

Sunday, September 28, 2014

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. 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 8:16-23)

Today, I’m going to focus on the part of that edifying and fascinating passage starting at verse 19 (“the earnest expectation of the creature”). But it’s important that we understand the context. It is about suffering, and the necessity of suffering to go to heaven. If we aren’t suffering with Christ, then we will not go to heaven. This is a common theme throughout the scripture. For example:

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Philippians 1:29)

The point of this passage is to comfort suffering saints, and it is a call to be patient under sufferings. There are three points of comfort: 1. We will be glorified with Christ, if we suffer with Him. 2. Sufferings are limited in duration (they are only during this present time). They will end, and will be replaced by a glory that is so great it will be as if we never suffered at all by comparison. The day will come when our beloved will speak and finally say to us: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone” (Song of Solomon 2:10-11). 3. Creation itself is in a state of suffering and bondage, and is earnestly looking for a deliverance.

As I said, my focus will be on the third point (verses 19-23). To get a good understanding of this passage, I will break this up into the following:

- What the creature or the creation is.
- What the bondage is that it is under.
- What the deliverance is that it is looking for.
- How this is meant to comfort suffering saints.

What the creature or the creation is

In this passage, we read of “the creature” and we read of “creation.” It is the same Greek word. It is talking about the unintelligent world, both animate and inanimate. Every plant, animal, rock, the heavens, the earth, the seas, the elements down to the smallest particle. All of these things, individually and as a whole, are looking forward to a great deliverance. I do not believe that humans are included here for two reasons. First, wicked men are not looking for a deliverance. They have only “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27). Second, in this passage itself, a distinction is made between the “creature” or the “creation” and the people of God. “And not only they, but ourselves also...” (verse 23).

It is no unusual thing for the Holy Ghost to use personification to teach us something. (Personification – “the attribution of human nature or character to animals, inanimate objects, or abstract notions, especially as a rhetorical figure.”) It’s all over the Bible:

“The land mourneth; for the corn is wasted...the oil languisheth... the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, *even* all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men... How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed... The beasts of the field cry also unto thee.” (Joel 1:10-20)

“For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.” (Habakkuk 2:11)

“Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.” (Isaiah 49:13)

“Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap *their* hands: let the hills be joyful together Before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth.” (Psalm 98:7-9)

What the bondage is that the creature is under

In this passage this is described as “the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope “ and “the bondage of corruption.” To understand this, we have to go back to the beginning of things. At the end of the creation in Genesis, “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was very good*” (Genesis 1:31). That means it couldn’t have been better. It was a very different world then than it is now. Here are a few examples. It appears that animals did not kill each other at this time:

“And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is life*, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so.” (Genesis 1:30)

The ground was watered by a mist from the earth which produced beautiful plants that were good for food:

“There went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground... And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” (Genesis 2:6,9)

There was no sin; there was no death. But when Adam fell, the creation fell with him. The ground was cursed for his sake, beasts began to be sacrificed, and death reigned:

“Cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field... Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.” (Genesis 3:17-18,21)

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12)

The earth was cursed again during the flood:

“The LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.” (Genesis 8:21)

And at this time, God declared that animals were allowed to be eaten by mankind:

“Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.” (Genesis 9:3)

In the beginning of things, the creation was put under the dominion of righteous mankind:

“Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26)

But after the fall of mankind, they are subject to vain and corrupt men, by the commandment of a righteous and longsuffering God:

“He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45)

Robert Haldane: “He appointed man to reign in it, commanding all creation to be subject to him whom He had made in His own image. But when sin entered, then, in a certain sense, it may be said that all things had become evil, and were diverted from their proper end. The creatures by their nature were appointed for the service of the friends of their Creator; but since the entrance of sin they had become subservient to His enemies. Instead of the sun and the heavens being honored to give light to those who obey God, and the earth to support the righteous, they now minister to rebels. The sun shines upon the wicked, the earth nourishes those who blaspheme their Maker; while its various productions, instead of being employed for the glory of God, are used as instruments of ambition, of avarice, of intemperance, of cruelty, of idolatry, and are often employed for the destruction of His children. All these are subjected to vanity when applied by men for vain purposes. This degradation is a grievance to the works of God, which in themselves have remained in allegiance. They groan under it, but, keeping within their proper limits, hold on their course...The whole creation, then,

groaneth together, and is under bondage on account of the sin of man, and has suffered by it immensely...It produces all noxious weeds, and in many places is entirely barren. It is subject to earthquakes, floods, and storms destructive to human life, and in various respects labors under the curse pronounced upon it. The lower animals have largely shared in the sufferings of man...They have become subservient to the criminal pleasures of man, and are the victims of his oppressive cruelty. Some partake in the labors to which he is subjected; and all of them terminate their short existence by death, the effect of sin. All that belongs to the creation is fading and transitory, and death reigns universally...They have been so subjected, not willingly, not owing to any natural defect or improper disposition in themselves, but by reason of the sin of man, and in order to his greater punishment...Sin, which is the spiritual leprosy of man, has not only defiled our bodies and our souls, but, by the just judgment of God, has infected all creation.”

What the deliverance is that the creature is looking for

The language here says the creature has an “earnest expectation” and a “hope” and “groaneth and travaileth in pain.”

This “earnest expectation” signifies that the creature is straining its neck in intense anticipation and hope. “Groaning and travailing in pain” is talking about the powerful pain associated with child birth. They are waiting for that pain and sorrow to be over.

And what are they looking for with such great anticipation? They are looking for “the manifestation of the sons of God” and to be “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Likewise, we are “waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

They are waiting for the resurrection of the sons of God because they will also be renewed. It is called the manifestation of the sons of God because that is the day where it is revealed to everyone who the people of God are. There will no longer be any doubt or any question. In our current circumstances, the sons of God are regarded by those who dwell on this earth as children of the devil:

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.”

(1 John 3:1)

Now, we have the firstfruits and earnest of the Spirit who has sealed us “unto the day of redemption” (2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 4:30). “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). At that time, though, everyone will know who the sons of God are. Our vile bodies shall be fashioned like the glorious body of Christ (Philippians 3:21), “this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53), “the righteous [will] shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matthew 13:43), we will praise God and triumphantly cry “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Corinthians 15:55), and our Savior will present us to His Father, saying, “Behold I and the children whom Thou hast given Me” (Hebrews 2:13).

The creation groans and travails in pain, waiting for that day. They partook in our curse unwillingly, so it only makes sense that they would partake in the glorious liberty of the children of God in the restitution of all things. The creature will no longer be subject to vanity and will no longer be in bondage to corruption.

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:10-13)

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever *in that* which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner *being* an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit *them*; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree *are* the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they *are* the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet

speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust *shall be* the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.” (Isaiah 65:17-25)

I don't feel like I have good light on the sequence of events in the last days, but I've heard that this passage from Isaiah may have to do with the millennial reign of Christ. There is a time where the heavens and earth are renewed, the animals are renewed to their original state, but there is still sin on earth, and men continue to live and die (albeit, their lifespans are greatly increased, like they were in antediluvian times).

And there is a time where the heavens and earth are renewed, and sin and death have been removed:

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-4)

However the details of that play out, this creation is looking for it, just as we are waiting for the redemption of our bodies.

How this is meant to comfort suffering saints

When we see a thorn or a thistle, we should be reminded that the earth was cursed for our sake, for our indwelling sin and corruption, and we should be humbled. When we see the sun rise, we should consider all the debauchery that it has witnessed and unwillingly given light to since we saw it set the night before. We should see all creation patiently bearing its burden of being subjected to wicked, vain and corrupt men, and we should likewise learn to be patient. It is vexing to the creature just like Sodom was vexing to Lot. Primarily, we should be reminded that “yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:37). There is very little that is more comforting than being reminded of this, and the resurrection of life and our new bodies:

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

I love you. Amen.