

# Our inheritance as children of God

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon  
at Poplar Baptist Church, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2017

*<sup>15</sup>For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." <sup>16</sup>The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8.15 – 17, NKJV)*

## Introduction

In recent weeks we have been studying Romans chapter 8 and verses 14 to 16. We have been thinking about the astonishing truth that we who believe are adopted as children of God. Last week we considered verses 15 and 16, where the apostle speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with our adoption. We saw that, for us who believe, the Holy Spirit is not like an evil spirit who brings us into slavery to fear. Instead he gives us freedom and peace. We saw that the Holy Spirit gives us the confidence to pray and to address God as Father. We also saw that the Holy Spirit directly assures us that we are the children of God.

Today I want us to think about verse 17, in which the apostle brings out a tremendous consequence that flows from the fact that believers are the children of God: that we are heirs of God. This is an enormously important truth. If we allow this truth to grip our hearts it will greatly strengthen us in our fight against sin. It will also enormously help us to deal with the disappointments and sufferings of this life.

There are three things that we learn from this verse:

1. Our inheritance is certain.

2. Our inheritance is glorious.
3. Our inheritance makes sense of our present sufferings.

## 1. Our inheritance is certain

Hear what the apostle says in verses 16 and 17: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and **if children, then heirs** — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

The apostle says that if we are the children of God then we are the heirs of God. This follows logically from the fact that we are children of God. A child who has been adopted into the family is legally as much an heir of the fortune of the father as the naturally born son is.

This is something which is absolutely certain, because it is God who has promised it. If our inheritance was a mere human inheritance, then we could not be sure of it. There are so many things that can stop us from receiving a human inheritance. The parent might spend all his money and leave nothing. Or he might retain his fortune but decide to leave it to someone else instead of his son.

But God is not like us. We read in Numbers 23 and verse 19 that Balaam declared, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?” God has promised to those who believe upon Christ that they shall be the heirs of all that he has. He is a faithful God. He keeps his word. What he has said he will do, he will carry out. James writes in his first letter chapter 1 and verse 17, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (NKJV).

God has sworn to give this inheritance to us. The writer to the Hebrews has written in chapter 6 of his letter, verses 17 and 18,

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the **heirs of what was promised**, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.

This inheritance is absolutely certain for all who are truly God's children. Peter writes in his first letter, chapter 1 and verses 3 and 4,

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you,

We saw last week that God has given us the Holy Spirit to assure us that we are the children of God. This gift of the Holy Spirit is a deposit, a down payment, guaranteeing our inheritance. The apostle writes in Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 13 and 14,

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

Is the Holy Spirit in you? Have you been born again? Can you see changes in your life, for which the only explanation is the work of the Holy Spirit? Do you know the comfort of the love of God in your heart? In that case you can be sure that you are an heir of God, and a co-heir with Christ.

If you are a true Christian, know that your inheritance is certain. You should not in any way fear death, or the coming judgement. You should not worry that you might somehow lose your salvation. You can and should look forward with joy and confidence to dying and going to be with your Lord.

## 2. Our inheritance is glorious

The second thing to see from this verse is that our inheritance is glorious. All that God has is going to be ours. As adopted sons of God, we will inherit, along with Christ, all that Christ himself has inherited.

Listen again to the verses 16 and 17: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — **heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ**, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

We are the heirs of all that God has, and joint heirs with Christ of all that Christ has inherited. What does God own? Everything. The whole

world is his. Life is his. Glory is his. Happiness is his. Joy is his. The complete absence of suffering is his. And all that is his, he will give to us. The only things that he will not share with us are what are known as his “incommunicable attributes”, those attributes that belong to God alone: for example, that he is almighty, that he is present everywhere, that he reigns over all things, that he knows everything, that he is without beginning and without end, and that he is completely self-sufficient. These attributes God will always reserve for himself. He will always be God, and we will always be creatures. But what are known as God’s “communicable attributes” – his love, his joy, his peace, his righteousness, his holiness – he will share with us. He will also give to us the new world that he will make.

The apostle says in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and verses 21 to 23,

So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.” We are the heirs of all things!

At the end of the book of Revelation, in chapter 21 and verses 6 and 7, having described the glories of the world to come, John says that Jesus said to him,

It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Let me sketch for you some of the things that we who believe will inherit:

### **1) We shall live in a recreated world**

The apostle goes on to say in the next few verses in Romans 8, verses 18 to 23,

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

The creation, which was subjected to frustration at the Fall, is going to be set free from that frustration. It will be wonderfully renewed. All the ways in which the creation, as a result of man's sin, was twisted and marred, and subjected for suffering and decay, will be removed. We shall enjoy the beautiful world that God will make.

## **2) We shall have glorious resurrection bodies**

If we are alive when Jesus comes our bodies will be transformed to being glorious new bodies, and if we have already died, our bodies will be raised from the dead, just as Jesus was raised from the dead and now has a glorious body. These new bodies will be splendid, pain free, powerful and beautiful, and will never grow old and weak. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 and verses 40 to 49, contrasting our new bodies with our earthly bodies,

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, 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.

## **3) We shall be completely free from all suffering**

All suffering will be completely over. In the book of Revelation chapter 21 verse 4 we read that God will "wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." "

In the next chapter, in verses 1 to 3, we have a further description of life in the new world:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.

#### **4) We shall be completely without sin**

Our old enemy, sin, will finally be gone. We will never fall into sin again, and never even be tempted to sin. John says in his first letter, chapter 3 and verses 1 and 2,

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

#### **5) We shall have perfect fellowship with all God's people**

All the Lord's people, from every age, will be there. We shall be reunited with all our old Christian friends and family. And we shall have the opportunity to get to know the millions upon millions of other believers from all around the world, and learn their stories.

#### **6) We shall have the sheer delight of having direct fellowship with God himself**

The greatest thing of all will be that we shall be able to see God, face to face, and have direct fellowship with him. He will live with his people.

In Revelation 22 and verses 3 and 4, we read, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."

We cannot begin to comprehend how wonderful it will be to see God himself. We will be absolutely thrilled and delighted.

This, then, is our second point, that the inheritance that we have is glorious. What effect should this have upon us? We should be a people of hope. We should be eagerly looking forward to our receiving our inheritance. Peter says in his first letter, in chapter 1 and verse 13, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed." If you are a Christian, be glad! You have a tremendous future.

### 3. Our inheritance makes sense of our sufferings

Let us hear our text again: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, **if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.**”

There is a question about the interpretation of the word which in the New King James Version is translated “if indeed”. Is this to be taken that Paul is, after all, adding a condition to our inheriting the glory of God? Is he saying that we will only inherit God’s glory if we suffer?

The verse cannot be interpreted as giving a condition for inheriting God’s glory, for two reasons. Firstly, for most of us, suffering is something that we have no control over. None of us wants to suffer, but we do, through circumstances beyond our control. It would not seem logical therefore to make this a condition for inheriting God’s glory.

Secondly, this would completely contradict all that the apostle has been saying in this letter, that our salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and not through works.

So how should we interpret the word that is translated “if indeed”? The best interpretation that I have seen is that we should take it to mean “since”. Substituting this word into the translation renders it: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, **since** we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”.

The truth is that in this world every Christian suffers. We suffer the results of the Fall, like every human being on earth. We suffer ill health, bodily weakness, bereavement, pain, and suffering caused by other people treating us badly. Most of us also suffer financial hardship and the pain of having to work hard to earn the bread we eat.

On top of this, as Christians, we all suffer in one way or another on account of Christ. We may not at the present suffer physical pain or death on account of Christ, but we do suffer the pain of being rejected and ostracised by others at work or in our families, and the pain and discouragement of seeking to reach out with the Gospel, and being constantly rebuffed. The apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12, “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”

In addition, we have the constant struggle against sin in our lives. And, at least from time to time, we are bound to experience direct attack from Satan.

What this verse teaches us is that our sufferings are a means by which God prepares us for glory. It is not that we are saved by suffering. We are saved by Christ alone. But we are made ready for glory through suffering. There are also degrees of glory. The more we suffer here on earth as believers, the greater will be the glory that we will experience in the age to come.

The apostle teaches the same thing in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 17, where he says that “Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” So when God brings us into periods of suffering, we should not take this as God being unkind to us, but rather as him giving us the privilege of suffering, in order that we might have the privilege of having a richer experience of his glory.

When we suffer, we are often tempted to think, “Perhaps God does not love me.” Or, “Perhaps God is not in charge of this world.” Or even, “Perhaps God has made some mistake.”

No. God has not stopped loving you. Neither has he abdicated from his throne, or been deposed. And he certainly has not made any mistakes. He is ruling over all the events in your life and mine, specifically because he wants you to know the blessing of a richer experience of his glory in the age to come.

If we did not know that we have an inheritance coming to us, and if we did not know that our present sufferings add to that inheritance, then our present sufferings would be bewildering and most grievous. But when we know that we have a sure and certain hope of glory, and when we know that our sufferings add to that glory, then it makes sense of our sufferings and makes them bearable for us. Our sufferings are still very painful, but we are comforted in our sorrow.

We see from this that we can be glad even in our sufferings. We do not enjoy suffering any more than anyone else, but we do not need to get despondent about it. God loves us, and is using our sufferings for our good, in order to increase our inheritance. So, Christian, rejoice, even in tribulation.

## **A final word**

I hope that if you are a Christian you will have been encouraged and strengthened through what we have considered today.

As I close, I must say that all I have said is true only if you are a true Christian who has put his or her faith in Christ. If you are not a true Christian your future is the exact opposite, unless you get saved. I have to warn you that your place will be in the lake of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is because of your sins. If your sins have not been paid for by Christ, then you will be punished for them through all eternity. Come to Christ, so that you may be saved from the wrath to come, in order that you may become an heir of God.

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