

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Who is the Creature? What is the Creature's Hope?

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. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 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. (Romans 8:18–23, KJV 1900)

If you read the commentaries on this passage, variation abounds. Many of them make their case that the "creature" or the "whole creation" in the passage refers literally to the whole created universe. There can be no doubt that Adam's sin impacted the natural world in which he lived. Genesis 3 explains some of those changes as they directly impacted Adam and Eve outside the garden. But does our study passage refer to the brokenness of the natural world as it teaches us about the Second Coming and our literal bodily resurrection? Occasionally very sincere believers confuse their interpretation of a passage with what the passage actually teaches in its context. Scripture never contradicts itself or teaches error, but well-meaning interpretations often overflow with contradictions when weighed against Scripture's teachings, rightly divided, not privately interpreted. (2 Peter 1:20-21; while these verses refer to the human authors, the same principle applies. The Holy Spirit, the true "Author" of Scripture gave Scripture with His intent and interpretation, disapproving private interpretation in the human author whom He used to write the Scriptures and the believers who read Scripture alike) A thorough study of Scripture, carefully stripped of all the preconceptions and personal baggage that we are liable to take to Scripture as we study it, will reveal and refute our bad interpretations. I suggest that our present passage simply says too much and says it too plainly to match well with the whole created universe view. Here are a few of many reasons why the passage does not support that view.

1. Paul specifically is dealing with "...the glory which shall be revealed in us" in this context. He personalizes the impact of the resurrection to the family of God. In the context leading up to this passage, Paul does not in any way deal with the natural universe. He carefully focuses his teaching on the impact of God's grace on His children.
2. Paul personifies the "creature" as having an "earnest expectation" and as "waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." Rocks and asteroids have no intelligent, spiritual "earnest expectation." Nor do they consciously wait for God's manifest glory in His resurrected and glorified children. Whatever the creature, it possesses a conscious mind that is aware of something far better in the future that God has prepared for His children than anything this present world can offer. It consciously waits for that day when the Lord shall manifest His family, "...the sons of God."
3. The creature of which Paul writes in some form has a will that is out of step with the present "vanity" of this sin-cursed, fallen and broken world.
4. This creature presently lives under the subjection of "hope," it joyfully expects a future deliverance from the present vanity and decay of this present world. Hope involves a conscious weighing of evidence and concluding from that evidence a strong expectation of a specific and good outcome, not something that natural elements alone can do.
5. This creature's hope is well placed. The creature "...shall be delivered...into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Think. If this creature shall experience the liberty and glory of the "children of God," it seems far more reasonable to conclude that this "creature" is in fact a term that refers to "the children of God."
6. Paul equates the present groaning of the "whole creation" with his experience, "...even we ourselves groan within ourselves." And what is the outcome of Paul's (And the "we ourselves" with him) hope, the object or realization of his hope? He makes the point clearly, "the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." While it is possible that God's natural creation may

in some way be transformed after its meltdown (2 Peter 3:10-13), nothing in Scripture personalizes whatever may happen to the natural world as Paul here personalizes the creature's deliverance of which he writes.

7. Paul personalizes the final outcome of the transformation of the "creature" of which he writes, "the redemption of our body." This term is far too specific a reference to the physical bodily resurrection of the children of God to match a generalized description of everything in nature.

By reading this passage in its context and applying it to the "...children of God" and by accepting the transformation of the "whole creation" as a reference to the family of God and "...the redemption of our body," the lesson flows smoothly with its context, in fact, enhancing and enriching the points that Paul makes regarding his and our hope for the Lord's return at the Second Coming.

Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. If the final manifestation of the "creature" is the "glorious liberty of the children of God," should we not conclude that Paul's teaching in the passage deals with God's purpose to resurrect and glorify the bodies of His children at the Second Coming?

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. First notice the often overlooked word, "together." As this whole creation groans and experiences the intense burden of childbearing, "travaileth," it is not alone. **We are not alone.** As Jesus stood before Lazarus' tomb, he groaned and wept. (John 11:35-38) This final deliverance is not a dream or an empty wish. It is a final reality that the Lord Himself shall bring upon His return. Most often in our King James Bible, this word "travail" refers to the birthing process by which a child is born into the world. However, the Holy Spirit occasionally uses the word to teach powerful lessons in the spiritual world.

1. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.* (Isaiah 53:11) This verse appears in the context of Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus' suffering and dying for our sins. In the very moment in which Jesus' body died, His "soul" was travailing in the work of securing the life of His beloved children. What a comfort. What a Savior.
2. Our present passage uses the word in the midst of its discussion of pain, groaning, and hope for deliverance. The passage is not dealing with natural childbirth, but with God's ultimate and glorious purpose to keep His children in the glory that He has

prepared for them while they live through this present pilgrimage. The process that God reveals in Scripture to resurrect His children and to complete His eternal purpose of glory in them is as logical and as inevitable as the process of childbirth. There is only one difference. In the world of natural childbirth, occasionally things can go wrong, and the baby does not live. However, our study passage, along with the consistent teaching of Scripture, reminds us that no such miscarriage shall occur in the Lord's family. The hope that excited the child of grace through this life shall come to fulfillment. All of those whom the Lord loves and chose in His Son before He created the first molecule of this natural universe shall be "...*delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*"

This passage is rich with metaphors that excite and instruct us. In addition to the thoughts already examined, Paul adds to the richness with yet another metaphor of deliverance. Throughout the lesson, he has contrasted present bondage and groaning with future deliverance. He finally enriches that deliverance with "the glorious **liberty** of the children of God." In degree far beyond our present sense of imprisonment and limitation to serve God as we should and to serve His children as He commands us, we shall then experience the full, the "glorious" liberty of deliverance and glory. In fact, as Paul focuses this lesson in its conclusion with this thought, he also started the lesson with it.

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.

Rather than heaven being a precise compensation for the sufferings that we presently endure, an idea often advanced by folks about heaven, Paul writes that the glory that we shall experience is so much greater than any suffering that we face in this "present time" that we cannot compare one with the other. This passage reveals one of the prime distinctions between belief in salvation, eternal and final salvation from sin and all of its consequences, by our works and final eternal deliverance by God and by His grace alone. If heaven is to be compensatory for our trials and sufferings, the equation should be equal; to use Paul's word, the two should "compare" equally with each other. The truth of Scripture, that our eternal final deliverance from sin is all of God and His grace alone, leads us to Paul's conclusion in this lesson. Instead of being compensatory and comparable, the glory that we shall experience is incomparable with our present sufferings, because that glory was secured for us by the Lord Jesus Christ and His sufferings for us, not through our purchasing it by our works.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor