

Romans - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Showers Upon the Grass: Being a Few Brief Letters and Papers, Romans 8:19-22 (8:19-22)

Look with me, beloved sister, at Romans 8:19-22. "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, because the creature itself also 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."

There is a propriety in the creation waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, because the "earth hath he given to the children of men." And thus creation travels her history with them. In their innocency creation was blest, in their transgression it was cursed, and so again it is when they are manifestedly glorified, creation will be delivered into the glorious liberty with them. The Church has the same connection with her Head. In this world, where He was rejected, she finds no place, but when He appears, they also shall appear with Him in glory. His ways determine those of the Church or saints. Man's ways or state determines creation's.

I do not judge that this "manifestation of the sons of God" will take place at the opening of the millennium, but at the close. There will be something of it in the land of Judea then, but not throughout creation. The Church will be in some sense manifested in glory over Jerusalem all through the millennial age. The golden city will descend and take her millennial place in the air above the earthly city of the Great King. And, in that measure, creation will rejoice. That is, "nothing shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain." The glory resting there, the corresponding glorious liberty of creation, will be known there. But the whole creation will not, I judge, be called into such liberty till a fuller and more universal manifestation of the sons of God takes place, in the new heavens and new earth. The liberty of creation will be commensurate with the manifestation of the sons. When the heavens are new, the earth will be new. When the morning stars shine, as it were; throughout the hemispheres, and not merely in the skies of Judea, then creation will enter into her complete rest in glory. And Judea in the millennium will thus be a sample of the new earth that is to be afterward.

And I see a great beauty and fitness in Paul's looking out to the last and wider manifestation. The Jewish prophet, when anticipating for a moment "the new heavens and the new earth," could at once turn to Israel and say, "For, behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy" (Isa. 65:17-18). And again: "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain" (Isaiah 66:22).

It was duly the way of the Spirit rather to contract the vision then and fix it on the land of the people whom He was addressing.

But Paul was not the prophet of Israel, but of creation, being the apostle of the Gentiles, and therefore he at once enlarges the vision, and passes by that subordinate and previous exhibition of "glorious liberty" which Jerusalem and the land of the Jewish prophet was to rejoice in, looking outward and onward to the manifestation of the sons of God in the eye of the whole creation.

Farewell, my dear sister; your poor body feels the pressure, but the Lord is under the load with you. There is a helper of infirmities. May His comforts refresh your soul,

Footprints for Pilgrims: Evening Meditations for the Day of Days, Footprints for Pilgrims - 32 (8:28-29)

God chooses my circumstances, my sicknesses, my sorrows, in view of what He is accomplishing. "We do know that all things work together for good to those who love God.... Because whom he has foreknown, he has also predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son." (Rom. 8:28, 29. New Trans.) He thus chooses the circumstances for us that will best accomplish His purpose of conforming us to the image of His Son. The consequence is that, if in the line of His purpose, I will never seek to change my circumstances. In fellowship with the heart of God I will gratefully leave that to Him.

Christian Truth: Volume 13, Glory of God, The (3:23)

The path of the glory through Scripture may be easily tracked and has much moral value for us connected with it.

Exod. 13 It commences its journey in the cloud, on the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, when the paschal blood, in the grace of the God of their fathers, had sheltered them.

Exod. 14 In the moment of the great crisis, it stood separating between Israel and Egypt, or between judgment and salvation.

Exod. 16 It resented the murmurings of the camp.

Exod. 24 It connected itself with Mount Sinai, and was a devouring fire in the sight of the people.

Exod. 40 It leaves that mount for the tabernacle, the witness of mercy rejoicing against judgment, resuming also in the cloud its gracious services toward the camp.

Lev. 9 The priest being consecrated, and his services in the tabernacle being discharged, it shows itself to the people to their exceeding joy.

Numb. 9 Resuming their journey in company with the tabernacle, the congregation enjoys the guidance of the cloud, which now attends the tabernacle, while the glory fills it.

Numb. 16 In the hour of full apostasy, it shows itself in judicial terror in the sight of the rebellious people.

Deut. 21 In the cause of Joshua, an elect and faithful vessel, it reappears in the cloud.

2 Chron. 5 On the temple's being built, a new witness of grace, the glory and the cloud reappear, to the joy of Israel, as of old.

Eze. 1 to 11. Again, in another hour of full apostasy, the glory taking wings and wheels to itself, as it were, leaves the temple.

Acts 7. Stephen, an earth-rejected man, sees it in heaven in company with Jesus.

Rev. 21:9. In millennial days it descends from heaven in its new habitation, the holy Jerusalem, "the Lamb's wife," resting above in the air, from whence it shades and illumines the dwellings of Israel again (Isa. 4:5), as it once did from the cloud in the wilderness; it will enter the temple again in the days of the Millennium (Eze. 43; Hag. 2).

Such is the path of the glory, the symbol of the divine presence. Its history, as thus traced, tells us that, if man be in company with grace, he can rejoice in it; but that it is devouring fire to all who stand under Mount Sinai. It tells us also that, while it cheers and guides them on their way, it resents the evil and withdraws from the apostasy of God's professing people.

It is very instructive and comforting to note these things in the history of the glory, which was the symbol of the divine presence.

Brief Expositions and Spiritual Meditations, Glory of God, The (3:23)

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Exodus 13—It commences its journey in the cloud, on the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, when the paschal blood, in the grace of the God of their fathers, had sheltered them.

Exodus 14—In the moment of the great crisis it stood, separating between Israel and Egypt, or between judgment and salvation.

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It is very instructive and comforting to note these things in the history of the glory, which was the symbol of the divine presence. And if that presence displays itself in other forms, the same lessons are still taught us. The most eminent of the sons of men were unable to brook it in

themselves; but in Christ all, high and low, unnamed and distinguished ones, could not only bear it but rejoice in it.

Adam fled from the presence of God. But the moment he listened to the promise of Christ, believing it, he came forth into that presence again with fullest and nearest confidence.

Moses, favored as he was, could not abide it save in Christ, the Rock, the riven rock, of salvation (Ex. 33).

Isaiah, chief among the prophets, dies at the sight of the glory, till a coal from the altar, the symbol of Christ in His work for sinners, purges his sin away (Isa. 6).

Ezekiel and Daniel, companions with him in the prophetic office, with him also fail utterly in the divine presence, and are able afterward to stand it only through the gracious interference of the Son of Man (Ezek. 3; Dan. 10).

John, the beloved disciple, the honored apostle, even in the very place and time of his suffering for Jesus, takes the sentence of death unto himself at the sight of the glorified Jesus, till He who loved and died and lived again spoke to him, and gave him peace and assurance (Rev. 1).

These distinguished ones cannot measure the divine presence by anything but the simple virtue of what Christ is to them and for them. In that virtue they abide it at peace; and so, with them, does the most distant and unnamed one of the camp witness a scene already referred to (Lev. 9). There, all who stood at the door of the tabernacle beholding the consecration and services of the priest, the typical Christ, triumph in the presence of the glory; as also in another scene referred to (2 Chron. 5), when the ark, another type of Christ, is brought into the house of God.

Sin and righteousness account for all this.

Sin is attended by this, as its necessary consequence — a coming short of the glory of God. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." This has been illustrated in the cases or in the histories I have been tracing. Sin incapacitates us to stand the force of the divine presence. It is too much for a sinner. But there is full relief, for if sin and incapacity to brook the presence or glory of God be morally one, so is righteousness and a return to that presence.

Sin implies a condition or state of being; and so does righteousness. And as sin is incapacity to come up to God's glory, righteousness is that which comes up to God's glory. It is capacity to stand in the fullest brightness of it; as those histories also illustrate. For in Christ, through the provisions of grace, or set in the righteousness of God by faith, all those whom we have looked at, whether great or small, found themselves at ease in the divine presence.

We experience all this toward our fellow-creatures. If we have wronged a person, we instinctively "come short" of his presence; we are uneasy at it, and seek to avoid it. But if we receive a pardon from him, sealed with the full purpose and love of his heart, we return to his presence with confidence. And how much more so, I may say, if we saw that he was pressing that pardon upon us with all the skill and diligence of love, and at the same time telling us that all the wrong we had done him had been infinitely repaired, and that he himself had good reason to rejoice in the wrong because of the repairing? Surely all this would form a ground, and be our warrant for regaining his presence with more assurance and liberty than ever.

Now, such is the gospel. It warrants the sinner to entertain all these thoughts with full certainty. The wrong we had committed, the offense which Adam did against the love, the truth, and the majesty of God, has all been gloriously repaired by Christ. God is more honored in the satisfaction than He would have been had the wrong never been done. All His rights are provided for in their fullest demands and to their highest point of praise. He is "just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

Faith assumes this, and the believer, therefore, does not come short of the glory of God, though as a sinner he once did. Faith receives "the righteousness of God"; and the righteousness of God can and does measure the glory of God. In His righteousness we can stand before His glory. And that it can in this sense measure His glory — that faith in the gospel, or in the ministry of righteousness, can set us with liberty or open face in presence of the glory of God — is taught in 2 Corinthians 3-4; yea, indeed, that the expression of that glory can be had only in the ministry of righteousness, the full glory only "in the face of Jesus Christ."

Short Meditations, Obedience of Faith, The (1:5)

DEEPLY and justly prizing our Authorized Version, yet alterations are at times well suggested-as on this verse, which should rather be, " By whom we have received grace and apostleship to the obedience of faith among all nations."

We might religiously judge that nothing could be more acceptable to God, than the services of love. We should be quite ready to admit, that mere conformity with law, or the observance of commands would not do for Him; but we should feel at the same time, that the services and renderings of love must be enough.

In this, however, we should greatly err. The service of love is not the thing. It is " the obedience of faith" (as Rom. 1:5 speaks) that is looked for from us sinners.

We must remember this to His glory, and our comfort.

We have a passing intimation of this in Luke 7 The sinner of the city that is introduced there, was a fervent lover of the Lord. Nothing in her esteem was too good for Him- she gave Him herself, and the treasures of her house. He valued and enjoyed her love. Surely He did. But He

recognized her faith at the end, when He came to dismiss her: " Thy faith hath saved thee," He says to her: "go in peace."

So in John 11 The Lord is there in the midst of the dearest affections. The scene is laid at Bethany, the spot dearest to Him of any on the face of the earth, the place which had then superseded Jerusalem in His affections, for He was dealing personally, and not dispensationally with the materials around Him But even then and there, He trains them that loved Him, to faith in Him. He would have them apprehend His glory, His glory for them, and could not rest in their love for Him.

And this same mind is still more vividly and largely expressed in the scenes which we witness after His resurrection.

Love took the women to the sepulcher in Luke 24, but the angel rebukes them for want of faith. The disciples going to Emmaus were sad. They had lost, as they judged, their hope and One whom they loved. But the Lord now, as His angel before, rebukes this want of faith. And so the company in Jerusalem, in the same chapter. The Lord conducts them, loving Him as indeed they did, into the faith of the fact and of the meaning of His resurrection.

So in John 21 Magdalene is alone at the sepulcher in deep, personal, fervent affection. But the Lord is not satisfied. He values it, I am right sure; but she must know Him better, apprehending Him by faith, as well as give Him these earnest services of love. He therefore reveals Himself to her as risen, and as risen for the sake of His brethren. That is, she must know Him in His grace and service, and not herself and her love. She must have faith of His perfect love for His own, and not merely be bringing the fruit of her love to Him. So, in the same chapter, the disciples in the city were glad when they saw Him-glad, because they loved Him. But He sets Himself at once to instruct them in His resurrection and the results of it, the results of it to themselves and other sinners. He tells them of " life " and " peace "and then, to the end of the chapter, He challenges faith.

This is so, I am full sure. But I would not, I cannot, but add, that all these instances are abundant to show us, that these affections and services are dear to Him. Ignorant love the heart of Jesus could prize. And He shows it, by those instances of it which I have been looking at. "Signs or tokens will be given to the doubt of love, though denied to the doubt of indifference "-as one has said. True indeed. This loving woman and others shall get signs to dispel their unbelief, as well as rebukes for their unbelief; and this shall tell us, that He prized their love, though He could not rest satisfied with it.

How truly acceptable to our hearts, all this is! We delight to think of the Lord thus prizing the feeble, ignorant movements of the heart towards Him, and letting us know how He answers them, thus, in His grace and gentleness. But surely we may take equal delight in the thought, that while He values our love for Him, He must have us acquaint ourselves with His love for us. He must have faith-that principle which trusts Him as a Giver, that principle which makes Him an object in the place and activity of grace, which acknowledges Him in the love that serves us, and not on the throne that exacts of us; which understands this happy divine secret, that God has found it, as for Himself, "more blessed to give than to receive."

And it is the purpose of the Epistle to the Romans, at least in its doctrinal part, to set forth the excellencies and wonders of faith. It is of faith it speaks to us, the faith of a sinner, what it apprehends as its object; and then, what it reaches and enjoys as its inheritance.

The eleventh of Hebrews celebrates faith as the principle by which a saint carries on his services and his victories amid the circumstances of life in the world. It is faith which is there set forth in its excellencies; but it is the faith in the saints, in the elders, as the saints of earlier days are there called. But in the Epistle to the Romans it is faith in the sinner that is set forth, not celebrated in its services and victories, or as that secret principle of the soul, by which the saints obtained a good report, but the secret in the soul of a sinner which apprehends wondrous objects, and reaches wondrous blessedness. The faith of saints will be rewarded: the faith of sinners will sing forever. It is there declared to look at the Christ of God delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification. What wondrous objects are there presented to its eye, and its acceptance! Nothing less than the most stupendous facts which could ever have transacted in the wide, wide compass of creation itself; that God should deliver up His own Son to die for sinners, and then raise Him up from the dead, for the justification of all who would receive Him!

Blood upon the mercy-seat, or propitiation, is set forth to the view of faith-the grand and blessed mystery, that God is now just while justifying the ungodly.

What objects can fill the eye so great and excellent and marvelous as these! And these are the objects presented to the eye of the faith of sinners. (Rom. 3; 4)

And if the objects of faith are thus excellent and wondrous in the highest order of excellencies and wonders, so are its attainments or the things that it reaches and possesses itself of, according also to the teaching of this Epistle.

" The righteousness of God " is its property. The believing sinner possesses himself of that at once. That righteousness at once constitutes, as I may say, his person. It makes him what he is. It clothes him. It sets him in his due form and personality before God. And who, of His creatures, can be more excellent than the one who shines before Him as His own righteousness? We are made " the righteousness of God."

And as this is the believing sinner's present possession, as this forms his person, or is himself now and as he will be forever, so "the glory of God " is his inheritance, in hope of which he now walks day by day. And if the person be excellent, what say we to this condition? If nothing higher could form me for the eye of God than His own. righteousness, what could make me higher in my estate and circumstances around Him, than His own glory? (Rom. 3; 5)

Have we not, therefore, reached and attained the most marvelous conditions, as well as apprehended the most marvelous objects? Indeed it is so. We look at the Son of God in death and resurrection for us, as delivered up and raised up for our blessing. These are our objects. And then, we shine personally in the righteousness of God, and claim as our estate and inheritance the glory of God. These are our attainments or possessions.

What could have been done more than has been done? If the obedience of faith be demanded, it is encouraged beyond all that the heart of man could have conceived.

But I must add this-that He who claims our confidence as sinners, has entitled Himself to it. And a most blessed secret of scripture this is. It demands our faith in Christ, and in the redemption which He has wrought for us; and it reads to us His divine title to this which He challenges.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is, as I may say, the closing, crowning testimony to that. Shall I say, it seals, and seals as forever, seals as with a seal that can never be questioned or effaced, the blessed One's title to the faith which He claims?

In one aspect of it, that Epistle may be called, " God's acceptance of Christ." It sets forth that fact, establishing it in the mouth of the most august witnesses.

Other testimonies had been previously given to the same blessed mystery. I know that. The rent veil at the moment of the death, testified God's acceptance of Christ. Then, the resurrection, as a more public witness, gave evidence of the same. And then, the gift and presence of the Holy Ghost here, fruit of the ascension and glory of Jesus, comes in its way and season, to tell the same great truth. So that in the mouth of these three august witnesses, the rent veil, the resurrection, and the presence of the Holy Ghost down here, the fact is established, that Christ has been accepted, and accepted for us.

But then, after all these, comes this Epistle to do the same service for us, in another and a further way. In that writing, the Spirit opens the heavens; and the heavens thus opened becomes the crowning testimony to the same great fact. Because it shows us heaven as the seat of the ascended. Jesus, ascended and seated there in such characters as suit and answer our necessities.

It shows us Jesus there as " the Purger of our sins;" as " the Apostle and High Priest of our profession;" as " the Mediator of the new covenant;" " the author and finisher of faith "and each and all of these characters tell us of God's acceptance of Christ for us.

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