

EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 8.15-28

A Paper

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By

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Introduction

The following paper will be an exegetical commentary of Romans 1.15-28. This will include an examination of the Greek text¹, a translation of the text, and an overview of important grammar and syntax issues, noted textual variants², and commentary. It will conclude with a synthesis of the meaning/intent of this passage.

Exegesis and Commentary on the Text

¹⁵ οὐ γὰρ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα δουλείας πάλιν εἰς φόβον ἀλλὰ ἐλάβετε πνεῦμα υἰοθεσίας ἐν ᾧ κρᾶζομεν· αββα ὁ πατήρ.

For you have not received the “Spirit of slavery” again unto fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption we cry out, “Abba, Father!”

As has been common throughout chapter eight the Apostle used the coordinating conjunction γὰρ with an explanatory function in order to further develop the thought that ended in v. 14. He has just stated that those who are led by the Spirit = the sons of God. He explains the reason for this is that believers have not (οὐ) previously received (the aorist ἐλάβετε functions to emphasize a past experience) a “Spirit of slavery”. Here it was decided that “Spirit of slavery” was more fitting that “spirit of slavery” because it appears that the Apostle is clarifying the identity of the Spirit rather than contrasting the Spirit with some other spirit. The aporetic genitive emphasizes that the Spirit that was received is not characterized by bringing believers into slavery. For such a Spirit would lead believer “again into fear” (πάλιν εἰς φόβον).

1 We will be using the Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition. Copyright (c) 1993 Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart. If there are significant textual variants it will be noted in the commentary.

2 All textual variants of importance will be discussed in footnotes in order to preserve the flow of the exegetical commentary.

The coordinating conjunction **ἀλλὰ** has an adversative function contrasting what has been said with what is about to be said. Rather than previous receiving the “Spirit of fear” believers have previously received (again an aorist) a Spirit characterized by “adoption” (**υἰοθεσίας** = aporetic genitive). This further develops v. 15 where the Apostle stated that those led by the Spirit have become sons of God. The reason for this is that the Spirit is characterized by the adopting function that the Spirit serves in bringing believers into a father-child relationship with the Father. Because of this we currently cry out (**κράζομεν** = present active indicative) “Abba, Father”. **αββα** is a vocative indicating direct address.

¹⁶ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν ὅτι ἐσμὲν τέκνα θεοῦ.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.

The reflexive pronoun **αὐτὸ** emphasizes the personality of the Spirit. It is the Spirit (it/himself) that testifies with (the **συμ** prefix of **συμμαρτυρεῖ** presents a cooperative action) our spirit (**τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν**). It is here we have the intersection of divine and human. The Holy Spirit relates and interacts with the human spirit (primarily). This follows the earlier statements that showed that the Spirit is beginning with the inner person in order to redeem the mortal body in the future.

The subordinating conjunction **ὅτι** describes what the Holy Spirit and the human spirit witness, namely that we are currently (**ἐσμὲν** = present active indicative) the children of God (**τέκνα θεοῦ** likely defined by a possessive genitive).

¹⁷ εἰ δὲ τέκνα, καὶ κληρονόμοι· κληρονόμοι μὲν θεοῦ, συγκληρονόμοι δὲ Χριστοῦ, εἴπερ συμπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ συνδοξασθῶμεν.

But if we are children, also heirs, on the one hand heirs of God, on the other hand coheirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer with [him] in order that also we might be glorified with [him].

δέ has a correlative function indicating that what is being said affirms what has been said. The εἰ...τέκνα appears to be function rhetorically here since the conditional sentence is within a context where it is evident that the Apostle has been speaking to those whom he understands to be the subject of his discussion. The emphasis he is trying to make is “if this...then this” (δέ... και). For the Apostle being a child = being an heir.

As an heir there are two aspects (μέν... δέ): on the one hand we are heirs “of God” (likely a genitive of relationship) and on the other we are coheirs (three x’s the συ prefix occurs in this v. : συγκληρονόμοι, συμπάσχομεν, συνδοξασθῶμεν) of Christ (likely another genitive of relationship). This is probably the highest regard that can be given to the sonship of believers in that we are said to be sharing in the inheritance of the eternal Son of God.

The subordinating conjunction εἴπερ introduces a first class conditional statement assuming that what is said is a reality. What is assumed is that we will suffer with (συμπάσχομεν) Christ. It is on this condition that the subordinating conjunction introduces what will follow suffering, namely being “glorified with” Christ (συνδοξασθῶμεν). So for the Apostle being a coheir results in coglorification but is dependent upon cosuffering. The Apostle does not clarify the meaning, extent, or intensity of the suffering but it can be assumed he did not intend it to refer to self infliction.

¹⁸ Λογίζομαι γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς.

For I consider that the sufferings of the present moment are not worthy to [be compared to] the glory about to be revealed in us.

The coordinating conjunction γὰρ introduces the next clarification. The Apostle consider/reckons/calculates (Λογίζομαι). The subordinating conjunction ὅτι introduces the

results, namely that the “current sufferings” (τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ = of the present time; now moment) cannot be (οὐκ) equated with (πρὸς) the forthcoming glory (τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν). The contrast is explicit. It is the current suffering versus the forthcoming glory. Therefore, the cosuffering is nothing when we contrast it with the coglorification of v. 17.

Since as children of God we share in the glory given to the Son it is this glory that will be revealed (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι = sudden, intense revealing (apocalyptic) not merely an intellectual awakening; also in passive tense suggesting the work of the Spirit) in us (εἰς ἡμᾶς).

¹⁹ ἡ γὰρ ἀποκαταδοκία τῆς κτίσεως τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται.

For the eager expectation of creation is the revealing of the sons of God.

Again, γὰρ functions as a coordinating conjunction. This time the Apostle connects the anticipated revealing of the sons of God to the eager expectation (ἀποκαταδοκία... ἀπεκδέχεται) of that revealing (τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν) by none other than creation (τῆς κτίσεως).

²⁰ τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, οὐχ ἑκούσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι

For in futility creation was subjected, not voluntarily but through the one subjecting it, in hope

Why does the Apostle personify creation and why is she eagerly anticipating the revealing of the sons of God? First, the apostle introduces the problem (again γὰρ functions as a coordinating conjunction) which is creation (ἡ κτίσις) having been subjected (aorist passive indicative refers to something that happened *to creation* in the past; likely an echo of Gen. 3.17-19) to “futility” or “frustration” (ματαιότητι).

As a means of clarification the Apostle reminds his readers that the current state of creation has nothing to do with creation herself. She did not (οὐχ) subject herself “voluntarily” or “willingly” (ἑκούσα). Rather, if we reflect on Gen. 3.17-19 where it was God who cursed the

earth it becomes apparent that “the one” who actively subjected it (τὸν ὑποτάξαντα = aorist active accusative). It was “through” or “because of” (δια + accusative) God that creation became subjected. Nevertheless, God did not subject creation to a state of futility with the intent of leaving her there. Rather, it was done “in hope” (ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι). We cannot read “hope” as being in reference to something that one would like to happen while being unsure of whether or not it will occur, but rather in anticipation of what is not yet evident and has not yet happened but that is expected to occur (again the evidence?).

²¹ ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ.

in order that creation herself will be set free from the slavery of decay unto the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The subordinating conjunction ὅτι links the dependent clause to the previous one. Creation was subject in hope *in order that* creation herself (αὐτὴ ἡ κτίσις creates an interesting personification) will be set free (ἐλευθερωθήσεται = future passive indicative). She will be set free from a form of slavery (τῆς δουλείας) that is decay (τῆς φθορᾶς is likely an expegetical genitive indicating slavery = decay).

Creation will move from (ἀπὸ) slavery and into freedom (εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν). The freedom is characterized by the aforementioned glory in vv. 17-18. The genitive here is likely expegetical as well (freedom = the glory). The possessive genitive τῶν τέκνων echos vv. 16-17 where being adopted by God = glorification. Another possessive genitive τοῦ θεοῦ reminds the reader who is the Father of the children.

²² οἶδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν·

For we know that all creation groans together and travails together until now

The coordinating conjunction γὰρ connects this statement with the previous one. The time creation will be set free is when the children of God are revealed because the destiny of creation and the children of God are intertwined. All (πᾶσα) the creation “groans” and “travails” (συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει is understood to depict birthing imagery according to some; e.g. NASB, NIV). “Until now” (ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν) does not indicate that “until now when it is complete” but rather “from the curse all the way even to the current moment”. Contextually it is clear that this groaning will occur until the revealing of the sons of God.

²³ οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν.³

But not only [her], but also we ourselves, the ones having the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also ourselves in ourselves we groan anticipating adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

The coordinating conjunction δέ has a correlative function connecting the previous statement to the current one. Creation is not alone (οὐ μόνον) in her groaning and travailing. The next coordinating conjunction ἀλλὰ introduces “also we ourselves” as the ones sharing with creation in this groaning. It appears that there are two parties introduced thus far: (1) the created order and (2) believers. It does not appear that this groaning occurs within humanity in general, per se.

The exegetical statement “the ones having the firstfruits of the Spirit” defines the groaning ones. We are those who have the “firstfruits” or in modern vernacular “downpayment”

³ There are some manuscripts that omit υἰοθεσίαν. As we discussed in the below commentary this v. appears to suggest that the adoption is something forthcoming while the rest of the text makes it appear as if adoption has already occurred. Since this seems a bit contradictory Metzger suggest that it may have been intentionally omitted. (Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. 457).

of the Spirit (epexegetical genitive = the firstfruits which are the Spirit). The Spirit is the first installment of our inheritance.

The Apostle returns to his subject once it has been defined with the semi-awkward statement “we also ourselves in ourselves we groan”. As creation groans, so do those who have the Spirit. The Spirit intertwines the destiny of believers with the created order.

As creation anticipates our revealing equally we groan anticipating our adoption (υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι). Since the anticipating is current (ἀπεκδεχόμενοι = present middle participle) it can be suggested that there is a sense in which the adoption is not complete. This is especially evident since the following statement, “the redemption of our bodies” appears to be epexegetical. In other words adoption = redemption of bodies. This obviously refers back to v. 11 where it is the Holy Spirit who will raise up our mortal bodies.

²⁴ τῇ γὰρ ἐλπίδι ἐσώθημεν· ἐλπίς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔστιν ἐλπίς· ὃ γὰρ βλέπει τίς ἐλπίζει;
(For in hope we are saved, but hope being seen is not hope, for who sees something [for which] he hopes?)⁴

The coordinating conjunction γὰρ seems to introduce an excurses. At first it is hard to connect this phrase with the order of thought. Nevertheless, the point is fairly simple. We have been saved (aorist) in hope. It appears that may be explaining the futuristic aspect of his last statement. The adoption is future, but our salvation and adoption likewise is current. It is current “in hope” since it has not yet been actualized. There is a connection with v. 20 where creation was enslaved “in hope”. This is the same hope.

4 Some manuscripts replace ἐλπίζει (he hopes) with ὑπομένει (he awaits).

δε functions as an adversative participle displaying what hope is not, namely things seen.

The coordinating conjunction γὰρ introduces the explanation: something seen cannot be something for which one can hope. If it is seen there is no reason to hope.

²⁵ εἰ δὲ ὃ οὐ βλέπομεν ἐλπίζομεν, δι' ὑπομονῆς ἀπεκδεχόμεθα.

But if we hope [for that] which we do not see, through perseverance we eagerly wait.)

Now δε is correlative. The first class conditional statement is introduced by εἰ. If it so happened that we hope for that which we do not see the inevitable result is that “through perseverance” (dative + δι’ functioning instrumentally) we “eagerly wait” which has been a theme in vv. 19, 23, and now 25. There is a sense of anticipation, eagerness, and expectation coming from creation and believers.

²⁶ Ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα συναντιλαμβάνεται τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ ἡμῶν· τὸ γὰρ τί προσευζόμεθα καθὼς δεῖ οὐκ οἶδαμεν, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα ὑπερευτυχάνει στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις·

But also in the same way the Spirit assists in our weakness, for the thing which we ought to pray (insofar as is necessary) we do not know, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us in unutterable groaning,

As further reason to see vv. 24 and 25 as an excursus it appears that the coordinating conjunction δε has a correlative function in connection to v. 23. In v. 23 the discussion was regarding the groaning of creation as well as our own groaning as we anticipate the resurrection of our bodies which according to v. 11 is the work of the Spirit. Suddenly, here in v. 26 the Apostle returns to the subject of groaning and the Spirit. In addition, the word Ὡσαύτως (“in the same way”) does not seem to have anything in vv. 24 and 25 as a referent.

The weaknesses that we have in our mortal bodies as we await our adoption is “assisted” (συναντιλαμβάνεται) by the Spirit. An application is made to prayer. Those things that we

“ought” to pray (προσευξώμεθα = subjunctive) “we do not know”. The adversative participle ἀλλὰ contrast our ignorance with the Spirit. Again, the personality of the Spirit is important to the Apostle as it is the “Spirit himself” that does the work of interceding (ὑπερευχαίνει). The dative στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις translated as “unutterable groaning” has been suggested by some to be equated with the gift of glossolalia (e.g. Fee) but that has been opposed by others (e.g. Dunn).

²⁷ ὁ δὲ ἐραυνῶν τὰς καρδίας οἶδεν τί τὸ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος, ὅτι κατὰ θεὸν ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἁγίων.

but the one searching the heart he know what [is] the mindset of the Spirit, because according to [the will] of God he intercedes on behalf of the saints.

Again, δὲ is correlative. “The one” (ὁ can actually be translated “but he” when used with δὲ) who is presently searching the hearts (ἐραυνῶν τὰς καρδίας) already knows (οἶδεν = perfect) the “mindset” or “way of thinking” (τὸ φρόνημα) of the Spirit. The distinction here is between God and the Spirit. God is the one who knows the mind of the Spirit. The reason given is that the Spirit does his intercession according to God (or the will, or desire of God). ὑπὲρ ἁγίων suggest that this not only something that occurs as the Spirit works through the saints, but it can be independent as the Spirit directly prays to the Father on behalf of the saints.

²⁸ Οἴδαμεν δὲ ὅτι τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν, τοῖς κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοῖς οὖσιν.

But we know that unto the ones loving God all things he works together unto good, to the ones [that] are called according to purpose.

The coordinating conjunction δε is once again correlative. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit “we know” already (Οἴδαμεν = perfect) that for the ones loving God all things work together for good. There is a contrast here with v. 26 where we do not know what to pray. In

exchange for our ignorance about what to pray the Holy Spirit intercedes for us and affirms in us that God will work all things together. The Apostle clarifies that the recipients are “the ones that are called according to purpose” which likely refers to God’s purpose.

Conclusion

In vv. 15-28 the Holy Spirit is seen as the one who is progressively conforming the believer to the will of God, interceding for believers, and along with creation bringing believers to the day of resurrection. It is the Spirit who will finalize our adoption making us children of God. While we are already children in status by hope it is the Holy Spirit that will make us children ontologically by redeeming our bodies along with our inner being.