
“For it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.”

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— Keith R. Blades

When we glory in something, (whatever it may be), we greatly rejoice in it. It is a matter of exultation to us because it thrills our hearts and minds. As such we are not indifferent to it by any means. Instead we exalt it in our thinking, setting a high value upon it, and since it profoundly delights us, we express our delight by glorying in it.

Now though sometimes glorying can be carnal in nature, akin to fleshly boasting and an expression of human pride, this is not always the case. And most certainly it is not the case when we rightfully glory in the things that comprise the riches of God’s grace that we possess in this present dispensation of God’s grace. We naturally should exalt these things in our thinking, placing an exceedingly high value upon them. They should delight us to no end and more than anything else that we possess, making the issue of glorying in them to be nothing less than the natural expression of our thankful and thrilled hearts. Naturally enough, therefore, we find the apostle Paul speaking about us glorying in many things.

For example, most of all we glory in the genius of the cross work of the Lord Jesus Christ for us. It is our ‘all in all,’ being “the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” Instead of seeing any foolishness to “the preaching of the cross,” we find it wonderful beyond compare. It is the preeminent rejoicing of our hearts. Hence we glory in it, just as Paul declares in I Corinthians 1:30–31 and in Galatians 6:14–15.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

I Corinthians 1:30–31

14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Galatians 6:14–15

Yet this is just the beginning of glorying for us. We have reason also to “glory in tribulations,” just as is set forth in Romans 5:3–4.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

Romans 5:3–4

This is something we are able to do in view of the understanding and appreciation we should have for the hope-confirming and hope-enhancing work of tribulations in our lives, especially those that belong to “the gospel of Christ.”

Another reason for glorying has to do with “the knowledge of God” that we are privileged to possess in this dispensation. In view of the understanding we should have for “the wisdom of this world” being “foolishness with God,” and “the thoughts of the wise” being “vain” in His sight, we have the exhortation:

21a Therefore let no man glory in men.

I Corinthians 3:21a

Instead of glorying in the wisdom of men, we should look upon it as God does, say the same thing about it that He says, and glory rather in His own incomparable knowledge and wisdom that He has set before us in His written word. And indeed we should glory in this, seeing that in this dispensation we are the ones to whom God has now made known His "hidden wisdom" and to whom He has given "the mind of Christ."

Without a doubt the list of things about which we should rightfully glory is both long and varied. Because of who God has made us to be "in Christ," and in view of all of the riches of His grace unto us in this dispensation, we truly have much to glory about.

An Exceptional Reason to Glory

Now in connection with this, there is one particular issue about which the apostle Paul was so thrilled, and about which he gloried to such a degree, that when faced with the possibility of his glorying being negated, it appalled him, and he said,...

15b :for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

I Corinthians 9:15b

In other words, Paul would rather die than not be able to glory in this particular issue. And this statement is by no means an exaggeration on Paul's part, nor is it a mere expression of some maudlin sentiment designed to manipulate the emotions of the Corinthian saints. On the contrary, Paul said this in dead earnest. He wasn't overstating things, or romanticizing. Rather, he set such a high value on this particular issue in which he gloried, that to him life itself was not much of anything without it.

What is this particular issue that Paul felt so strongly about? And just as important to ask, if not more important, is this: Do we understand and appreciate it as much as Paul did, so that we ourselves would feel just as strongly about it as he?

Sonship Liberty's Highest Privilege

What Paul gloried in is the ability, (and indeed the privilege), that we have as adopted "sons" in this dispensation *to walk in the fulness of Godly love and charity*. That's right; to walk in the fulness of Godly love and charity. In truth, of all of the unique privileges belonging to our sonship liberty "in Christ," the ability to walk in the fulness of Godly love and charity is the highest; the crowning glory, so to speak. And Paul knowing this to be so, expressed his deep appreciation for it with such strong terms.

Now if this special privilege does not impress you to the same degree as it did Paul, you are not alone. It didn't impress most of the Corinthian saints either, which is why Paul pointedly deals with it in I Corinthians 8, 9, and 10. However this is by no means an excuse, or a justification, for not being suitably impressed, either for them or for us. Rather what it indicates is the need for further edification in this matter. For further edification that takes our understanding and appreciation past the initial stage of simply glorying in sonship's personal liberties, to the greater issue of glorying in its highest honor — being a follower of God and emulating Him in our walk.

What The Corinthians Gloried In

The Corinthians knew the *basics* about our sonship status and liberty "in Christ" in this dispensation. As part of "the testimony of Christ" being "confirmed" in them, they had been educated in Sonship Liberty 101, so to speak. And this being the case, they were immediately impressed with the issue of God treating us and

dealing with us today as adult “sons”; and in particular they were thrilled with the personal liberties that go with it.

Hence, they readily understood and appreciated the issue of the liberty that is ours in not being “under the law” in this dispensation. They knew what it means for us not to be under the law’s ‘tutor and governor’ operating principle, nor to be in bondage under “the elements of the world” that it employs. They were taught and learned that all these things are part of being dealt with as “children,” and that God employed them with Israel in accordance with treating them as such. But now in view of the redemptive work of Christ having also provided for “the adoption of sons,” they learned that God is not dealing with us today as “children” but as adult “sons.” They knew, therefore, that they were not given “the spirit of bondage again to fear.” But rather in receiving “the Spirit of adoption” and thereby “crying, Abba, Father,” they knew they were liberated “sons.” They, therefore, knew they were ones to whom “all things are lawful,” just as Paul repeatedly acknowledged to them.

Accordingly the Corinthians relished the freedoms of sonship, as they rightfully should. For the freedoms of sonship are truly wonderful and marvelous. There is no comparison between the childish things, limitations, and restrictive operating principles of childhood, and the adult things, freedoms, and mature operating principles of sonship. Indeed, as when with the Galatians Paul declares “the elements of the world” to be “weak and beggarly” compared to the things of sonship, so the same can be said about all of the components of childhood when compared to sonship. They are all “weak and beggarly.” Wherefore it is no wonder that Paul not only declares the foolishness of any saint who desires to be under the law and treated like a “child” in this dispensation, but also the sheer incredulity of it.

Consequently, when the Corinthians gloried in the fact that “all things are lawful” for “sons,”

and exercised their liberty, their initial delight and glorying was not unfounded, nor in error. And neither is it so when we do the same. However, though this may be true, the understanding, appreciation, and delight that we have for our sonship status and liberty should not stop here. For there is more to sonship than this. Much more. In fact, what we need to learn is that the liberty of having ‘all things lawful’ is merely the means for being able to exercise the ultimate purpose of sonship. Yet often times to our discredit this is never learned.

Moreover when it isn’t learned, there is a danger. A danger that we will exercise our sonship liberty in a fleshly manner. In fact this is just what both the Corinthians and the Galatians did. Hence Paul says to the Galatians:

13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Galatians 5:13

The Reality of Sonship Liberty 201

Strictly speaking, our personal liberty as “sons” is not the grand purpose or the ultimate aim of sonship. Instead, once again, it is actually a provision through which the ultimate aim can be achieved. However it is a matter of further edification for us to understand and appreciate this to be so. It is the issue of Sonship Liberty 201, if you will.

As an illustrative case in point, it is much the same as when we initially glory in the basic *fact* that we live in the dispensation of God’s grace, but are not yet able to glory in all of God’s phenomenal wisdom regarding it simply because we haven’t yet learned the doctrine of *why* God has brought it in. That is we haven’t yet learned God’s ultimate *purpose and design* for this dispensation. (This situation was also a part of the Corinthians’ initial edification status, as Paul describes and deals with in I Corinthians 2 and 3.)

Until we grow in doctrine and come to understand and appreciate the issue of God's great wisdom in having kept "the mystery of Christ" a secret in time past; along with being able to appreciate all of the displays of God's wisdom that He is making during this dispensation; and also the grand and ultimate purpose that it fulfills in His eternal purpose in the ages to come; we don't yet have the edification and doctrinal ability to glory in God's "manifold wisdom." This only comes later in our edification once we first understand and appreciate the basics.

Thus it is one thing to know the basic fact or reality of one of the privileges of God's grace unto us, and to glory in the fact that we possess it. However it is a matter of further edification to understand and appreciate the *purpose and design* behind the privilege, and to glory in this as well, if not more.

Now this is exactly the situation that we have with the privilege of our sonship status and liberty in this present dispensation. So if we like the Corinthian saints are only glorying in the fact that we possess sonship liberty, while at the same time not really understanding and appreciating the ultimate reason for possessing it, then we have much yet to learn. Or as Paul says to the Corinthians,...

2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

1 Corinthians 8:2

The Great Need For Sonship Liberty 201

When God had Paul write I Corinthians, the situation demanded that he teach them about the grand purpose of our sonship liberty "in Christ" in a very pointed manner. This is because for the most part they had failed to go on and to grow in the doctrine. And this made it so that they failed to perceive or appreciate liberty's grand purpose.

Paul began to deal with them about this as he addressed a particular way in which they were exercising their sonship liberty.

1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

1 Corinthians 8:1

As Paul clearly states, the Corinthians had "knowledge" regarding their sonship liberty and they were exercising it in this matter of eating meats offered unto idols. They knew that "there is nothing unclean of itself" and that they could freely eat the meats. They knew the truth of what Paul says a few verses later:

8 But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

1 Corinthians 8:8

So they were perfectly right in what they knew, and they truly had full liberty to eat.

However as Paul quickly points out to them by way of reproof, this knowledge "puffeth up." And indeed it did. They became self-centered and selfish in their thinking. As such they were exercising their sonship liberty to their own personal pleasure and to their own individual profit. With this going on, other saints among them who were weak in the faith, (not knowing what they knew), were in danger of being adversely affected by their liberty. Wherefore Paul warns,...

9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

1 Corinthians 8:9

Yet now what happened to the Corinthians was by no means the fault of the doctrine of our sonship status and liberty. The "knowledge" itself was not to blame. Rather the reason why it "puffeth up" was because it was left to itself.

Again it was Sonship Liberty 101, but it wasn't built upon with Sonship Liberty 201.

The Content of Sonship Liberty 201

Though to their credit the Corinthians were thrilled with the doctrine of sonship, to their discredit they treated it as if it stood alone all by itself. Or in other words they pretty much divorced the doctrine of our sonship liberty from the doctrine we have also been given by which we are taught of God to love one another and to walk in charity. In fact they more or less ignored the doctrine that is designed to teach us love and charity, and they focused upon their sonship liberty to the exclusion of the other. They, therefore, easily became 'puffed up' and self-serving with their sonship liberty; when instead they should have learned to be selfless in their thinking and to gladly use their liberty to edify one another.

God, however, did not design the knowledge of our sonship liberty to stand all by itself, as if it was an end in itself. He did not design it to be divorced from the doctrine that He has also given to us that teaches us to have the same selfless love that He has and to walk in charity like He does. Rather the two doctrines are to go together in our thinking, with God designing it so that when we put them together we discern as "sons" that the former is actually the means of providing for the fulness of the latter. And this is just how it is taught to us in Romans.

We first learn the basics of our sonship status and liberty in Romans 8 as part of the doctrine of our sanctified position "in Christ." But then at the beginning of Romans 12 God beseeches us to put our sanctified position "in Christ" into practice in our daily lives, including our sonship status and liberty. And in so doing God then begins to set forth the doctrine that is designed to effectually renew our minds and enable us to do this. In connection with this, beginning in 12:3ff God gives us the doctrine that teaches us to think with

the same selfless love that He has. With what follows He begins to teach us to love what He loves, and then in view of this to walk charitably in this world.

Moreover as the doctrine of Romans 12:3ff effectually works within us it is also designed to produce an initial measure of wise perception and discernment in us, which is a characteristic also belonging to sonship. Hence as we begin to actually love as God does and to walk charitably in this world, God has designed for us to realize something wonderfully wise about what He has done in giving us "the adoption of sons." Which is that the sonship liberty He has given to us is really the quintessential component to our sanctified position "in Christ." What we should come to realize through the effectual working of Romans 12:3ff is that our sonship liberty is the very means by which the epitome of Godly love and charity can be produced by us and put on display by us. This is because it is only when we have complete personal liberty and power to do what we will for ourselves, that we can produce and display such great love and charity by willingly giving up of this power in order to benefit others whom we love more than ourselves. And, of course, giving up of ourselves for another's benefit is what Godly love and charity is all about.

Sonship Liberty's Grand Purpose

As Romans 12:3ff makes clear, Godly love is the issue of selfless thinking. And Godly charity is selfless thinking in action. In Godly love we value and esteem others, initially as ourselves, but then more than ourselves. And as such we are willing, and even desirous, to give up of ourselves for the benefit of those we love. Hence we walk charitably, not only not wanting to work any ill towards them, but also freely giving up of our own things to pursue and to produce that which benefits and profits them. And again this we do because we value and esteem them as God Himself does. We have Godly love.

Indeed, therefore, it is our personal liberty and power as “sons” that provides us with the ability to be a follower of God and to emulate Him by walking in the fulness of Godly love and charity. Once again, it is only when we have complete personal liberty and power to do what we will for ourselves, that we can produce and display such great love and charity by willingly giving up the pursuit of our own benefit and pleasure, to pursue the benefit of others whom we love more than ourselves. This is the very thing God Himself has done with us, and it is the very thing we now have the ability to do in emulation of Him as His “sons.”

This, however, is what the Corinthians failed to learn and failed to come to realize about their sonship status and liberty. They had indeed been called unto liberty. Yet the grand purpose of our sonship liberty is not to serve ourselves, but to give us the ability by love to serve one another. In view of this Paul continued his original reproof to them, going on to say,...

2 And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

I Corinthians 8:2-3

And the same is true of us as well, if we like the Corinthians think that our sonship liberty is an end in itself. We too know nothing yet as we ought to know. We too need to be ones who “love God” and are taught of Him to have Godly love and to walk in Godly charity.

This, now, is what Sonship Liberty 201 is all about. And when it effectually works within us, this is when the thrill and glory of our sonship status “in Christ” becomes the exquisite thing in our thinking that God has designed for it to be. This is when we can begin to glory like Paul did when he said,...

15b :for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

I Corinthians 9:15b

Paul’s Godly Love and Charity

After following up his reproof with some corrective doctrine in the rest of I Corinthians 8, Paul goes on in chapter 9 to give the Corinthians a ‘crash course’ in Sonship Liberty 201. This he did by making an example out of himself as one who understood, appreciated, and walked in accordance with sonship liberty’s grand purpose.

As Paul emphatically declares, he was indeed “free.” He truly had “power” as the “son” that he was to pursue things to his own benefit and pleasure. And even more so did he possess this sonship “power” as the “apostle” he was. In connection with this he brought to their attention many examples of the liberty and “power” that he had. Yet as he says, he “used none of these things.” Instead he gave up of himself in connection with these things for the benefit of these Corinthian saints and others whom he loved more than himself. In doing so Paul walked in the fulness of Godly love and charity. And he did so in deep appreciation for receiving the present time “reward” of our sonship status — that is, the high privilege of actually emulating God our Father in our walk. Little wonder, therefore, that Paul was appalled at the possibility of what he gloried in being negated. Little wonder he said,...

15b :for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

I Corinthians 9:15b

How Is It With You

Do you glory in your sonship status and liberty because of its grand purpose? Has the doctrine of Romans 12:3ff effectually worked within you to produce the realization that your sonship liberty is what provides you with the ability to fully walk

in Godly love and charity? Or would Paul need to say to you, "knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth."

Again, the privilege and ability that we possess as "sons" to walk in the fulness of Godly love and charity truly is the highest privilege belonging to our sonship liberty. This being so it ought to profoundly impress us. It should greatly thrill our hearts and we should be zealous to so walk. In fact if we understand and appreciate it as Paul did, then we should glory in it, even to the point to which he gloried. Moreover, until we do, we are not ready for the further edification that belongs to Sonship Liberty 301. — *K. R. Blades*