. As creation longs for future *restoration* as the solution to its own present groaning and travail (vv.21, 22), so also we, God's children, yearn for our redemption *of* our bodies, not **FROM** them. We see Paul's detail explanation of this in 1 Cor. 15:35-57.

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The most relevant point is this: the present “natural body” (1 Cor. 15:44) is not raised as a pure “*spirit*”, but as a “*spiritual body*” (1 Cor. 15:44). This change or transformation (could we even say: transfiguration?) is explained by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:51 by his use of a future Divine passive (ἀλλαγησόμεθα) and this is the longed for fulfillment of our adoption, namely, “*the redemption of our body.*”

Conclusion



ANY
QUESTIONS

ROMANS 8:24-27



**Next
Week:
Part II**

HOPE

And

A

PRAYER

