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HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD - ROMANS 8:19-23

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Peter made the statement that some of Paul's writings were "hard to be understood" and also refers to them as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16). Considering the wide range of views on this particular passage, I believe it could be considered as one of the *hard to be understood* sections of God's word. However, in order to properly understand this small section of Romans, the context of the entire book must be understood as well.

The book of Romans is bracketed by the same statement at the beginning and the end. Paul was writing to lead his readers to have an "obedient faith" (Rom. 1:5 and 16:26). In the first three chapters he established that all men, Jew and Gentile, were in need of the gospel because of the universal problem of sin. He wrote, "for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin" (Rom. 3:9). Because of this great need, God has "set forth" or publicly displayed His Son to be a propitiation for the sins of mankind (Rom. 3:25). To serve God or to serve sin is a choice that each individual must make. God's grace is abundant and is accessible by faith (Rom. 5:1, 20-21). Those who have yielded obedience to God by being baptized into Christ have been set free from sin, but they must not permit sin to reign in their lives (Rom. 6:1-11). Each man must choose his master (Rom. 6:16)!

Romans seven and eight draw a contrast between two laws - "the law" and "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (7:4; 8:2). *The law* of chapter seven in a reference to the Law of Moses, the Old Covenant. Romans 7:7 clearly defines which *law* was being discussed. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit the human author, Paul, quoted Exodus 20:17 which says in part, "Thou shalt not covet..." He then goes on to explain that the law was "holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). The Law of Moses was written by the finger of God and was not evil (Ex. 31:18). The law simply revealed to those who lived under it the nature and consequences of sin (Rom. 7:13). The remainder of Romans 7 reveals that a man, while living under the Law of Moses, could not be freed from the burden of sin and the conflict that it causes. In fact, Paul wrote, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our

Lord..." (Rom. 7:24-25).

Chapter 8 opens with a wonderful exclamation, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Chapter 8 presents us with the New Covenant of Christ under which sins can be forgiven. The Old Law could not do that (Rom. 8:3). Those animal sacrifices could not take away sin, but they did remind the people who offered them that something/someone must die for sin (Heb. 10:1-4). "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Those who are in Christ have been freed from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Those who are in Christ are led by the Spirit of God, are children of God, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:14-17). What a wonderful thought when compared to the condition of one who was attempting justification through the Law of Moses. Also, there is future glory that awaits the children of God because of what has been done for them through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:18).

"For we are saved by hope...we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24-25)

The thoughts of Romans 7 and 8 lead to the discussion of 8:19-23 and the difficulty that is found therein. The particular difficulty is the meaning of the terms *creature* and *creation*.

There are four things said of the *creature/creation* in this text. (1) It has an *expectation* (v. 19). (2) It has been *subjected to vanity* (v. 20). (3) It will be *delivered from the bondage of corruption* (v. 21). (4) It is *groaning and travailing in pain* (v. 22). There are different views that are held as to who or what the *creature/creation* is. For example, on pages 272-273 of his commentary, Moses Lard puts forth his belief that Paul is discussing the earth and physical creation looking forward to a time of freedom from the curse of Genesis 3. There are some among the churches of Christ today who hold the position that Romans 8:19-23 is a discussion of the new heavens and new earth and that the physical creation will be renovated or recreated. Another position is that the *creature/creation* is a reference to the church looking forward to her future glory. Roy Deaver makes this assertion on page 283 of his commentary on Romans. On page 152 of his Gospel Advocate Romans commentary David Lipscomb writes that the *creature/creation* is a figure of speech known as personification in which inanimate objects are given human feelings. While there may be other views of this text, these three seem to be the most prominent.

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HARD TO BE UNDERSTOOD - FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:10 AND "PERFECT"

Dan Cates

In the context of his wonderful discourse on love, or charity, Paul told the Corinthians, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." There have been varying ideas as to what the "perfect" was referencing, with most centering around the next life, or as Matthew Henry put it, "a future life." For example, Albert Barnes thought this was describing heaven. Adam Clarke considered this the "eternal blessedness" (which is in heaven). John Gill saw this as "perfect knowledge of God, of Christ, and of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (which would be in heaven). While these ideas superficially seem to fit, they do not truly fit the context. That context is capped by the reference to "that which is perfect"'s being come. The reader is asked to consider three things: first, the meaning of the word translated "perfect"; second, the *whole* context of the passage; third, an alternative and preferable meaning of 1 Corinthians 13:10; and, fourth, the significance of the passage for today.

First, what does the word translated "perfect" mean? Here Paul used the Greek word *telios*. James Strong defined this word as "*complete*" (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.). Henry Thayer defined it as, "brought to its end, finished; wanting nothing necessary to completeness." While Spiros Zodhiates, in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, maintained this is "heaven" in 1 Corinthians 13:10, defined it as "goal, purpose. Finished, that which has reached its end, term, limit; hence, complete, full, wanting in nothing." One may ask, why would this not be heaven - and rightly so, for heaven is the end, the goal of this life. However, is it the end/goal/completion of the process alluded to in this context? Perhaps the *whole* context - not merely 1 Corinthians 13 - should be considered to rightly answer this question.

Second, what is the *whole* context of the passage? 1 Corinthians 13 is indeed the "great love" chapter! How many sermons have been framed just from the wonderful and challenging description of love in verses 4 through 8? This chapter is not *only* a discourse on love, however. In fact, the chapter is not even a new thought. Since there were no chapter divisions when the Bible was initially penned, one would do well to consider the subject which began being discussed in 1 Corinthians 12:1, "Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, ..."; that discussion did not conclude with the end of chapter 12; it merely elevated into a focus on "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31), love. In fact, Paul alluded to the spiritual, or miraculous, gifts in 1 Corinthians 13:1,2,8,9 *and* in *all* of chapter fourteen! There is no mention of "heaven" in these chapters; incidentally, there is no mention of "eternal," "eternity," "life," "reward," or

"judgment" either. If nothing that would be expected to be in the passage if this were a reference to heaven is in the passage, then perhaps another interpretation exists.

Third, is there a preferable meaning for 1 Corinthians 13:10 over what most have thought? Paul set forth in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 that there were numerous miraculous gifts - but one Source, the Holy Spirit. Paul slightly changed the thought in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 arguing that every member of the church, the body of Christ, had a valuable role in doing God's Will. It is evident in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31 that Paul had not truly changed his focus, for he demonstrated that all of these members did not possess the same miraculous abilities. While not all had the same gifts, all could share in the aforementioned "more excellent way." In fact, it was imperative that they did. Even Paul, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 would have been nothing if love had not accompanied the practicing of the abilities he possessed. The love described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a trumped the gifts which so many coveted, for the prophecies would cease, the tongues would cease, the miraculous knowledge would cease (1 Cor. 13:8b). May the reader pause there a second and remember that Paul was writing from a first century perspective in which the miracles confirmed the message which was being preached (Heb. 2:3-4). Today, that reader sees no such miracles - something has evidently changed. Returning to the text, Paul showed that the miraculous knowledge and prophecies were partial - not the end of a process by any means and that the perfect would cause the partial to be done away (1 Cor. 13:9-10). In other words, the partial was merely leading toward something else. 1 Corinthians 13:11-12 uses the analogy of a child becoming a man to represent the partial giving way to the "perfect" and the analogy of looking through a glass with the partial and then looking without the glass via the "perfect." Paul then returned to the priority of love, this time over faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13), before finishing the discourse considering the proper use of miraculous gifts (1 Cor. 14). Returning to the passage in question, the reader will note that the partial (the miraculous gifts which were not the *telios*) would be replaced at some time yet future by that yet to come.

Fourth, what does this matter for today? Paul had no Bible. Christians today have no miraculous gifts. Yes, there are those who *claim* to be able to perform miracles, but one can read Scripture and see that what are called miracles today are a far cry from what was *truly* experienced then. Moreover, with no apostle available today, the miraculous ability could not be ...

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The term for *creature/creation* is from the Greek word *ktisis* which is used no less than thirty-eight times in the New Testament and has a variety of usages. Jesus has commissioned His followers to preach the gospel to every *creature* (Mk. 16:16). Paul wrote of those who worship and serve the *creature* instead of the *Creator* (Rom. 1:25). God made humanity male and female from the beginning of *creation* (Mk. 10:6). Christians are a new *creature* (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). The question then follows: what is the *creature/creation* of Romans 8:19-23?

What was Paul concerning himself with when writing Romans 8? As shown in the preceding paragraphs, he was showing a distinction between the Old Covenant (Rom. 7:1-4) and the New Covenant (Rom. 8:1-3). The Old Law was “holy, just, and good,” but it could not forgive sins with its animal sacrifices. The Law of Moses is a ministration of condemnation, but the Covenant of Christ is a ministration of righteousness (2 Cor.3:9). Romans 8 is addressing Christians about the blessings of being a Christian and the hope that is included. In fact he wrote, “For we are saved by hope...we with patience wait for it” (Rom. 8:24-25). On pages 182-183 of his commentary R.L. Whiteside wrote, “Every statement indicates that he was talking about intelligent beings who had a real interest in the resurrection and glorification of the children of God. Who but Christians are so hopefully interested in that event?” Another question naturally follows as one reads Romans 8: What is the *whole creation* of verse 22 and is it really groaning? While some will tell us that not only Christians, but also the earth itself, is awaiting, groaning, and travailing in anticipation of the resurrection, is that what Paul is teaching? Is he teaching a literal, physical new heavens and new earth? The short answer is, no! When the larger context of the book of Romans is understood that answer becomes clear. For example, in Romans 10:1 he wrote, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” Paul, in all of his writing and preaching, is concerned about the salvation of the souls of men, not a recreation of the material universe. The passage under consideration personifies the material universe to paint a word picture of the hope of eternal salvation for the Christian. There are many times in the Bible where this style of writing is used. “Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together” (Ps. 98:8). Is that to be taken literally or figuratively? Can mountains and hills sing and trees clap their hands (Isa. 55:12)? In the same way, is the earth anticipating the second coming of Christ? Is the material creation awaiting a future glorification? We are told repeatedly in Scripture that heaven and earth will “pass away” (Matt. 24:35; Mk.

13:31). Peter wrote that it will pass away “with a great noise” and that even the elements will be burned up, melt, and be dissolved (2 Pet. 3:10-12). Inanimate objects such as trees, shrubs, or flowers cannot sin or hope. They cannot be forgiven and live in the hope of a future resurrection. They cannot seek salvation. As stated above, Paul is talking to Christians about the blessings of being a Christian and he employs a figure of speech that is common throughout Scripture – personification. The child of God is “saved by hope” and is anticipating “the glory which shall be revealed” (Rom. 8:24, 18). While it is true that the ground was cursed because of sin as recorded in Genesis 3:17-19, salvation is for the souls of men, not a restoration of the earth. On the final day everything will be delivered from the curses announced in Genesis 3. All mankind will give an account before God and enter their eternal existence. The faithful in Christ will be permitted entrance into the place that Jesus has gone to prepare (Jn. 14:1-3). The unbelieving and disobedient will be separated from God for all eternity (2 Thes. 1:7-9). All other things will be “dissolved” (2 Pet. 3:11).

Another passage that is often used with this discussion is Isaiah 11 which describes a time of peace and harmony on earth. Animals that are typically predator and prey will graze together (Isa. 11:6-7). Children will not have to worry about poisonous snakes according to this passage (Isa. 11:8). Isaiah uses the phrase “in that day” twice as he was looking to a future fulfillment (Isa. 11:10-11). Does the Bible reveal when “that day” would or did come to pass? Yes, it does! In fact, Isaiah 11 is quoted by Paul a little later in the book of Romans. “And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a Root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles trust” (Rom. 15:12). The Bible explains itself! This time of peace on earth described by Isaiah was a use figurative language to prophesy of a time of peace and harmony that would exist in the church. The prophecy of Isaiah 11 was fulfilled in the first century in the church between Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 15:6-12).

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...transferred any more anyway (Acts 8:18). The true significance of the passage for the Christian in the twenty-first century is this: He does not need a miracle. The complete revelation of God has been accomplished. What a blessing enjoyed today that Paul could only anticipate! It does not need to be confirmed by miracles, for its very existence, unity, and inerrancy are all the confirmation the Bible, in verity the Word of God, needs!

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- Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24)
 - Prayer (Acts 12:5; Phil. 4:6-7)
- Vocal music only (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 13:15)
 - Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7-8)
 - Preaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7)

The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:3)
 - Name (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
 - Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
 - Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
 - Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Body of Christ and Christ alone is the Head and Savior (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23)
- Added to the church today just as in the 1st century (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13)

Salvation

- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
 - Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
 - Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
 - Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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