

- g. The Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming kingdom as the glorious result of the Day of Yahweh – the day when He would arise and, once and for all, destroy His enemies, liberate His captive people and restore them and their desolate habitation to Himself. Many times in Israel’s history the Lord had intervened in this fashion on behalf of His covenant people, but each time His hand of deliverance and ingathering had not resolved the real issue: Each episode had left Israel in its state of alienation and enmity. The people may have been restored to the kingdom land and they might have experienced some degree of contrition and repentance, but their hearts remained estranged from their God.

The scriptural portrait of God’s triumph over His enemies was depicted primarily in terms of Israel’s *national* enemies – the human enemies of the theocratic kingdom. But a careful, consistent reading of the Old Testament prophets shows that Yahweh’s promise of conquest, liberation and ingathering looked beyond a national, geographical restoration for exiled Israel to the liberation and renewal of the whole created order (cf. Isaiah 7-12, 34:1-35:10, 42:1-45:25, 54:1-17, 65:13-66:24; cf. also Daniel 2 and 7; Hosea 1-3; Joel 2-3; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-5:6; Zephaniah 3; Zechariah 14).

In the end, Yahweh would have to arise and exercise His conquering and liberating power so as to deliver Abraham’s children from *themselves* and their own *self-enslavement*. He would “circumcise their hearts to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul in order that they would truly live” (Deuteronomy 30:6; cf. Isaiah 44:1-23; Ezekiel 37; etc.). The Day of Yahweh would involve His conquest of the enemies of His people and His creation, the greatest of which is death itself. *Thus the triumph of God’s kingdom is His triumph over the creational curse.* God’s true enemies – all of which the Son conquered – are all entities, structures and powers which contradict and oppose the shalomic design and order of His creation and His relationship with it.

The promise of the kingdom was the pledge of creational renewal. Most importantly, this was not to be the repair of the existing order, but the *transformation* of the creation that it should at last and forever attain to and experience the design for which God brought it into existence. Thus the prophets spoke of the kingdom in terms of the destruction of the curse and the ushering in of a creational order unknown in the present scheme of things. *And at the heart of this new creational paradigm would be a Creator-creature intimacy and harmony utterly foreign to the present order – an intimacy centered in the Servant-Messiah* (cf. Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:1-12, 42:1-13, 49:1-13, 61:1-62:12 with 64:8-65:25; cf. also Hosea 2:14-3:5; Joel 3:9-21; Amos 9:11-15; Micah 4:1-5:5; Zechariah 3:1-10; etc.). The intimacy and harmony of the coming kingdom would be pervasive, defining every relationship within the created order and every creature’s relationship with its Creator. And as this relationship was to be *secured* by the Servant in His coming, so also it was to be *bound up* in Him: He would be the peace – the *shalom* – of Adam’s race and the whole creation over which man presides as image-son (Isaiah 9:1-7, 52:1-55:13; Jeremiah 33:1-16; Micah 5:1ff).

For all the diverse perspectives and imagery in the Scripture's depiction of the coming kingdom of God, the promise of the kingdom was, at bottom, the promise of shalom, with all this concept entails and implies. *And this being the case, the reality of shalom is the backdrop for Paul's summary declaration that the consummate kingdom is the state of the created order in which God is "all in all."*

Some have interpreted Paul's final clause ("in order that God may be all in all") as modifying only the participial phrase immediately preceding it. In this case, Paul's meaning is that God subjected all things to Christ in order that He (God) would be all in all. Though grammatically possible (and true in some sense), the context better supports connecting this final clause with the main clause and thus the sentence as a whole. Treated this way, Paul's point was that God's ultimate design for His relationship with His creation is that He should be "all in all," and this consummate state is attained when Christ – with the whole creation in subjection to Him – subjects Himself to the Father. In this way the entire created order will be "summed up" in God by being summed up in Christ (ref. Ephesians 1:9-10); every created thing will be related to God in and through Jesus Christ.

The Scripture employs the concept of *shalom* to express this all-encompassing relationship, thus highlighting that shalom vastly transcends the human notion of "peace." It connotes integrity or wholeness, and when considered in relation to the created order, it refers to the perfection and blessedness of complete creational harmony – harmony at every level and in every respect.

- Inasmuch as it connotes wholeness, shalom implies first that a thing finds itself in perfect conformity to its true *self* and its true *function*.
- In turn, this perfect self-conformity expresses itself in inter-creational harmony. The relational and comprehensively interdependent nature of God's creation means that a given thing can only conform to its own nature and function when it exists in perfect harmony with everything else.
- Finally, inter-creational harmony presupposes Creator-creature harmony. There can be no shalom *within* the created order except as shalom exists *between* the creation and the God for whom it was created.

*"The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call **shalom**... In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight... In a shalomic state each entity would have its own integrity or structured wholeness, and each would also possess many edifying relations to other entities."* (Cornelius Plantinga)

Shalom speaks to flourishing and blessedness *and has relationship as its fundamental premise*, whether relationship with oneself or with other entities. So it is with the triune God, who finds His blessedness and felicity in the intimacy and joy of mutual love and delight among the Father, Son and Spirit.

And so it is with the universe God created to reflect and express the truth of Himself as a relational being. The God who is love – who exists as perfect relationship – brought forth a created order which glorifies Him by testifying to Him – that is, by conforming in itself to the truth of who He is in Himself.

God is a shalomic being and shalom encompasses His ordained destiny for the creation. And because of what it represents, shalom is grounded in and depends upon *subjection*. This is true of the triune God and therefore it must be true of the creation which reflects, attests, and communes with Him in truth; *subjection is the essence of all authentic relationship as the exercise of love*.

- Again, true subjection – subjection as it exists in the intertrinitarian relationships – has nothing to do with hierarchical distinctions or gradations of superiority or inferiority. So it is within the created order. Indeed, precisely because everything God created is *very good* (cf. Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25 and 1:31) – which is to say, everything as created expresses the perfection of God’s purpose and design, there can be no such thing as superiority or inferiority within His creation (just as there is no superiority/inferiority among Father, Son and Spirit).
- But as Father, Son and Spirit are distinct hypostases, so there are countless distinctions within the created order. But each created entity and each distinction shares equal perfection, value and necessity in the creational scheme and its order and functioning (as is the case within the Godhead).

Because of its relational nature, shalom utterly depends upon distinctions among entities – *but distinctions perceived and functioning in a certain way*: As it pertains to the created order (and mirroring its divine counterpart in the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit), shalom refers to the harmonious ordering of the vast diversity of God’s creation, with each entity fulfilling its created design and role in relation to God and the whole of creation. This arrangement utterly depends upon diversity; *there can be no interdependence or mutual ministration where there is only the unity of absolute sameness*. Indeed, the exercise of love demands that there be an “other,” even if, as in the case of God, it is only the otherness of distinct hypostases within the one divine being.

At the same time, interdependence and mutuality preclude hierarchicalism and the notion of superiority/inferiority. One need only examine an untouched ecosystem to glimpse the principle of shalom: a myriad of widely diverse plants and animals all flourishing in a dynamic relationship of mutual interdependence and service. Each, in its own way, serves the good of the others and of the whole; each perfectly fulfills its own unique identity and role in relation to the whole without usurpation, domination, abdication, or denigration. The curse has compromised the creation’s shalomic perfection, but it is still detectable; things are not the way they ought to be, but the *truth* of what they ought to be – and will be – is still discernable in the distorted image (cf. Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20).

Shalom is God's design for His creation and His relationship with it, and Paul here described that consummate outcome in terms of God being "all in all." Moreover, Paul emphasized that this shalomic outcome is grounded in subjection: all things being in subjection to Christ with Christ then in subjection to His Father. Two things, then, come to the forefront in seeking to understand what it means that, in the consummation, God will be all in all.

The **first** is how the concept of God being "all in all" implicates *Jesus' subjection to the Father*. If shalom defines the Creator/creation relationship in its consummative state, and if this state involves Jesus' subjection to His Father, it follows that His subjection must be understood in relation to the realization of shalom. As noted before, the consummation of the creation's relationship with God is in and through Jesus Christ: The creation is subject to God *in the Son*, which is to say that it is in the context of its *subjection to Christ* that the created order is subject to God and His lordship. Thus the created order realizes its consummate, shalomic subjection to God precisely by the Son subjecting Himself to God, His Father (cf. again v. 28 with v. 24). ***Jesus' subjecting of Himself to the Father is the creation's subjection to God.***

This understanding provides critical insight into how (and why) Jesus is *yet* to become subject to His Father. Paul insisted that the Son's subjection to God awaits the time when all things will have been made subject to Him, which will not occur until the Parousia with the destruction of death. This seems to suggest that, in some sense at least, Jesus is not presently in subjection to the Father. *But this apparent problem evaporates when one recognizes that Paul was speaking of Jesus in terms of His being the Last Adam: the true Image-Son and the first fruits of true man* (cf. vv. 20-22, 45-49).

Thus Paul was not suggesting that Jesus now (or ever) usurped, contradicted, opposed, or in any way came short of perfect subjection to God. Jesus Himself insisted that He was fully subject to the One who sent Him, such that to see *Him* is to see *His Father*. The Son has eternally been one with the Father, a fact which Paul well understood. But that is not the issue here: *Paul wasn't referring to the Father/Son relationship as such, but to the consummate realization of God's purpose for His creation*. In speaking of Jesus' future subjection to the Father – which subjection has its purpose in the realization of God's design to be "all in all," *Paul was referring to the consummation of Jesus' role as Last Adam, whereby, in His own subjection to the Father as true Image-Son, He realizes, in Himself and on behalf of man and the creation, the entire creation's subjection to God*. Man was created to administer God's rule as King over His creation, but he instead alienated the creation from its Creator-King. But the Last Adam – the New Man – has restored and reconciled the creation and, when all enemies are destroyed and all things fully subjected to Him, He will commit the new creational kingdom to His Father (v. 24). In that way, Adam's race will, in Him, at last attain its ordained destiny as image-son: man as ruler over God's creation, ruling in His name and authority as His submissive, devoted son (Psalm 8).

The **second** issue – and one which flows out of the previous one – is the way God being “all in all” implicates the *creation’s subjection*. Because Jesus is the Last Adam, His subjection to the Father constitutes man’s subjection. (Note that this is not to imply that, in the consummation, individual human beings will not be personally in subjection to God. But because their life is their share in Jesus’ life (John 6:53; Romans 8:9-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:1-4; etc.), their personal subjection is, in a very real way, only the fullness of Jesus’ subjection.) But human beings aren’t the only created things that will be in perfect subjection to God in the consummation; the entire created order will join them in this. And the non-human (and even the inanimate) creation will be subject to God in the same way that men are: by virtue of being in subjection to the Son who is Himself subject to the Father (v. 28). God’s expressed goal is that *all things* will be subject to Him by being summed up in His Son. As the whole creation shared in and suffered under man’s estrangement and curse, so the whole creation will share in man’s full restoration and perfect communion with God in Christ.

Shalom is man’s destiny, but also the destiny of the created order. Shalom speaks to relational harmony and blessedness, and so it’s not difficult to understand how it applies to human beings. Created in the divine image and likeness, man is uniquely suited to (and indeed created for) the deepest intimacy with God. Man can know and experience shalom because he is a personal being – because he is person unto Person. But what about the non-human creation? How can the rest of the created order – and especially the inanimate creation – experience shalom as relational harmony? And if it can’t, does this mean that the prophets went too far by portraying shalomic existence as a cosmic, creation-wide phenomenon?

The answer is that the whole creation is indeed destined for shalom. While human beings can experience the blessedness of relational wholeness and harmony in ways the non-human and inanimate creation can’t, every created thing has a rightful share in shalom simply because it stands in relation to all other things. Everything God created has a place and function in His purpose, and that place and function are in relation to everything else. God has created a relational universe in which nothing exists independently; comprehensive interdependence characterizes the created order just as it does the Creator. But as it is with man, so it is with the rest of the creation: *The creation’s experience of shalom depends upon and proceeds out of its communion with God*. And the non-human creation experiences this communion as man does – by being God’s dwelling place.

God will realize His goal to be “all in all” with respect to His creation when all things are summed up in His Son and Jesus the Son consummates His role as True Image – True Man – by committing the cosmic kingdom under His lordship to His Father. In that day God will be “all in all” in that all things will be as He created them to be: All things will share in the blessedness of perfect conformity to their identity and function – in relation to God, themselves, and all other things. In that day all things will be shalomic as God Himself is shalomic; in that day the whole creation will exult in its effulgent glory as sacred space (Revelation 21-22).