

Romans 8:18-23 Does Not Indicate that Animal Mortality was Imposed at the Fall¹

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to **futility** (Greek: *mastaiotēs*), not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also **will be set free** (Greek: *eleutheroō*) from its slavery to **corruption** (Greek: *phthora*) into the **freedom** (Greek: *eleutheria*) of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom 8:18-23)

Interpreting the futility and corruption of creation as animal suffering and mortality resulting from the fall of Adam goes well beyond the text. Romans 8:18-23 does not use any of the language of the Septuagint of Genesis 3 (pain, curse, dust or even death).

Although the noun corruption (Greek: *phthora*) does not occur in the Septuagint of Genesis, there is a word-play with related verbs in Genesis 6:11-13 which addresses the corruption of the earth in a similar way to Romans 8:18-23:

Now the earth **was corrupt** (Greek: *phtheirō*) in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, **it was corrupt** (Greek: *kataphtheirō*); for all flesh **had corrupted** (Greek: *kataphtheirō*) their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, **I am about to destroy** (Greek: *kataphtheirō*) them with the earth. (Gen 6:11-13)

The word futility (Greek: *mastaiotēs*) used in Romans 8:20 in its other two usages in the New Testament focuses on moral depravity in the thinking (Eph 4:17) and boasting (2 Pet 2:18) of the godless (cf. Ps 42; 26:4; 38:12; 52:7; etc.):

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the **futility** (Greek: *mastaiotēs*) of their mind, (Eph 4:17)

For speaking out arrogant words of **vanity** (Greek: *mastaiotēs*) they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, (2 Pet 2:18)

The context of Romans 8:18-23 is not about morality but about walking according to the Spirit not the flesh. The passage begins with a statement that those in Christ are not condemned:

Therefore there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Rom 8:1)

It then transitions to explaining why believers need to walk according to the Spirit, not the flesh:

So that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, **who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** (Rom 8:4-14)

Romans 8 ends with a guarantee that believers will be conformed to the image of Christ:

For those whom He foreknew, **He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom 8:29-30)

What creation is longing for is the revealing of the sons of God, not for physical immortality:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (Rom 8:19)

The opposite of corruption is sanctification, "the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

Freedom is from sinning:

"...**having been freed** (Greek: eleutheroō) **from sin**, you became slaves of righteousness."(Rom 6:18)

But now **having been freed** (Greek: eleutheroō) **from sin** and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, **resulting in sanctification**, and the outcome, eternal life. (Rom 6:22)

Freedom is from the Old Covenant law:

"Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know **the law**), that **the law** has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by **law** to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from **the law** concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is **free** (Greek: *eleutheros*) from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. (Rom 7:1-3)

Freedom is never from physical death.

¹ Adapted from John Beckman.