

HEIRS WITH CHRIST

A Study on Romans 8:14-17

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Suppose someone came to you and said you had been made an heir of a one-million-dollar estate, but for some silly reason you refused to accept this estate. You have a fortune but refuse to possess it. To refuse a million dollars when one could have pure luxury, splendor and the comforts of life is plainly ridiculous. In fact, for one to refuse to inherit this estate, he would have to be a little mentally unbalanced. Why would any poor man want to stay poor when Providence wants to make him rich?

The Bible tells us that all Christians have been made heirs of God through Christ and yet many Christians refuse to lay hold of this reality by faith. They choose to stay spiritually poor when God wants to make them spiritually rich in their experience.

CONTEXTUAL ARGUMENT

The Apostle Paul has been arguing in Romans 8 that only saved people who walk in dependence upon the Holy Spirit can fulfill the righteous requirements of the Mosaic Law in their daily experience. Because the unsaved man is in the flesh and walks according to the flesh, he cannot fulfill the Law and please God. However, the saved man is in the Spirit and walks according to the Spirit and he can please God.

The saved man has the Holy Spirit indwelling him and his sin nature judged; therefore he can and will walk according to the Spirit. He will not always walk perfectly according to the Spirit, but there will be a bent, leaning or propensity towards the Spirit-filled life.

The Apostle Paul concludes by giving an exhortation and warning to these Roman Christians:

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:12,13).

True Christians are not debtors to the flesh but to the Spirit, and if one professes to be a Christian but lives constantly by the flesh, he is not saved at all. True Christians are seeking to put to death the evil deeds of the body. They never do this perfectly, but they do fight sin in their experience.

THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT PROVES ONE IS A SON OF GOD — Romans 8:14

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons (*huios*) of God.” The “for” looks back to the previous verses (Rom. 8:12,13) about putting to death the deeds of the body by means of the Holy Spirit.

Every true child of God is being led by the Holy Spirit, and the evidence and proof of this leading is that he is fighting sin and the sin nature so as to please God. This is a great comfort to the Christian because we have the confidence that we are being led by the Spirit of God, and we know this by our desire to fight sin and to please Christ.

Sonship is not based on our obedience or this verse would have said, “As many as follow the Spirit are the sons of God.” Sonship is by God’s grace and rests on his faithfulness to lead his own children.

The Holy Spirit does lead God’s sons and daughters, but the other side of the coin is that as the Spirit leads, the Christian must submit and yield to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not drive the Christian but patiently leads him, expecting the believer to submit voluntarily.

The word “son” means “a son in legal standing” or “a son in full standing.” It is related to the terms “adoption” and “heir” in the following verses.

THE JOY OF BEING RELATED TO GOD AS A SON — Romans 8:15

“For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.” Before a person is a Christian, he is a slave to sin and judged by the Mosaic Law. This bondage brings fear, despondency and a sense of helplessness.

How many there are that have such fears in life — and the greatest fear is the unknown of death. Why do men fear? Because they have sin and no Saviour.

“But ye have received the Spirit of adoption.” When a person receives Christ as personal Lord and Saviour, at that moment the Spirit does a work of adoption.

The word “adoption” had great meaning to Paul’s Roman audience. The Romans had a special way of adopting their own sons. This word “adoption” actually means “a son-placing,” and has nothing to do with taking an orphan child and making him a member of a family. The Romans acknowledged all children as part of the family, but only those who went through the ritual of son-placing were recognized as sons. A Roman father, if he had male children, never referred to them as his sons until they were of age — they were his *children*, but they were not his *sons*. But when the child became of age (when he was about 14 years old in the Roman system), the father took him down to the public forum where the child was publicly adopted by his own father, and thereafter

regarded as an adult son in the family, being heir of the father and sharing the privileges as well as the responsibilities as a son.

At the moment we initially received Christ, we were made adult sons in God's family with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of a son. Not fear, but blessing!

"Whereby we cry, Abba, Father." This is probably an early liturgical formula. The word "Abba" means "papa" in the Aramaic, and the word translated "Father" is the Greek *pater*. Our Lord used the term "Abba, Father" when addressing the Father in prayer (Mark 14:36). Through this formula we find that a most vital and intimate relationship exists between the adult son and his Heavenly Father. As sons of God we can know and have confidence in our Father God.

I remember reading a story about a Christian girl who had received word that her fiance had been suddenly killed in an accident. She was a relatively new Christian, and when she got this word she was tremendously disturbed. She went into her bedroom and locked the door. Her mother heard her sobbing, and after a bit her mother said to her father, "I think you had better go up and see her. She needs a father right now." So the father went upstairs and was about to open the door when he heard his daughter sobbing, quietly he opened the door a crack and saw that she was kneeling beside the bed with her head buried in her hands crying out, "Oh, Father, oh, Father, Father." The man just quietly shut the door again, came back downstairs and said to his wife, "She is in better hands than mine, for she is with her Heavenly Father." This young lady knew God as her Father — this is one of the first marks of new life in Christ Jesus.

ASSURANCE OF SONSHIP — Romans 8:16

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." The Holy Spirit that lives inside of every true Christian bears witness (gives confidence) to the human spirit in the Christian that he is a child of God.

"That we are the children of God." The Holy Spirit gives an inward and subjective assurance that we have a spiritual relationship to God through Christ.

"But as many as received Him [Christ] to them gave he the power [authority] to become the sons of God" (John 1:12).

We are the "little born ones." To all who have truly trusted Christ, the Holy Spirit gives an assurance that they are truly saved.

There are many Christians who believe that once a person is saved he can be lost if he breaks his covenant with God. Even so, I have never met anyone who held this view and showed evidence of true salvation who also felt that he himself could lose his salvation. They just doubt everybody else's! I had a good friend who was a pastor in the Church of God. He believed that a person could

lose his salvation. When I asked him if he thought he could lose his, he answered that he did not believe he could. I then asked him why he felt this way. He answered that God had given him a conviction that he was saved, and he was going to do spiritual works to prove it. Even though his theology was incorrect, in practice the Spirit of God was bearing witness with his spirit that he was a child of God.

This illustration raises a question: “How does one know he is saved?” There are some easy check points:

1. The Bible says all who trust in Christ will receive the forgiveness of sins and be saved.
2. How can I be sure this Word is true? Because the Holy Spirit gives inner conviction that it is true and that I am a child of God.
3. How do I know the Spirit is bearing witness that I am a child of God? Because, as a Christian, I desire to persevere or push on in the things of Christ.
4. How can I be sure I will persevere? Because when a Christian sins, he has conviction from the Spirit that it is wrong, and that Christian persists in sin God will most certainly discipline him. Discipline is a sure proof of sonship.

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb. 12:7,8).

PRIVILEGES OF A SON — Romans 8:17a

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God.” Since we are God’s children, we have become the heirs of God. God has chosen to bestow infinite spiritual blessing on each one of his children.

“And joint-heirs with Christ.” The Christian is a joint heir of the Father with the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Father’s Son, and to Christ God has bequeathed everything because Christ is the only rightful heir to the Father’s estate. But the Christian is in spiritual union with Christ because of the new birth and is therefore a joint-heir to the inheritance.

If two brothers inherited an estate as equal heirs, then the estate would be divided into two equal parts and each would be given the same amount. But if the two are made joint-heirs, then both of them have equal rights to the total inheritance. They both look at the total inheritance as theirs. As joint-heirs with Christ, the total inheritance of Christ is the inheritance of every believer.

As sons of God, we are joint-heirs of all that Christ possesses, and his possessions are infinite. Therefore, our possessions are infinite as believers. It is also possible to have an inheritance but not really possess it experientially.

There used to be a television show hosted by Art Linkletter. Occasionally Mr. Linkletter and his sponsors would hire a private investigator to find estates that had not been claimed because the people who had inherited them were unaware of their inheritances. Great sums of money lay in unclaimed estates because the heirs could be found. The investigator traced down the estates, and the heirs names were announced over the air. Some folks became quite wealthy through this method. I remember that one elderly woman who was quite poor inherited an estate worth approximately \$10,000 estate (which was a relatively substantial sum in those days). She was the rightful heir of this money, but did not possess it. She was relatively rich and did not know it. Many Christians live like spiritual paupers, even though they are joint-heirs with Christ. They are spiritual millionaires by inheritance, but are ignorant of their inheritance and do not possess it by faith. They are spiritual paupers in experience.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A SON — Romans 8:17b

“If so be that [since] we suffer with him.” Our responsibilities as sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus include suffering with Christ. Suffering is part and parcel of Christian living. This is not providential suffering, for all men suffer to some degree. This is suffering that comes through sharing Christ’s life as we seek to lead holy lives and speak to the world of its need of Christ. Suffering with Christ is evidence of one’s sonship.

“That we may be also glorified together.” Since we share Christ’s sonship, we shall share his inheritance in glory; but if we are to share His glory, we must share his suffering first. All who share Christ’s suffering now will share his glory hereafter.

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ has promised to make any person a son of God if that person will but trust him as personal Lord and Saviour. Every person is a creature of God, but not every person is a son of God. God’s sons are those who are united to his only begotten Son Jesus Christ.

You may become a son of God right now if you will both acknowledge that sin has separated you from God and turn to Christ believing that he died as your substitute and for your sin. At that very moment of belief, you will become a child of God, and God will become your Father. Then for the first time you will be able to cry out, “Abba, Father.”