

The Doctrine of Glorification

Glorification is what we might call “the end of the chain” in Paul’s *ordu salutis* (“order of salvation”) in Romans 8:28-30:

And we know that for those who love God all things are working together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He fore-loved, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Grudem’s words are helpful:

When Christ redeemed us He did not just redeem our spirits (or souls) – He redeemed us as whole persons, and this includes the redemption of our bodies. Therefore the application of Christ’s work of redemption to us will not be complete until our bodies are entirely set free from the effects of the fall and brought to that state of perfection for which God created them. In fact, the redemption of our bodies will only occur when Christ returns and raises our bodies from the dead...[This] stage in the application of redemption when we receive resurrection bodies is called *glorification*.¹

Horton says,

“In glorification, the apparent contradiction between God’s verdict and our actual lives is finally and forever resolved. The “already” and the “not yet” converge, completing immediately and perfectly that which the Spirit began when He called us into fellowship with Christ by the gospel (Phil. 1:9-10). When [resurrection] day dawns, there will no longer be a “not yet” to our salvation; no longer a *simul iustus et peccator* (just and sinner simultaneously). Rather, God’s declaration

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 828.

that we are righteous in Christ will actually correspond fully to the actual reality of our lives.”²

In the words of the apostle elsewhere, the work of our redemption and salvation which God “began” has been “completed” when we receive our new glorified bodies (Phil. 1:6; 3:20-21))

- Calvin: “*The end* of the gospel is to render us eventually conformable to God,”³ and “the whole *purpose* of the gospel is to restore us to [God’s] image.”⁴

Though most clearly articulated in the New Testament, the origins of this doctrine find themselves rooted deeply in the Old Testament, going all the way back to Genesis 3, where the original sin of Adam that brought not only the helpless groanings associated with death and decay, but also the hopeful groanings of resurrection and restoration.

This is precisely what Paul tells us in Romans 8:18-25:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with **the glory** that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him⁵ who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom **of the glory** of the children of God. For we know the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly 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

² Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2012), 325. For a more thorough treatment of this idea, see Greg Beale’s excellent *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), especially ch. 15: “The Inaugurated End-Time Justification.”

³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 371. Emphasis mine.

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

⁵ Most commentators agree that the ‘he’ here is referring to God, not Adam (hence my capital ‘H’).

who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

The “good” in 8:28, is the being conformed into the image of Christ in 8:29, who is there called the “firstborn among many brothers.”

- The image Paul is painting for us in Romans 8 is that of a restored humanity in Christ co-reigning over a new creation with Christ (8:17).

An essential part of this new creation is having bodies no longer characterized by sin and decay (8:21).

- Since sin has wrecked every aspect of us – both spiritual and physical – our salvation, though complete forensically and objectively, is nevertheless incomplete *until* we receive “the redemption of our bodies” (8:23), that is, says Paul, bodies that are “glorified.”

This contrast between the believer’s current body with their promised-by-God and purchased-by-Christ resurrection body is dealt with more fully in 1 Corinthians 15:

What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised **in glory**. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit...Just as we have born the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man in heaven. (1 Cor. 15:42-45, 49)

Christ’s resurrected body is now glorified.⁶ And since Christ is the firstborn of God’s ‘family’ (Rom. 8:29) and the firstfruits of God’s ‘harvest’ (1 Cor. 15:22), the

⁶ Horton: “The resurrection-justification of Jesus and His glorification (Rom. 1:3-4) – His triumphal entry into the heavenly sanctuary – both ground and anticipate our justification in the present, which will be verified in our own glorification.” Regarding Rom. 1:3-4, Vos says, “Paul is not referring here to Christ’s two natures, but to the two successive stages in His life: His life “according to the flesh” originated from David, while His life “according to the Spirit” had its source in His resurrection from the dead.” While Jesus is the Son from all of eternity, His resurrection actually gives rise to “a new status of sonship” that is distinct from His essential deity.” Quoted in Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 338.

believer is saved not only *from* their condemning and corrupting sins, but also *to* this living hope of future “glory.”

- In the context, “glory” clearly means that believers will one day be able to dwell in God’s presence – His “glory.”

But since God’s glory is a holy and consuming fire against sin, all sin must not merely be forgiven forensically, but also removed physically.

And thus, we must have new and sinless bodies that are able to withstand the glory of God without being incinerated by His brightness and majesty.

In other words, though the gospel is not less than our justification before God, it is much more.

- Justification allows us to ‘stand’ *forensically* before this holy God
 - Psa. 130:3 (NET) – “If You were to keep track of sins, O Lord, who could stand before You?”⁷
- Glorification allows us to stand *physically* before Him, just as Adam and Eve were able to, before they sinned (cf. Gen. 2).
 - Rev. 21:1-3, 22:3-4 – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God...His servants will worship Him, [and] they will see His face.’”⁸

⁷ NET note: the words “before You” are supplied in the translation for clarification. The Psalmist must be referring to standing before God’s judgment seat. The rhetorical question expects the answer, “No one!”

⁸ The pronoun “His” refers to “the Lamb” of verse 3.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they – and by extension every single human afterwards⁹ – were subjected to a *wholistic* corruption.

- We might say they were totally, or, more accurately, radically depraved in every part of their nature: soul, mind, affections, will, and physical body.

Sin is the infection that has brought about this corruption.

- Therefore, until sin is radically dealt with, what Adam and Eve experienced before sin – the basking of and enjoyment of God’s glorious presence – is impossible.

And so, as Peter teaches, Jesus came to die for us, “the righteous for the unrighteous.”

- But the *goal* is not merely to confer to us a status of ‘not guilty.’ The goal, says Peter of Christ’s sacrificial, substitutionary, and atoning death on the cross was “that He might bring us to God.” (1 Pet. 3:18)
- Equally essential to accomplishing this “bringing us to God” was His resurrection from the dead (3:18b, 21b-22), which, says Peter, is the “living hope” to which we were “born again into.” (1:3)

Though presently we still carry about our ‘bodies of death’ (Rom. 7:24), and thus are still susceptible to sin (7:23), we nevertheless have been “saved in hope” of a sinless, glorified body (8:24) like that of Christ’s (8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49). And until this state of “glorification” becomes an actual reality for us, we groan “by the Spirit.”

The Spirit’s Role in Glorification

As we have seen, the Spirit unites the elect into Christ in time and space when they believe in (or into) Christ in response to the gospel.

- The result is all that Christ has purchased for them in salvation is then organically ‘communicated’ to them, resulting in their once-for-all

⁹ Cf. Rom. 5:12ff.

justification and adoption, their progressive sanctification, and finally their end-time glorification.

- The beginning of our sanctification is *regeneration*; the end of our sanctification is our *glorification*.

By uniting us to Christ, the Spirit begins this work, advances this work, and completes this work of new creation.

Viewed rightly, we might be so bold as to say that we are more ‘glorified’ now than when we first believed:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord **who is the Spirit**. (2 Cor. 3:18)

That is, the Holy Spirit transforms (that is, ‘glorifies’) believers who are in Christ into the image of Christ, *as* they gaze upon Christ in the gospel which reveals His transforming glory (4:4, 6).

Horton writes,

The believer shares in the new creation, whose head Christ has become by His own resurrection-glorification. As Christ’s humanity was ‘glorified’, we too will share in the same kind of eschatological life that He already enjoy. As goes the King, so goes the kingdom; what has happened to the Head will happen to the whole body.¹⁰

This glorification, however, is initially and presently inward and **spiritual** (4:16).¹¹ But one day, says the apostle, it will become **outward** and **physical** as well (4:18-5:4). Our less-than-glorious and ever-wasting-away “jars of clay” (4:7) are not permanent but temporary.

¹⁰ Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 337.

¹¹ Again, this is the language of “first-fruits.” This is also clearly taught by Jesus Himself in John 5: all those whom He has resurrected spiritually in regeneration will be resurrected physically in glorification. See vv. 21, 25-29. See also Beale’s fantastic treatment of this in his *A New Systematic Theology of the New Testament*.

- This is why Paul commands the believers to keep their eyes on what is important: the eternal and ‘invisible’ realities that the gospel promise God’s people.
 - The Spirit uses these promises of the gospel to produce change (i.e. conformity to Christ’s “glorious” image) in God’s people, ultimately culminating in their glorification (5:5).

In addition to being the agent of “progressive glorification,” the Spirit is also God’s “pledge” and “guarantee” and “down payment” of their final and perfect glorification in Christ (Eph. 1:13-14; 2 Cor. 5:5).¹²

Horton’s words nicely summarize our lesson:

Through faith in Christ, the *verdict* of the last judgment itself has already been rendered in our favor, but, as our meager growth in holiness and the unabated decay of our bodies attest, the full *consequences* of this verdict await a decisive future completion. We receive our justification through our believing what we have heard; we will receive our glorification by seeing face-to-face the one whose voice we have heard. Thus, the beatific vision is the sight of God’s glory in the face of Christ, without veil, without corruption, without the mediation of preaching and sacrament. For now, we are creatures of the word, hearers of the promise, with the hope of glory, expressing our faith imperfectly in love. On the last day, however, there will be no need for faith or hope. Faith will yield to sight. Hope will be fulfilled. All that will be left is love, forever (1 Cor. 13:8-13).¹³

Jesus has accomplished the victory. Because we are “in Him,” it is just a matter of time before we fully and forever get to enjoy this victory with Him in the new heavens and new earth. Until then, we hope and long and groan by the Spirit for

¹² BDAG defines ἀρραβὼν (*arrabōn*) as “a legal and commercial term; an advance transaction that guarantees the validity of a contract or a full purchase price; down payment; first installment; pledge.”

¹³ Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 340.

these promised realities.¹⁴ Until then, and by faith, we obey the King's commission to be His agents of change and transformation in this present age, being "steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, [our] labor is not in vain." (1 Cor. 15:58)

¹⁴ The apostle notes that such a hope encourages us to sanctification and obedience: "And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, even as He is pure." (1 John 3:3, NLT) This falls on the heels of 3:2: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when [Christ] appears we shall be like Him, because we will see Him as He is."