

COLLOQUY

A CONVERSATION WITH GUTENBERG COLLEGE



Winter 2026

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Musings on Romans 8

By Charley Dewberry and Naomi Rinehold

Near the end of Romans chapter eight, Paul abruptly personifies creation and claims that it is groaning in anticipation of being set free from its corruption and futility. This move seems to come out of the blue, as Paul had not previously mentioned creation in this section of Romans. The fact that this turn seems so abrupt may indicate that we are not tracking what Paul is doing. Our goal here is to make sense of this passage and answer the question: Why is Paul linking our redemption with creation's redemption?

To see this question in its context, let's briefly consider Romans chapters six through eight. Paul begins this section by answering a cluster of Jewish objections which center around the claim that if divine mercy gets us right standing before God, then we have no incentive to pursue goodness. Next, he points out that his gospel has a major benefit that the Jewish pursuit of the Covenant does not have—that is, we need not fear that our efforts will be short of the mark in the end. To illustrate this, Paul then uses an analogy with Roman adoption to argue that our being found acceptable to God is assured (Romans 8:15-17).

In Roman adoption, a Roman patron identified a promising youth with the potential to contribute to his city and culture. This patron legally committed himself to giving the youth an inheritance when he reached adulthood, though the child did not receive any part of this inheritance until he came of age and was adopted as the patron's son. Since the patron had legally bound an inheritance to the child, however, that inheritance was assured. The believer's status, Paul contends, is similar to that of the youth. Like him, we do not yet have our inheritance; it is a hope that lies before us. If we have been chosen by God and have received a desire for goodness and obedience at the core of our being (which is a sign of His commitment to us), we will receive our inheritance. It will not fail. We need only persevere until we receive it. To encourage the believer to hang on, Paul points out the great value—the glory—of our inheritance.

For the Roman youth, the time between being chosen by a patron and being adopted was often a time of training and discipline, where he learned how to live as his patron's son and take on the relevant responsibilities but without yet being granted the corresponding resources and freedom. For believers, our time in this life is also a time of training, which frequently comes in the form of suffering. But whatever suffering we undergo in this life is a small price to pay when we consider the inheritance that awaits us upon our adoption as sons of God, as Paul assures us in verse eighteen:

Now I count it that the sufferings of this current time are not fit to be compared to the glory that is about to be realized in us. (Romans 8:18; translation of the Greek NT by the authors, here and throughout this article.)

This verse immediately precedes the passage about the longing of creation, which brings us to the central question of this essay: Why mention creation at all? What does Paul gain by including it? Here are the verses we are focusing on:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in expectation that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption (or decay) and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in suffering until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:20-23; Greek NT)

Here, Paul claims that creation is longing for the time when the sons of God will be revealed. Why would this be? It seems that the redemption of creation is directly tied to our own redemption—that when we obtain freedom and glory, so will the creation. When we come into our inheritance, creation will share in it and, like us, be set free from corruption. At the present time, both believers and the creation are experiencing corruption and death, as entropy characterizes our existence. Both will be released from this bondage in the future.

So, to return to our central question, why does Paul bring up creation here? There are several possibilities. This connection between believers and creation is at minimum a straightforward analogy: we are like the creation in that we are on similar journeys. In addition, Paul seems to be situating us within creation, pointing out that we believers are part of a larger story of redemption. Paul also seems to be using his understanding of Genesis to explore how man's relationship with creation relates to the redemption of both.

From the beginning, creation has been the stage upon which the narrative of God's dealings with humanity has been worked out. It has been subjected to entropy—corruption and decay—with the life of every inhabitant ending in death. Moreover, creation has been put under the dominion of man. God first gave Adam and Eve dominion over all living creatures (Genesis 1:28-31), and then He did something very similar with Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:1-3). While dominion over the earth began as a gift to both man and creation, this had radically changed by the time of the flood, which embodied God's judgment against man and creation because of man's moral depravity.

The earth was being corrupted before God, and the earth was being filled with unrighteousness. And the Lord God saw the earth, and it had become corrupted because all flesh (humanity apart from the Spirit of God) corrupted his [man's] conduct upon the earth.

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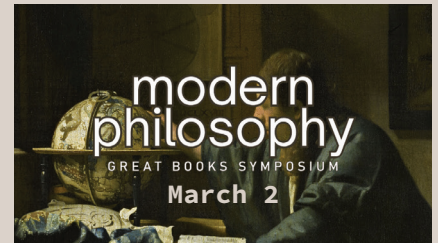
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Upcoming sessions:



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The Junior Tea, an annual event in the fall, honors the Gutenberg juniors who satisfactorily completed their two-year exams in the spring of their sophomore year. Honorees receive a Greek New Testament. Congratulations to this year's juniors:

Molly Pickens
Elle Miller
Noah Roemen
Sarah Tardibono
Grace Redelsperger



Musings on Romans 8

continued from page 3

And God said to Noah, "The appointed time of every man has come before me because the earth is filled with their unrighteousness, and note, I am going to destroy them and the earth." (Genesis 6:11-13; translation of the Septuagint by the authors, here and throughout this article.)

After the flood, the Lord God said:

I shall not again put a curse upon the earth on account of the works of man, because the mind of man is thoroughly inclined toward evil things from youth. Therefore, I shall not strike all living flesh, just as I did. All the days of the earth, seed and harvest, cold and hot, summer and springtime, day and night they shall not cease. (Genesis 8:21-22; Septuagint)

In these Genesis passages, Moses is pointing out that God inflicted the flood on both mankind and the creation because man was corrupt and his evil had corrupted the earth. While creation itself had started off good—acceptable for its designed purpose—man's moral depravity corrupted his dominion over it, thereby corrupting creation itself. In response, God destroyed the majority of mankind and creation in the flood. The creation was subjected to futility because of man's immorality, not because of any inherent flaw of its own.

In Romans 8, Paul is drawing on this conceptual framework when he contends that the creation is waiting for the day of man's redemption. On that day, not only will creation be freed from its preexisting corruption and decay, which will cleanse creation of its present corruption, but creation will also no longer be under the corrupting dominion of evil man, which will prevent future corruption. So, one reason Paul might refer to creation is to provide a picture of how different life will be in the next age. Because we will be morally perfect and immortal, our dominion over the earth will likewise be righteous and unending. Creation, the stage upon which our lives will be lived, will therefore also be immortal and incorruptible, reflecting our righteous

dominion. As much as creation shared in the judgment of man's corruption, so creation will share in the glory of man's redemption. This is a straight-forward implication of Paul's allusion to Genesis, but it is possible that Paul has another aspect of the Genesis account in mind as well. The next portion of this essay will develop this speculation.

Man's Relationship to Creation

From the Genesis account, there appears to be a significant change in the ecological relationship between animals and man after the flood:

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be increased, and be multiplied, and fill the earth and have dominion over it. And a trembling fear of you will be upon all the wild animals of the earth and upon all the birds of heaven, and upon all the ones moving upon the earth and upon all the fishes of the sea; I have placed them under your hands. And all moving things which are living shall be for you for food, as I have given all vegetable plants to you. But meat with the blood of life you shall not eat. For I will demand an account for [the spilling of] your blood of life. From the hand of all wild animals I will demand it, and from the hand of a man's brother I shall demand an account for the life of a man. The one who pours out a man's blood, in its place his blood shall be poured out, because in the image of God I made man. And you, be increased, be multiplied, fill the earth, and be multiplied in it." (Genesis 9:1-7; Septuagint)

In this passage, Moses claims that after the flood, man was given all animals to eat and that all animals would now fear him. Previously, God had only given man plants as food, and animals presumably had no innate fear of him (Genesis 1:29). There are three possibilities that we see here.

First, God might not have been excluding animals from man's diet, only describing the expansiveness of his vegetable options. While possible, this doesn't seem likely, given the contrast with God's words to Noah in Genesis nine.

Second, all of mankind could have been vegetarian before the flood. This seems to be what God had in mind

when he told Adam and Eve, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food" (Genesis 1:29). If this is the case, then God's words to Noah after the flood brought about a major change in the ecological relationship of animals and man. Man had become a carnivore who killed animals for food.

Third, mankind may have been made to be vegetarian but became carnivorous in practice. It's not hard to imagine that some men began killing and eating animals as a part of their corruption and that the changes God made after the flood were more about protecting animals from a common human practice than they were a change in man's eating habits. Add to that Abel's righteous sacrifice of the "fat portions" of the firstborn from his flock (Genesis 4:4), and the picture of man's relationship with animals before the flood becomes even more unclear.

Under any of these three possibilities, God's words to Noah may also indicate that animals would now begin to take the lives of men, where previously only men took the lives of other men. God would correspondingly treat the animals that killed men in the same way he treated men who did so. All this suggests that man's relationship to creation changed significantly after the flood. However they started out, man and animals now have a predator-prey relationship that goes both ways. This raises the further question of whether any animals were carnivores and predators before the flood.

These passages do not mention any changes in animal-to-animal relationships, which suggests that carnivores and predation were part of creation before the flood. This does raise a problem. If carnivores were present during the flood, what did they eat on the ark during the flood? Genesis does not say. In addition, God gave animals green plants for food at the same time he gave them to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:30). But there is also a major difficulty if carnivory and predation started after the flood. This would suggest that man predates all carnivores. While that is logically possible, it does not fit the current physical and biological evidence.

Regardless of when they began to eat meat, the predator-prey relationships among animals and between man and animals continue to this day. Returning to the context of Romans 8, this raises the question of whether these relationships need to be redeemed. If they do, then how might these ecological relationships change in the next age, when man and creation have been cleansed of corruption? What exactly is creation longing for?

We are not aware of any clear evidence about the ecological relationships in the next age, but a passage in Isaiah 65 is suggestive. Isaiah describes some characteristics of the new heaven and earth, and near the end of the description is the following:

The wolves and lambs shall be fed together, and a lion shall eat chaff as an ox, and a snake shall eat soil as bread. Neither shall they do harm nor mistreat on my holy mountain, says the Lord. (Isaiah 65:25; Septuagint)

This descriptive prophecy is difficult to interpret, but if it is literally referring to animals, then wolves and lions will be neither predators nor carnivores on the new earth. This suggests that carnivores will no longer exist in nature. And if snakes were sustained by eating soil, then the tapestry of creation and ecological relationships would have to be significantly different. Wolves and lions are predators in this age, but on the new earth these animals would be herbivores and therefore not really wolves and lions at all. The general point is that the ecological relationships among animals would be characterized by peaceful coexistence rather than by predation and death. This also suggests that man would no longer be threatened by animals, nor animals by man.


In Romans 8, Paul may be alluding to this picture when he talks about creation longing for the time when the sons of God are revealed, as that revelation comes with this new state of affairs. Further, the parallel that Paul is drawing between the redemption of man and of creation may be informed by these new relationships. Perhaps the moral and bodily redemption of man is somehow analogous to the peaceful coexistence of creatures in redeemed creation.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have explored the question of why Paul introduces creation into a passage about the redemption of man. To begin with, Paul is pointing out ways in which our redemption and that of creation are linked. Creation is, and will continue to be, the stage for human existence. There is a coherence between them. Moreover, man's experience and creation's run in parallel. Now, both are mortal and subject to entropy and decay. Man is mortal and subject to moral depravity; creation is mortal and subject to futility and corruption because of man's sinful management. At present, the relationship is not what it ought to be. In the future, however, neither will suffer decay and entropy. Man will be morally perfect, and his management will be righteous. And creation will provide man with the materials he needs for life.

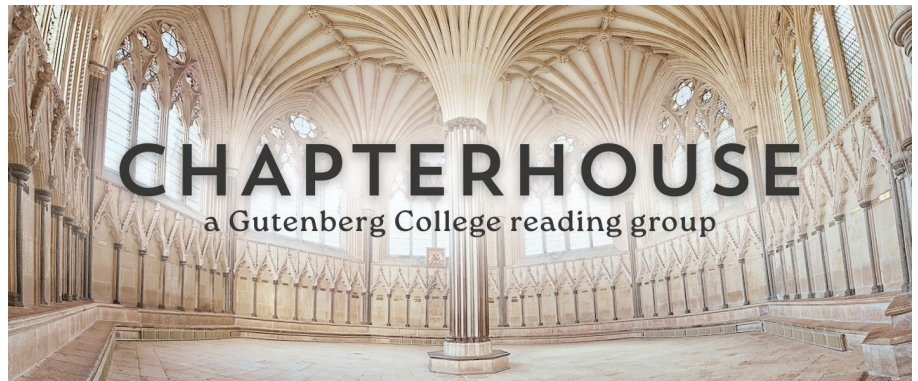
Finally, Paul may also have in mind that part of the change in the relationship between humans and creation is the change in the relationship between man and animals. Now, this relationship

is characterized by competition and the fear between predator and prey. In the next age, the relationship will be harmonious and characterized by peaceful coexistence among animals and between man and animal.

All this speaks to a change in the fabric of existence in the next age. Neither we nor the creation will be characterized by depravity or futility. Both humanity and creation will reflect the glory of God, and the relationship between them will reflect it as well. Therefore, the suffering experienced by both now will be insignificant compared to the glory that lies before both humans and creation. 

Charley Dewberry is the dean and a tutor at Gutenberg College and a practicing scientist and stream ecologist. He holds a BS in the arts, an MS in stream ecology, and a PhD in philosophy.

Naomi Rinehold is the student services director and a tutor at Gutenberg College. She holds two BAs, one in history and one in philosophy, and an MA and a PhD in philosophy.



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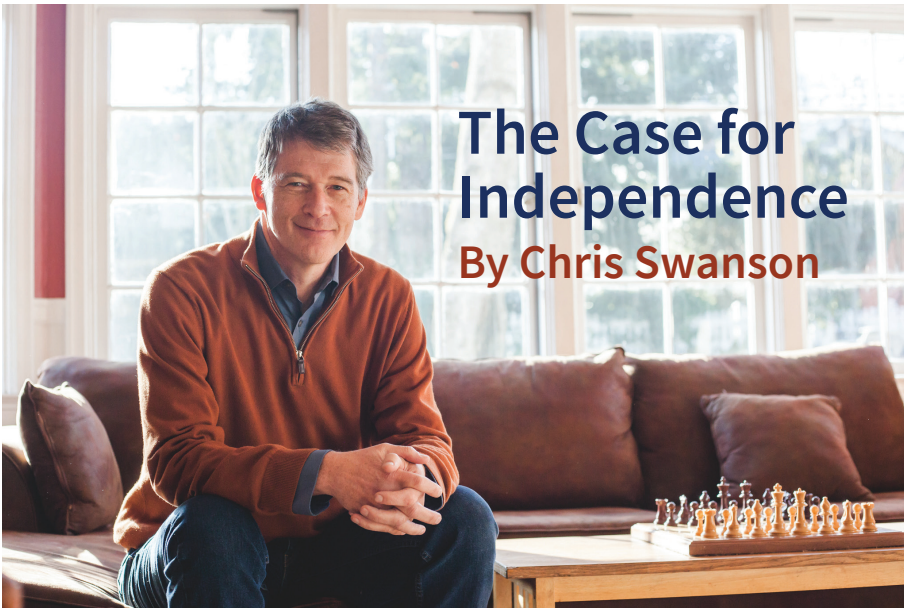
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We invite you to join us!





The Case for Independence

By Chris Swanson

Elite universities in the United States are between a rock and a hard place. The students, faculty, administrations, and boards have, over the years, adopted a progressive political stance. For the most part, this stance has been either ignored or lauded by the government. During this time,

universities have become financially intertwined with the government through grants and financial aid.

Now, for the first time, these universities are facing a strong government adversary in President Trump. They cannot give up the billions that they receive from the government without destroying

their reputation and their mission of advancing research. But they are unwilling to give up the ideologically progressive mission that they have adopted over the last century.

While I believe that the elite universities need a reset with regard to their educational mission, the big news is the volatility of their relationship with government funding. They believed that that relationship was solid and would continue unchanged. They saw no need to worry. Now, they are discovering what many conservative schools have known for some time: relationships with the government have strings attached. The stronger the national polarization, the less trustworthy those strings become.

No doubt, the presidency will again shift left someday, and the government will leverage federal dollars to impose new requirements on conservative institutions. To the extent that universities and colleges depend for their existence on a rapidly changing political situation, their missions are vulnerable.

Learning in a
TECHNOLOGICAL AGE

**LEIGH BORTINS
KRISTEN RUDD
ANDREW PUDEWA**


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Technology pervades our lives, altering how we learn, teach, and parent. But which of these changes are beneficial? Which detrimental? How does the relentless efficiency of technological tools affect the development of our minds and the formation of our skills and practices? And if our ultimate aims are spiritual, what role should technology play in our pursuit of them? Join us as we think together about how to navigate the unique technological moment in which we live.



Gutenberg College remains untethered from government funds. We do not take student federal or state financial aid or grants, even though we are authorized to do so. The government cannot threaten us with a withdrawal of funding. We are still subject to regulations through accreditation and the state legislature—we cannot fully decouple from government—however, such regulatory processes are easier to navigate than dealing with federal funding.

Gutenberg has a distinctive mission that challenges the current higher education orthodoxy by prioritizing learning to live life well before God over political and economic goals. I did not predict the aggressiveness of the government regarding higher education, but I am thankful to all of our students and donors who have made it possible for Gutenberg to retain its independence. 

Chris Swanson is the president and a tutor at Gutenberg College where he teaches science and leads discussions in *Microexegesis*, *Western Civilization*, and the *Great Conversation*. He holds a Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Oregon.

Thank You!

I am happy to be able to report that friends and supporters like you have been incredibly generous again this year. We have received over \$100,000 in donations at the end of 2025. These gifts are such an incredible blessing to the school and to our students. They provide the funds we need to be able to offer a personal education to our students at a price they can afford. They support all of our public outreach through *Colloquy*, conferences, our podcast, and public classes. They help us reach out to more prospective students so that those that want a Gutenberg education can find us. They help us to maintain and improve the building and provide a residential home. They help to maintain accreditation and authorization from the state. We are so grateful.




The following piece was written and delivered by Erin Greco at Gutenberg's annual school Christmas Dinner on December 5, 2025. (Photo by Brian Julian.)

The Light Is Real

We struggle to believe it.

It takes time

—maybe a long time

—maybe a lifetime

To see the truth, though some part of us has longed for it since we first drew breath:

The Light is real.

Our understanding of it, our vision for it, our tolerance for its presence, must grow, but it is there—

Even when it's shrouded in grief and pain—or numbness, or distraction,

Even when people claiming to carry it spread utter darkness instead,

Even when we discover, to our sorrow, the places we have spread darkness, too.

The Light is real.

As Zechariah proclaimed with his re-opened voice just months before Jesus's birth (echoing Isaiah from hundreds of years before him):

*The dawn from on high will visit us
to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

And as John wrote decades later, beginning his beautiful testimony:

*The true light, that gives light to everyone,
was coming into the world.*

And as Jesus said, His words recorded in that same work:

*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.*

We feel the darkness;

We struggle to believe.

But the Light is real.

And because of this—

Because of our desire to see the darkness overcome,

Because of our belief that *it will be*,

We link hands with millennia of light-bearers before us,
joining our voices to theirs as we testify:

The true light is coming; it has come.

He approaches; He is here.

And He is real.

COLLOQUY WINTER 2026



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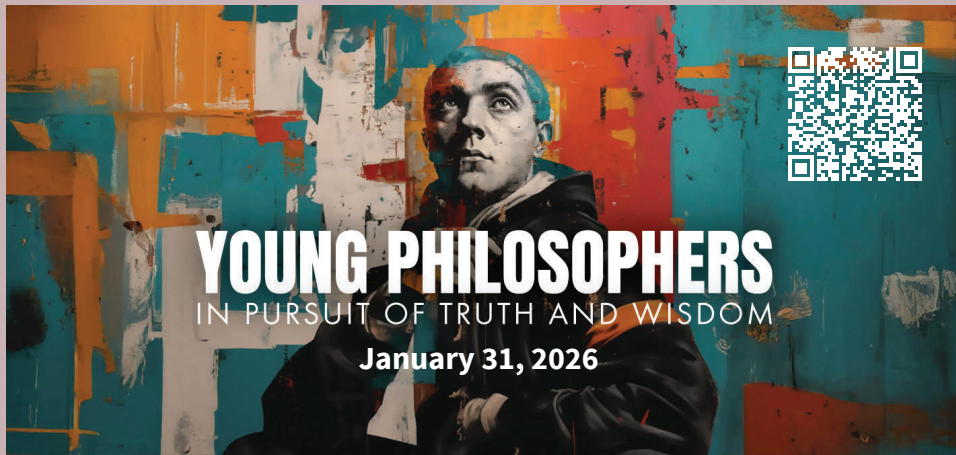
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At Preview Days, Gutenberg opens its doors to high school students and transfer students who are considering Gutenberg's bachelor's degree program in liberal arts. Winter Preview Days also include a Parent Track for parents and guardians to experience the thoughtful, relational approach that defines Gutenberg. Please join us!

