

Romans 8:18-25, NIV

In 2 Peter 3:16 Peter says that Paul's "letters contain some things that are hard to understand..." Most of us would say "Amen." In my opinion this is especially true of Romans chapter 8. I would like to put forth in this paper the results of recent study on verses 18-25. The following text is from the NIV:

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In verse 18 the Roman Christians, as well as Paul himself, were experiencing trials, sufferings and hardships. But he reminds them that the glory we will experience later is far greater than any sufferings endured in this life.

The key to understanding the next few verses is the definition of the word *creation*. When used with the phrase "of the world," as in, "creation of the world" (10 times in the New Testament) it is referring to the creation of the physical world described in Genesis 1. When the word *creation* is used alone the meaning must be determined by the context. Sometimes the context confirms the meaning to be all the human race or all humans in general. For example look at the following verses.

Mark 16:15, **He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.**
Both BDAG, 3rd edition and Thayer's Greek lexicons agree *creation* is here used only to refer to humans.

2 Cor. 5:17, **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**

Gal. 6:15, **Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.**

The context in each case makes it clear the word *creation* does not include mountains, trees, dogs, birds or fish. In each of these cases the word refers only to humans. Please look again at the verses from Romans 8 to see if the context clarifies the meaning of *creation* to be talking only about humans. In each case what is *creation* doing? "**Creation waits in eager expectation, creation was subjected to frustration, creation itself will be liberated ... from decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of light, and creation has been groaning.**" Could any of these actions be applied to mountains, trees, dogs, birds or fish? Or does these descriptions of what *creation* is doing apply only to humans? If so, we could replace *creation* with the phrase *human race* as follows:

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The **human race** waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the **human race** was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the **human race** itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole **human race** has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

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If the above conclusion is reasonable, then the following comments should be helpful and makes this previously difficult passage a great source of encouragement and hope. Let us look in detail.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

Giving hope to those who are suffering Paul compares their (our) current trials to the glory that will be revealed in us! Focusing on the glorious future helps us to endure the present pain of living this life. This new glorious life will begin when “the sons of God” are revealed. Who are “the sons of God” and when will they be revealed? Notice the verb *waits* is present tense and the book was written about 25 years after Pentecost. But let us wait for a few verses to see if the text will tell when the *sons of God* will be revealed.

20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, *in hope that* the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

The human race was subjected to frustration by the will of the one who subjected it. The first thought might be: the Devil subjected the human race to frustration by Eve and Adam’s sin. But the Devil only *tempted*. Man used his Free Will, given by God, and chose to sin, subjecting the Human Race to frustration, bondage and decay. God’s decision to give man Free Will implies it was God’s will that subjected the Human Race to frustration. This is verified by the explanation of His motive for doing it, i.e. “**in hope that the human race itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay...**” If the devil had been the one to subject the human race to frustration, this certainly was not **his** motive!! This hope could only be a motive for God. Is this hope to be realized? And, and if so, when? This was God’s hope (Gk. hope = desire plus expectation) when He subjected the human race to frustration, bondage and decay. This liberation will occur when we are “**brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.**” Notice the similarity between verses 19 and 21. Will both verses be fulfilled at the same time?

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

The human race has been suffering as if in childbirth right up to the present time. Why this example? Because the pain of childbirth is always considered “worth it” when the pain is followed by the wonderful happy time with the new child! When will these pains of childbirth end? Paul says that not only the human race in general, “**but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit [see verse 15] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**” Paul said “We,” meaning himself as well as the Christians in Rome, had the firstfruits of the Spirit but were still waiting to be adopted. Therefore even we who are Christians also groan, suffering frustration and eagerly waiting for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Yet we have the previous verses 13 -16:

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

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Since Christians already “are sons of God,” have “received the spirit of sonship,” and the Spirit “testifies that we are God’s children” then when verse 23 states that “we **wait eagerly** for our adoption as sons” it must mean something more than becoming Christians! This could be very confusing if we no additional information. But we do have the next phrase for further explanation! The next phrase “the redemption of our bodies,” tells us what we Christians are waiting for and when it will happen. When will our bodies be redeemed, or ransomed, or bought back? Only at the resurrection! Therefore we as Christians inwardly groan eagerly expecting the resurrection of our bodies as the final phase of our adoption process.

Only now can we define when **the sons of God [will] be revealed**, from verse 19. Only now can we say when *creation* will be liberated from decay and brought into **freedom of the children of God**, from verse 21. Only now can we say when we will receive **our adoption as sons**, verse 23. All these descriptions are of one event, the general resurrection at the Second Coming. -- At this point it would be very helpful if you paused for a moment to read Paul’s description of the event and the importance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, **specifically verses 12-19 and 35-55**.

Repeating verse 23 to get the important context for the meaning of verse 24,

23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

The beginning word “For,” in verse 24, implies “because of what was taught in the preceding verses.” Paul is saying “For in this hope (the eager expectation ... of our resurrection) we were saved. We do not see the resurrection, we do not yet have the resurrection, therefore we hope (Gk. hope = desire plus expectation) for the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15), and wait for it patiently!!

Looking at a comparison of the critical verses:

19 The *creation* waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. (at the resurrection)

20-21 For the *creation* was subjected to frustration, ... in *hope* that creation *will be* liberated from decay and brought into freedom of the children of God. (at the resurrection).

22-23 *creation* has been in childbirth Not only so, but we, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, ... wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (at the resurrection).

24 For in this hope (the resurrection) we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it (the resurrection) patiently.

Summary, Romans 8:18-25.

Based on the above evidence it seems reasonable to consider the following reading as an explanation of this text.

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Text Plus Commentary

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. **19** The creation (human race) waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed (at the resurrection). **20** For the creation (human race) was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one (God) who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation (human race) itself (our bodies) will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (at the resurrection). **22** We know that the whole creation (human race) has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth (pains of earthly living) right up to the present time (still waiting for the resurrection). **23** Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit (gained at baptism), groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons (the completion of our adoption process), the redemption of our bodies (our bodily resurrection). **24** For in this hope (of resurrection) we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? **25** But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it (our resurrection) patiently.