

Spirit and Flesh: An Allegory, No. 2

This will be a continuation of the previous discussion centering in Romans 8 rather than a separate treatise. For more clarity, please read FR 207 again.

Paul speaks of the intercession of the Spirit. This is usually interpreted as showing how lovingly the Spirit takes our inexpressible groanings and miseries to the Father. But my questions have always been: Does God plead with God? Is one manifestation of deity more understanding and concerned than the same deity manifested in a different character? Is the Spirit of God more approachable than God himself, if there is such a distinction? Because that does not make sense, we should be open to investigate the matter more fully. This is especially true since there is no instruction for, or record of, anyone ever addressing the Holy Spirit either in conversation, prayer, or song.

No dogmatic answer is being offered here but I am suggesting that we look in another direction. The “creation” that was groaning to receive freedom was not the physical universe for it fills no role in redemptive history. The creation Paul was writing about was a temporary earthly system which could offer neither life nor redemption. God had called Abraham through whom all families of the earth would be blessed. It included a land promise but Abraham never inherited that earthly property. He looked for the fulfillment of the spiritual promise: “*For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb. 11:10). Later, the earthly promise was limited to the children of Jacob and, due to rebellion in wanting a king, an earthly kingdom was established still subject the Law of Moses. Abraham was never under the Law or a citizen of the kingdom. In the “last days” of that system, God was inaugurating the spiritual kingdom inclusive of those who had the faith characteristic of Abraham. The completion of this change was so close that Paul could speak of it as fulfilled, as he expressed it, “*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience*” (8:22-25). They would have to wait only fifteen years at the most.

Jesus had taught his disciples to pray “*Thy kingdom come,*” but they did not understand the spiritual implications. Neither did the Roman disciples understand or feel empowered to bring the spiritual kingdom into completion and the old system into obsolescence. Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit was sent to take care of that, interceding as their Advocate, that is, an attorney who acts on behalf of his client

Just as Abraham had to wait for the demise of an earthly, fleshly system, so those of the faith of Abraham were anxiously awaiting the imminent return of the Lord for their promised redemption. Jesus had died “*to redeem those who were under the law*” (Gal. 4:5), had taken his redemptive offering into the holy place, and was soon to return to

receive the righteous dead, giving immortality to those who had long-since died in the flesh. Thus he would be fulfilling “the hope of Israel” – the hope of resurrection. While living according to the flesh as a chosen race had brought death, that death was swallowed up in victory through the Spirit of grace.

So Paul was presenting these truths in an allegory where “flesh” represented both the previous system and the physical bodies in which they waited. Likewise, he used “Spirit / spirit” to depict the spiritual city that Abraham anticipated. It would soon be seen in vision by John, coming down out of heaven from God. The old “heaven and earth” passed away and the new “heaven and earth,” the “holy city,” came into view. The indwelling presence of God’s Spirit would be a guarantee giving assurance to those who awaited that fulfillment.

In all of this working, Paul could observe *“that in everything God works for good with those that love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified”* (8:28-30). WOW! God’s plan before creating the then-present system / world was to form a people conforming to the character of his Son in whom his Presence would dwell. Having pre-determined this, he called out a nation. Though they served under a futile fleshly system, ultimately he justified the righteous ones by the grace of Christ, and was in the process of glorifying them until Jesus would return and receive them in immortal state.

In view of all this, Paul asks rhetorically, *“What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?”* Were any against them? Yes, but it was not Roman opposition. The disbelieving Jews had opposed every effort. It was those Jews who still clung to their fleshly relationship. Paul’s heart bled for them as he pled with them in this epistle. Others were Judaizing believers who were creating dissensions and difficulties in opposition. Those holding to the fleshly system were the adversary – the “satan.” Paul assured them that *“the God of peace will soon crush Satan (the adversary / satan) under your feet”* (16:17-20). That fleshly system would be crushed and scattered at Jesus’ imminent return when the spiritual kingdom would be completely established in total victory for those being led by the Spirit. This would be a working of God’s unending love.

It is my hope that, as you further consider this chapter, you may see how its many details fit into this allegoric concept.

Next: Spiritual Communication.

(Cecil Hook: April 2004)