

That We Might Bear Fruit For God

Lesson 8

Summary of God's provisions for changing human beings into son's of God. (Romans 8:18-25)

By F, M, Perry

“(18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself also will be set free from the slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (24) For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? (25) But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.” (Romans 8:18-25 NASV).

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Questions for study.

1. What is the "glory that is to be revealed to us?" (Romans 8:18; 8:29; 1 John 3:1-3; Philippians 3:21; 2 Corinthians 4:17).
2. Why do human beings suffer in the world? Do Christians who "walk in the Spirit" suffer more than, or differently from, non-Christians? (Romans 8:18).
3. What is the "creation" which Paul wrote about in Romans 8:19-23? (See also 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:23; and Romans 1;25).
4. What is the "anxious longing" ("earnest expectation" or "eager longing") of the creation? (Romans 8: 19).
5. Interpret "futility" ("vanity") and "slavery to corruption" ("bondage to decay") as used in Romans 8:20-21. (See also Romans 8:32).
6. To what does the figurative phrase "pains of childbirth" refer? (Romans 8:22). In this figure, who is like a mother suffering "pains of childbirth?" To whom is the mother trying to give birth? How long will these "pains of childbirth" last?
7. What are some rewards to be given to Christians who "walk in the Spirit?" Which rewards do Christians get immediately during life on earth and which do they get in Heaven? (Romans 8:18-25).
8. What are the "first fruits of the Spirit" which Christians have during their earthly "walk in the Spirit?" (Romans 8: 23).

9. What immediate reward promotes the "perseverance" for a Christian's "walk in the Spirit?" (Romans 8:24-25).

10. Summarize God's provisions for changing human beings into "sons of God" as indicated in Romans 8:18-25.

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Questions for study.

1. What is the "glory that is to be revealed to us?" (Romans 8:18; 8:29; 1 John 3:1-3; Philippians 3:21; 2 Corinthians 4:17).

The "glory that is to be revealed to us" is the glory of becoming like Jesus, our spiritual prototype, in the eternal state. We are "predestined to be conformed to His image." (Romans 8:29). "When He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." (1 John 3:1-3). The Lord Jesus Christ "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." (Philippians 3:21). "For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." (2 Corinthians 4:17).

2. Why do human beings suffer in the world? Do Christians who "walk in the Spirit" suffer more than, or differently from, non-Christians? (Romans 8:18).

Human beings suffer in the world because they are subjected to futility through "the law of sin and death." Subjection to law brought about law-breaking which is sin. The wages of sin is death. When Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden they were made subject to futility. God said to Eve when she sinned, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children." To Adam God said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake ... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread until thou return to the ground." Then, "the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken." (Genesis 3:16-19). These words from the Genesis record draw our minds immediately to the physical suffering of childbirth and the other physical sufferings and physical death that Adam and Eve brought upon themselves and all their progeny, mankind.

Paul made it clear that Christians suffer also, and will suffer even as they walk in the Spirit. Why must we suffer as Christians? We suffer because Christ is in us, and when Christ walks in this world, the world causes Him to suffer. If He lives in us, He is made to suffer by the world, and we can't escape suffering with Him because it is our life He is using now in which to live on earth. What happened to Jesus when He came to earth 2,000 years ago? The world did not recognize Him. Even His own people did not receive Him. They persecuted Him and would not rest until they had killed Him. The world hasn't changed. There are today great multitudes of people who can't abide or tolerate Jesus. And if they see Him living in us, they are not able to tolerate us. See how the Apostle Paul suffered. It was because Jesus lived in him that people made Paul suffer.

However there is much more suffering in the world than there is in Christ. In addition to their human sufferings, the people of the world live futile lives culminating in permanent separation from God.

Christians who "walk in the Spirit" are promised by Christ a "yoke that is easy and a burden that is light." The Spirit does not lead Christians completely away from all suffering, but the Spirit, in using Christians simply as vessels, takes much of the suffering upon Himself. And the result of suffering on Christians who "walk in the Spirit" is "hope," in the manner that the suffering of childbirth brings "hope" culminating in adoption as sons, the redemption of the body, and the revealing of glory to Christians.

3. What is the "creation" which Paul wrote about in Romans 8:19-23? (See also 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:23; and Romans 1:25).

The word "creation" is translated from the Greek word *KTISIS* which means "a making," or "thing made." The word was used to signify spiritual creation in two places: In 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature;" and in Galatians 6:15, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." The word was used to signify human creation in two places:

In Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation," and in Colossians 1:23, "the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, ..." The word was used in Romans 1:25 in a way that might be open to interpretation. "For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." Here the word "creature" is interpreted by some as a "material creature" such as an idol made by men's hands. It is interpreted by others as human creatures who have accepted worship from other human creatures.

The word "creation" used in Romans 8:19-23 is:

A "creation" that "waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God," (v. 19),

A "creation" that "was subjected to futility ... in hope", (v. 20),

A "creation" that "will be set free from its slavery to corruption," (v. 21),

A "creation" that "groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now," (v. 22).

Jimmy Allen's book, "Survey of Romans," in discussing the meaning of the word "creation" in this passage, offers the following argument. He says that the word "creation" cannot refer to spiritual creation because Christians are excluded from it. He suggests that verse 23 shows that the "creation" differs from the "we ourselves" who have "the first fruits of the Spirit." Verse 23 says "not only this," that is, not only the "creation" "but also we ourselves." He suggests that this language shows that Christians are not included in the term "creation" as it is used in this paragraph.

Jimmy Allen goes on to say that it cannot refer to human creation because unbelievers do not look forward to being set free from slavery to corruption. If some one suggests that the "creation" refers to angels, it cannot refer to fallen angels for they were never subjected to their present condition "in hope." And it cannot refer to unfallen angels for they were never brought into slavery to corruption. Mr. Allen suggests that the only possibility left to consider is that the word "creation" refers

to God's material creation. If material creation is thought of in a personified way, it meets the criteria for the meaning of the word "creation" in this passage.

Mr. Allen also points out that a great many New Testament commentators of the recent past (some 22 out of 29) agree that the word "creation" is used here to refer to inanimate material creation.

But it is my view, along with a few commentators, that the word "creation" in these verses refers to mankind, or human creation. The creation was subjected to futility when Adam and Eve exercised their free wills to choose to disobey God, were thrown out of the Garden of Eden, and were made subject to the "law of sin and death." I believe also that the gospel of salvation was first preached to Adam and Eve. Evidence of this is given in Genesis 3:15 when God said to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you will bruise him on the heel." The point is that Adam and Eve and all their offspring had access to the "hope" of being set free from slavery to corruption and again becoming children of God.

James MacKnight in his book, "Apostolic Epistles," summed up the position which seems correct to me: "Verse 21, where it is said that 'the creature itself shall be liberated from the bondage of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God;' and the antithesis, verse 23, 'not only they, but ourselves also,' show that the apostle is speaking, not of the brute and animate creation, but of mankind, and of their earnest desire for immortality. For these reasons, and especially because of Mark 16:15, 'Preach the gospel to every creature,' which means to every human creature, I think the words (creature and creation) in this (passage) signify mankind in general, Jews as well as Gentiles."

4. What is the "anxious longing" ("earnest expectation" or "eager longing") of the creation? (Romans 8: 19).

The anxious longing of the creation is the revealing of the sons of God in glory.

5. Interpret "futility" ("vanity") and "slavery to corruption" ("bondage to decay") as used in Romans 8:20-21. (See also Romans 11:32).

Romans 8:20-21 says, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

There are three statements here:

1. The creation was subjected to futility.
2. This subjection was not voluntary, but was imposed by God.
3. The subjection itself is a basis of hope because God will arrange that creation have opportunity to be set free from its slavery to corruption.

Burton Coffman states in his "Commentary on Romans: "'Vanity' (or 'futility') describes the wretchedness, sufferings, disappointments, frustrations, futilities and general tragedy of mortal life in a state of separation from God, due to man's sin."

Mr. Coffman indicates that the phrase, "not of its own will" means that the execution of God's sentence upon man for his rebellion was no part of man's will but contrary to it. "It was the will of Him who subjected it, meaning God, humanity having had no choice whatever, except to submit to the subjection sentenced upon mankind by the Father. Thus the subjection was 'not of its own will.'"

Mr. Coffman goes on in his commentary to say: "'Him who subjected it, in hope', is a reference to God, who alone had the authority and power to subject the creation to vanity, and also the option of totally destroying man because of sin, or subjecting him in hope of his redemption. The master plan of God called for the exercise of the latter option," that is, for subjecting mankind to futility in hope of leading mankind to redemption. This is certainly a reference to the fact brought out in Romans 11:32, "God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all."

6. To what does the figurative phrase "pains of childbirth" refer? (Romans 8:22). In this figure, who is like a mother suffering "pains of childbirth?" To whom is the mother trying to give birth? How long will these "pains of childbirth" last?

The phrase "pains of childbirth" in Romans 8:22 seems to be a unique translation only in the New American Standard Version of the Bible. The King James version simply says, "groaneth and travaileth in pain" and leaves out the reference to childbirth. But a number of commentators believe the phrase "groaneth and travaileth in pain" refers to pain as felt by a woman in labor, as a pain for which the sufferer does not ask to suffer, but as pain which must be suffered.

The one like a mother suffering pains of childbirth is "the whole creation" trying to give birth to "children of God." These "pains" will continue as long as God offers grace and hope to mankind.

Emil Brunner, in his book "The Letter to the Romans," says of the suffering of creation, that is, mankind: "No one is asked! ...This expectation of the creature is different from the hope of Christians. (In their case) it is an apathetic, unconscious waiting, a waiting for something better, yet uncertain of its goal. But it is expounded by the apostle according to its true nature. What men actually mean without knowing it, is the goal in Christ which has been given to mankind: divine sonship, freedom, divine adoption, participation in the glory of God."

7. What are some rewards to be given to Christians who "walk in the Spirit?" Which rewards do Christians get immediately during life on earth and which do they get in Heaven? (Romans 8:18-25).

The ultimate reward is termed "the glory that is to be revealed to us." Rewards to Christians immediately during life on earth are "hope" and "the first fruits of the Spirit." In heaven Christians get the reward of "seeing," or actually having, the things hoped for such as "glory," "adoption as sons," "redemption of the body," and "salvation" in their full meanings.

8. What are the "first fruits of the Spirit" which Christians have during their earthly "walk in the Spirit?" (Romans 8:23).

It appears that the "first fruits of the Spirit" are the Holy Spirit Himself and all that He brings to Christian's lives as they "walk in the Spirit." Paul wrote in Romans 8:11 about the Holy Spirit who indwells Christians. The Holy Spirit was given to each Christian as a gift when the Christian was baptized, said Peter in Acts 2:38. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:22, "God ... gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." The Holy Spirit was given to Christians by God as a first fruit while they live in the flesh on earth. The Holy Spirit brings to the Christian "fruit" on which they are to feed. Then God produces fruit in Christians on which those feed whom Christians serve. Apparently, in this case, "the first fruits of the Spirit" refers to the first fruits Christians receive and feed upon after they become Christians.

9. What immediate reward promotes the "perseverance" for a Christian's "walk in the Spirit?" (Romans 8: 24-25).

An immediate reward of a Christian's life is "hope." It promotes the "perseverance" with which Christians eagerly await the things hoped for.

10. Summarize God's provisions for changing human beings into "sons of God" as indicated in Romans 8:18-25.

First, God provided that mankind be subjected to futility. Adam and Eve, and all their progeny even down to us, were ejected from the Garden of Eden to become subject to the law of sin and death. This was God's first provision of the salvation of Adam and Eve as well as their offspring.

Second, God subjected mankind to the futility of slavery to corruption. This comes about because of mankind's subjection to the law of sin and death.

Third, God changed futile sufferings to hopeful sufferings for human beings who choose to respond in obedience of faith.

Fourth, God provided the gift of the first fruits of the Spirit to people who respond to the Cross of Christ by obedience of faith.

Fifth, God gave the gift of hope to Christians who walk in the Spirit.

Sixth, God will bring about the culmination of hope by taking Christians into the heavenly, spiritual realm where there is redemption of bodies and freedom of the glory of children of God.