

## THE “CREATION” OF ROMANS 8:19-23

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**One of the most controversial sections in the book of Romans concerns the “creation” in chapter 8:19-23. There are good men who have disagreed, discussed, and even debated what Paul meant in these verses. The following study is what I believe as well as my reasons for believing it.**

**I.** According to Strong’s Concordance the word translated “creation” is used 19 times in the New Testament and refers to: the act of **founding, establishing, building** etc. the act of **creating**,

**II.** It is used to refer to:

**A.** God’s **Original Creation**: This includes the earth (rocks, dirt, trees, animals etc.) as well as mankind. (Romans 1:20; II Peter 3:4)

**B.** God’s **Human Creation**: This includes all of mankind. (Mark 16:15; Col. 1:23).

**C.** God’s **Spiritual Creation**: This refers to God’s spiritual creation (the church). (II Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15-16).

**III.** It is important to understand that the word “creation” can and does sometimes refer to God’s spiritual or new “creation”, which is the church. The church is said to have been “created” (Ephesians 2:14). We are “created” in Christ (Ephesians 2:10).

**IV.** Therefore, Christians are God’s **NEW CREATION**:

**A.** II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone **is in Christ**, *he is* a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

**B.** Galatians 6:15 For **in Christ Jesus** neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a **new creation**.

**C.** *Therefore it is abundantly clear that Paul uses the word “creation” more than once to refer to the church.* Furthermore, since the church was founded, established, built, and created by Jesus it fits Strong’s definition of the word exactly.

**V.** The question then is: In **Romans 8:19-23**, what “creation” is he referring to? Does it include the **material creation** (rocks, dirt, trees, bugs, bees and animals etc.)? Does it refer to the **human “creation”**, including all of mankind (saved and lost)? Or, does it refer to God’s **spiritual or new creation** (Christians or the church of Christ)?

**VI. Special Note:** The focus in Romans 8, beginning in verse one and ending in verse 39, is dealing with Christians...God’s **spiritual creation**.

**VII.** There is not a verse or statement in the entire chapter that would lead you to believe that the material creation (rocks, dirt, trees, insects or animals) is referred to in Romans 8:19-23. The focus, from beginning to end, refers to **Christians**, i.e. those “**in Christ**” or God’s spiritual “**creation**”.

**VIII.** Observe carefully that the statements in the entire chapter, from beginning to end, refer to those of “**us**” who are “**in Christ**” who “**walk according to the Spirit**” and are thus “**spiritually minded**”. Observe the reading:

1 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to **those who are in Christ Jesus**, who do not **walk** according to the flesh, but **according to the Spirit**. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made **me** free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in **us** who do not **walk** according to the flesh but **according to the Spirit**. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but **those who live according to the Spirit**, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be **spiritually minded is** life and peace. 7 Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But **you** are not in the flesh but **in the Spirit**, if indeed the **Spirit of God dwells in you**. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. 10 And if **Christ is in you**, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness. 11 But if the **Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you**, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to **your** mortal bodies through **His Spirit who dwells in you**.

12 Therefore, **brethren, we** are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if **you** live according to the flesh **you** will die; but if by the Spirit **you** put to death the deeds of the body, **you** will live. 14 For as many as are **led by the Spirit of God**, these are **sons of God**. 15 For **you** did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but **you received the Spirit** of adoption by whom **we** cry out, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with **our** spirit that **we are children of God**, 17 and if **children**, then heirs—**heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**, if indeed **we** suffer with *Him*, that **we** may also be glorified together.

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in **us**. 19 For the earnest expectation of the **creation** eagerly waits for the revealing of the **sons of God**. 20 For the **creation** was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who **subjected it in hope**; 21 because **the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God**. 22 For **we** know that the **whole creation** groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only *that*, but **we** also who **have the firstfruits of the Spirit**, even **we ourselves** groan within **ourselves**, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of **our** body. 24 For **we were saved** in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does **one still hope** for what **he sees**? 25 But if **we** hope for what **we** do not see, **we** eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in **our** weaknesses. For **we** do not know what **we** should pray for as **we** ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for **us** with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for **the saints** according to *the will of God*.

28 And **we** know that all things work together for good to **those who love God**, to **those who are the called** according to *His* purpose. 29 For **whom He foreknew**, He also

**predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many **brethren**. 30 Moreover whom He **predestined**, these He also **called**; whom He **called**, these He also **justified**; and whom He **justified**, these He also **glorified**.

31 What then shall **we** say to these things? If God *is* for **us**, who *can be* against **us**? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for **us** all, how shall He not with Him also freely give **us** all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against **God's elect**? *It is* God who justifies. 34 Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for **us**. 35 Who shall separate **us** from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written:

*“For Your sake we are killed all day long;*

*We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”*

37 Yet in all these things **we** are more than conquerors through Him who loved **us**. 38 For **I** am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate **us** from the love of God which is **in Christ Jesus** our Lord.

*Observe that the entire chapter focuses on the blessings of being “in Christ” and therefore part of God’s “spiritual creation”.*

**IX. Furthermore, the earth is going to be “burned up”. It is not going to be “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Observe the following verses concerning the destiny of the earth:**

A. “Heaven and **earth will pass away**” Matthew 24:35

B. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will **pass away** with a great noise, and the **elements will melt** with fervent heat; **both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up**. (II Peter 3:10).

C. “You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the **earth**,  
And the **heavens** are the work of Your hands.  
They will **perish**, but You remain;  
And they will all grow old like a garment;  
Like a cloak You will fold them up,  
And they will be changed.  
But You are the same,  
And Your years will not fail.” (Hebrews 1:10-12).

D. But the **heavens and the earth which are now** preserved by the same word, are reserved for **fire** (II Peter 3:7). Therefore, **since all these things will be dissolved**, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which **the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?** (II Peter 3:11-12).

E. John saw a new heaven and a new earth, **“for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1).**

X. Since the heavens and earth that God created in the beginning are going to “pass away”, “perish”, “burn up”, “melt” with “fervent heat”, and be “dissolved”, **how could it could be said in any sense (figurative or otherwise) that it “eagerly waits” for that treatment.**

Note that the “Creation” in Romans 8 **“eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God”**. If the material creation is in view in these verses then the creation “eagerly” waits to pass away, be burn up, melt, dissolve, and perish.

XI. Notice carefully that the “creation” of Romans 8:19 **“will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Vs. 21).** But the material creation is not going to be delivered, it is going to be **DISSOLVED**. The material creation is not going to be “delivered from bondage” but is going to **“DISAPPEAR FROM BURNING”**. The material creation is not going to experience freedom (liberty), but it is going to experience FIRE.

XII. Since the heavens and earth are going to disappear, Christians are going to need another place to live. Jesus has gone to prepare that place. In heaven we do not, and will not, need anything that this earthly creation has to offer. The “heavens and the earth which are now” (II Peter 3:7) were created for man’s existence here and will not be needed there. There will not be any need for rocks, dirt, trees, dogs, cats, or fish in heaven. “Flesh and blood” will not be needed there and neither will “fish and bloodhounds”. This physical creation was created for man’s existence here and when man does not need it, it will pass away, perish, burn up, melt and be dissolved. Heaven is a totally different place that Jesus is preparing. *So why would Jesus save this earth, or material creation, in any sense if He is not going to need it or use it? Observe the following verses:*

A. In My Father’s house are many mansions; *if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. (John 14:1-3).

Wherever this “**place**” is, Jesus said He had to “**go**” to prepare it. He did not take it with Him and He is not coming back to get it, but He has **gone to prepare it in some place else**. It is “in the Father’s house” and has nothing to do with the creation here. So why would this creation be “delivered from the bondage of corruption” if He was not going to need it or use it?

B. Christians have an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved **in heaven** for you, (I Peter 1:4).

C. Our citizenship is **in heaven**. (Philippians 3:20-21).

D. We set our minds on things **above**, not on **things on the earth**. (Colossians 3:1-2). *But if this “earth” is going to be delivered into the glorious liberty of the Children of God, why wouldn’t we “set our minds” on “things on the earth” if it is going to be as blessed as we are?*

*E. Furthermore, John saw that the “first heaven and the first earth had passed away” and that there was “no more sea”. Then he sees the “new heaven and earth” (Rev. 21:1). Observe that the “new heaven and earth” is pictured as a “city” that originated in heaven because it came down from heaven (Rev. 21:10). That this is a picture of the glorified church is clear from Revelation 21:9. But the things John saw in chapter 21 and in chapter 22 would not lead one to believe that it was a glorified earth which was “taken up” into heaven, but rather a “city” that God had prepared in heaven that John saw “descending out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:10).*

**XIII. Note also that Jesus did not come die for “angels” (Hebrews 2:16) and He certainly did not come to die for “animals”. It is only Abraham’s seed that He came to help, not animals you feed. He came to redeem the children of men. He did not come to save Rin Tin Tin. He is interested in souls, not soil. He is interested in hearts, not hardwood. It is the “priests” (I Peter 2:9), and not the beasts, that He promised to help.**

**XIV. Furthermore, if the “material creation” is going to be “delivered” into “the glorious liberty of the children of God” does this mean that there is going to be spiritual dirt, trees, grass, and animals? The “Children of God” are going to get out of this body of corruption and into the liberty of a “spiritual body”. Is the “material creation” going to be delivered into that same liberty? The text says “the CREATION itself also will be DELIVERED from the bondage of corruption INTO THE GLORIOUS LIBERTY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD”. Please understand that the “material creation” includes rocks, dirt, trees, fish, frogs, dogs, cats, hogs, birds, bees, etc. Are these things going to still exist in some spiritual sense? If they are, will the trees be spiritual trees and the animals have spiritual bodies? If they are not going to be spiritual trees and spiritual animals then how can it be said that it will be delivered “into the glorious liberty of the Children of God”? We can’t have it both ways. If the material creation (“whole**

creation?") is going to be delivered into "the glorious liberty of Children of God" then these things will have to continue to exist in some sense just like the Children of God are going to continue to exist. If the material creation (including bats, butterflies, bumblebees, bears and buzzards) are not going to continue to exist in some sense, then they are not going to experience "the glorious liberty of the Children of God". The truth is that these verses apply to the *spiritual creation* that God created *for Himself* (the church) and not to the physical creation that He created *for man*.

**XV. Here is my paraphrase of what I think Paul is saying to encourage all Christians during their suffering in this life.**

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us (who are in the church). 19 For the earnest expectation (eager longing) of the (spiritual) creation (which is the church) eagerly waits for (and longs for) the revealing of (final manifestation that belongs to) the sons of God (which is the redemption of the physical body when Jesus comes). 20 For the (spiritual) creation (Church) was subjected to futility (frustration from living in a body subjected to suffering and decay), not willingly (the church did not make this choice to live in this physical body of suffering, pain, and decay), but because of Him who subjected it (God decided that the whole human race, which includes the church, would die as a result of sin) in hope ( but because of Christ the Christian is subjected to suffering in this present time but he desires and expects to be delivered from this body of corruption). ; 21 because the creation (church) itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption (living in a physical body of corruption and decay) into the glorious liberty (freedom from a body of sickness, suffering and decay) of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation (whole church) groans and labors with birth pangs (suffers physically in this present time) together until now. 23 Not only *that*, but we also (Jewish Christians and especially the apostles) who have the firstfruits of the Spirit (we were the first to receive the Spirit because the gospel was preached to us first), even we (those first chosen by God) ourselves (who first heard) groan within ourselves (we suffer too), eagerly waiting for the adoption, (which in this context is) the redemption of our body. 24 For we (God's spiritual creation) were saved in this hope (hope that God gave us)), but hope that is seen (if we already had the redemption of our bodies) is not hope (we would not be desiring and expecting it); for why does one still hope for what he sees (already has)? 25 But if we (God's new creation) hope for (desire and expect) what we do not see (haven't received yet) we eagerly wait for it (the glorified body) with perseverance (for the earnest expectation of this spiritual creation that God has created in Christ eagerly waits for this revealing of what we shall be as sons of God in our glorified bodies).

**Special Note: It would be an encouragement for those "*suffering in the present time*" (vs. 18) to know what was in store for God's spiritual creation. It is also "*in this hope that we are saved*" (vs. 24). It is an encouragement to me when I read it, because I**

too suffer in this physical body and I am part of the (spiritual) creation that shall be delivered from this bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

But, personally, it would help me very little, if any, to know (figuratively or otherwise) that the birds and beasts, fleas and frogs, bats and baboons, snakes and snails, sands and seas, mountains and molehills, bushes and briars, were going to be delivered into the same glory as me. I could care less if there was going to be glorified bears, bobcats, bulldogs, and bullfrogs in heaven. According to my understanding, Jesus came to save His *people*, not this *planet*. He came to save the *righteous*, not *rocks*. He tasted death for every *man*, but He did not die for *trees* and *land*. He is going to save the *person who believes*, but He has not promised to save the *forests* and the *trees* or the *birds* and the *bees*.

XVI. Also when we compare what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the Christian “earnestly desiring to be clothed with our dwelling which is from heaven” (II Corinthians 5:2) with what he said to the Romans about the creation who “eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God,” (Romans 8:19) he seems to be referring to the same thing. Notice the similarities of II Corinthians 4:14-5:5 with Romans 8:18-24. We will notice first what he said about the “Christian” in II Corinthians and then compare it to what he said about the “creation” in Romans.

A. Our *light affliction*, which is but for a *moment* (II Cor. 4:17) is the same as the *sufferings of this present time* (Romans 8:18a).

B. *Light affliction..works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* (II Cor. 4:17) is the same as *suffering... not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* Rom. 8:18b)

C. We look..at the *things that are not seen* (II Cor. 4:18) is the same as we hope for *what we do not see* (Romans 8:25).

D. *Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house from heaven* (II Cor. 5:2) is the same as the *earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God* (Rom. 8:19).

E. For *in this we groan* (II Cor. 5:2) is the same as *the creation was subjected to futility* (Rom. 8:20).

F. For *we who are in this tent groan, being burdened* (II Cor. 5:2) is the same as the *whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now* (Rom. 8:22).

G. *We who are **in this tent** groan being burdened* (II Cor. 5:4) is the same as being in the **bondage of corruption** (Rom. 8:21).

H. ***Earnestly desiring** to be clothed upon with **our house** which is from heaven* (II Cor. 5:2) is the same as **eagerly waiting** for the adoption, the redemption of **our body** (Rom. 8:23).

I. *We want to be clothed that **mortality may be swallowed up by life*** (II Cor. 5:4) is the same as being *delivered into the **glorious liberty of the children of God*** (Rom. 8:21).

J. *For we know if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, **we have a building from God, eternal in the heavens*** (II Cor. 5:1) is the same as *the creation itself also **will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the Children of God*** (Rom. 8:21).

K. *Now He Who has **prepared us for this very thing is God*** (II Cor. 5:5) is the same as **God subjected the creation in hope** (Rom. 8:20).

L. *God has also given us **the Spirit*** (II Cor. 5:5) is the same as having the *firstfruits of **the Spirit*** (Rom. 8:23).

M. ***We are confident*** (II Cor. 5:8) is the same ***we are saved in this hope*** (Rom. 8:25).

N. *We walk by **faith and not by sight*** (II Cor. 5:7) is the same as *we **hope for what we do not see*** (Rom. 8:25).

O. *We are **always confident*** (II Cor. 5:6) is the same as *we **eagerly wait for it with perseverance*** (Rom. 8:25).

**Special Note:** There can be no doubt that in II Corinthians 4:17-5:7 Paul is writing about **Christians** whom he calls God's "**new creation**" in this very context (II Cor. 5:17). And when we compare what is said about God's "**new creation**" in the verses in II Corinthians with what he said about God's "**creation**" in Romans 8:18-25, it seems to me that both sections are dealing with the same "**creation**" which is the church.

**XVII.** But someone may wonder: "Why would God refer to Christians in Romans 8 as those "in Christ" and those who "walk after the Spirit" then, *suddenly and without warning*, refer to them as the '**creation**'?" I may not know the answer to that. But I do know that He did the same thing in two other books. For example:

A. In II Corinthians Paul refers to Christians as: "saints" (1:1) who were an "epistle" (3:2) and who were "in Christ" (5:17). Then, *suddenly and without warning*, he refers to them as a "**new creation**" (5:17).

B. In Galatians Paul referred to Christians as: "brethren" (1:2), "churches" (1:2) those who are "Christ's" (3:29), "Abraham's seed" (3:29), those who are "led

by the Spirit” (5:18), and the “Israel of God” (6:16). But also, *suddenly and without warning*, he called them a “new **creation**” (6:15).

**XVIII.** In Romans 8 Paul refers to Christians as: those “in Christ” (8:1), “spiritually minded” (8:6), “in the Spirit” (8:9), “brethren” (8:12), “led by the Spirit” (8:14), having the “Spirit of adoption” (8:15), “children of God” (8:16), “heirs of God” (8:17), “joint heirs” (8:17), etc. Then, *suddenly and without warning*, he refers to them as the “**creation**” (8:19). Why? Again, I may not know. But *perhaps* by referring to Christians as the “creation” he was trying to stress that we exist, and have all of the blessings mentioned in Romans 8, because of God’s **creative** power and not because of anything we do or have done. In the preceding verses he had talked about: our “*walk* according to the Spirit” (8:1 & 4); that we are to “*live* according to the things of the Spirit” (8:5); that we are “*debtors*” to “live according to the Spirit” (8:12-13); that we are to “*put to death* the deeds of the body” (8:13); and that we are to “*suffer* with Him” (8:17). And it could be that he refers to us as God’s “creation” to remind us as well as stress to us that it is God and not us Who gets it done. However, it is important to realize that we do not have to *perceive* the *reason* in order to *believe* the *revelation*. In other words, I do not have to understand *why* God referred to Christians as the “creation” (“creature”, KJV), in order to believe that He *did*.

**XIX. Final Point:** This is a highly controversial and extremely difficult section of the book of Romans. And even though I am confident, in my own mind, that the view I have presented here is correct, I realize that I may be wrong. And if the “whole creation” in these verses does include the material creation then, of course, I have missed the *point*, but I will still share in the *promise*, because I do trust in Jesus for salvation and *not my understanding of this or other sections of scripture*. On the other hand, if I am right, then other dedicated Christians who disagree have missed the *point*, but will also share in the *promise* because they too trust in Jesus. Understanding the meaning of the “creation” here certainly is not essential to salvation, but a good friendly discussion of these, and other matters of disagreement, can help us all in seeking a better understanding of what God wants us to know.

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