

Liberty, Adoption and Glory in Romans 8

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Letters to the first century church must primarily be recognized and appreciated for their relevance to their immediate audience, before we can attempt to accurately apply them to our own lives and time. Most of us who have grown up in churches are familiar with the phrase "already but not yet," and were taught our salvation was an ongoing process which would culminate in "glory" at the time of our individual physical death, when we would "go to heaven." The problem with this traditional teaching is that upon examining the Scripture on which it is supposedly based, two things are immediately apparent: 1) The passages are written to a unique audience, living in a unique time in redemptive history, in a unique circumstance which ceased to exist when the Old Covenant Age ceased to exist; and 2) These passages used to make an event of some efficacious quality of physical death in actuality are not about physical death at all, but rather the death of the Old Covenant, and specifically the deliverance of God's Covenant people from the bondage of the Old into the liberty of the New.

One such passage, the understanding of which is affected by acknowledging its "audience relevant" meaning, is found in Romans 8. The "already but not yet" many traditions teach as a present reality, in light of context, is more accurately understood as the "already and becoming," and that not as a present reality, but as a process unique to the first century, pre-parousia body of believers. Let us look at this passage in the context of the covenantal transition period, keeping in mind that as we observe it in this light, we are building a framework within which to connect the many other passages which speak to the same concepts. Specifically the three concepts which will be discussed here from Romans 8:15-25 are: **Liberty, Adoption and Glory.**

Romans 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 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. 18 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. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 23 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. 24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? 25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Initially in this passage there is a contrast between the spirit of bondage and the Spirit of adoption. Later in the passage the contrast to bondage is also identified as

liberty: "...the creature....shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (vs. 21) Before discussing further the nature of this liberty, "the creature" to which it is promised should be identified. It is significant that the same Greek word (*ktisis*) is translated here as both "creature" and "creation":

Vs 19: For the earnest expectation of the creature (*ktisis*) waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

Vs 20: For the creature (*ktisis*) was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

Vs 21: Because the creature (*ktisis*) itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Vs 22: For we know that the whole creation (*ktisis*) groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

This same word is translated as "building" in Hebrews 9 in reference to the Old Covenant sacrificial system:

Hebrews 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building (*ktisis*).

The traditional view of "the whole creation groaning" (as a present reality) conjures up anthropomorphic images of inanimate rocks, flowers and trees travailing under the curse of sin, never more plainly evidenced than in the obviously corrupted (sin-infested?) state of the earth's ozone layer. But a closer look at this passage refutes that interpretation. First, in contrast to a present tense application, we read the following:

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this *present [first century]* time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which *shall be [mello: is about to be]* revealed in *us[first century believers]*.....Because the creature itself *also [along with us in the first century]* 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.*" [*"Now" refers to the first century; so whatever/whoever the "creature" is, it would be delivered from its bondage at the same time which salvation would come to the first century body of believers.*]

Secondly, in contrast to an inanimate object application, there is contextual evidence that the creature/creation refers to a group of people:

"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, 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. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it."

Notice in the above passage the comparatives between the "creature/creation,"

referred to as "they," and the people Paul speaks of in the first person plural. Both were waiting with hope and expectation. "Not only they, but ourselves also": this indicates that both were waiting for and expecting the same thing, and as has already been observed, it was to come to both of them imminently and concurrently. Now compare this to Hebrews 11:

Hebrews 11:1f Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.... By faith Noah....became the heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham.... looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God....These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.... And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Several things are significant about this passage in Hebrews 11 which relate to Romans 8. The inheritance for which the Old Covenant believers were hoping and died having not received is defined as righteousness. Just as Noah became an heir to the righteousness which is by faith, "we [*first century body of believers*] through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." (Galatians 5:5) The inheritance is also defined as a city, a country, and heaven. Finally, it is defined as being "made perfect." Is not the inheritance Hebrews 11 defines as that for which the Old Covenant believers were hoping the same as the liberty, adoption and redemption of the body for which "the creation" was hoping, and about to receive, according to Romans 8? So we see that the "creation groaning" in Romans 8 is not the terra firma, but the Old Covenant body of believers who were waiting to be taken to heaven when Christ returned "a second time apart from sin for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28).

Liberty

Romans 8:19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The "vanity" to which the Old Covenant body was subjected was their hopeless condition under the law, which could never perfect their conscience:

Hebrews 9:9...Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience...

Romans 8:1f There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus...For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did:

sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh...

According to Isaiah liberty would be accomplished and God's people would be comforted (freed from condemnation) when they were made righteous in Christ:

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; 2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

The transformation process from Old Covenant glory to New Covenant glory the first century church was undergoing as they were being changed into the image of Christ and translated to a face to face relationship with Him would culminate in what Romans 8 calls "the glorious liberty of the children of God":

2 Corinthians 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Not only would the first century body be liberated and perfected in conscience, but "the creature itself [*Old Covenant body*] also."

Adoption

Romans 8:15f For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ... For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God...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.

Notable in this passage is the apparent dichotomy between the "now and the not yet" or that to which 1 John 3 refers as what we are "now" (the children of God) and what we "shall be" (like Him). In Romans 8, Paul sets up this same juxtaposition between having the "Spirit of adoption," quite obviously a present reality to them, and "waiting for the adoption." The key here is the "Spirit", which bore witness and was their guarantee. Compare this statement of a future adoption with the following:

Galatians 4:1 Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; 2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: 4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, 5 To redeem

them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. 6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. 7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

They were already heirs and sons, to be sure. But Paul goes on to explain in this chapter the typology of Isaac and Ishmael, and the persecution which Isaac, the son of the free woman, endured while Ishmael, the son of the bond woman, was still in the house. And of that persecution he states: "even so it is now." But the time was coming when the bondwoman and her son would be cast out, "for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." As we saw previously, the context here is a unique time in redemptive history, wherein there existed two covenants. They had the Spirit of adoption, and their inheritance was certainly guaranteed, but the receipt of that inheritance, the New Covenant glory which would open heaven, was not available while the first tabernacle (the physical representation of the Old Covenant) was still standing. (Hebrews 9:8)

Notice again Galatians 4:1: "...the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant." Compare to Paul's statement a few sentences later: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." (verse 19) Now compare this birthing process Paul describes in Galatians to the transformation process into the image of Christ he describes to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 3:18 ...we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.

So we see the future adoption for which they in the first century along with the Old Covenant body were groaning, the redemption of their body, was the equivalent of being changed into the righteous image of Jesus Christ at His appearing.

Glory

Romans 8:17...if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 18 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.

It bears repeating that the glory about to be revealed is in a first century context. It is also significant that they would be "glorified together" with Christ. His glory was future as well. How does Scripture define the glory of Christ?

Isaiah declares that God glorifies Himself through His redemption of His people:

Isaiah 44: 22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. 23 Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.

Here he states that forgiveness of sin is the revelation of God's glory:

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. 2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.... 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: **5** And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

In the same way Isaiah proclaims all flesh seeing the glory of the Lord, the Psalmist speaks of the ends of the earth seeing His salvation:

Psalm 98: 1 O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. 2 The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. 3 He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

The first century church was about to receive that salvation, and be partakers of that glory, again, which Paul in Romans 8 declares was *about to be* revealed in them, as they were suffering with Him:

1 Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer...12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.

1 Peter 5:1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:.. 4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The salvation of God is synonymous with the glory of God. The "glory about to be revealed" in those first century believers *has been* revealed in us, "for the Lord hath done it":

Isaiah 44:23 Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: ... the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.