

8. The *Spirit of life* is the *Spirit of adoption*. He is the agent of the believer's sonship, and so also the One through whom he is made an heir of all things with Christ. In a larger context focused on the theme of the Christian's hope, it is eminently appropriate that Paul would bring his argumentation to its pinnacle in a consideration of the doctrine of sonship. For it is the believer's status as a son of God – along with all that sonship entails and implies – that, more than anything else, proves out his fundamental insistence that Christians are secured in a hope that can never disappoint.

- This is true first of all because all of the realities that establish the believer's settled hope – his full justification, his peace with God, his reckoned righteousness, his deliverance from sin and death, his share in Christ's life – are presupposed by and are aspects of his glorious status as a child of God.
- But it is true secondly because God's intention in making men His sons is that they would be joint heirs with His singular Son. Christians are not merely sons, but also heirs, and as such they live in hope of a promised inheritance. Because their inheritance has its source, substance, and surety in God's purpose and work in Christ, it is an inheritance "imperishable, undefiled, and unable to fade away"; one that is "reserved for them in heaven." And just as their inheritance is secured on their behalf, so they themselves are "protected by the power of God" until the day when they will inherit it in full (1 Peter 1:1-5).

Thus the Spirit of adoption is also the *Spirit of glory*; the Christian is a son by virtue of his union with Christ, and though that union brings suffering, it has its destiny in glory.

- a. Paul introduced this reality in 8:17, and the subsequent context serves to further develop and explain it (8:18-25). This explanation begins with Paul's fundamental thesis concerning the relationship between suffering and glory: "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us*" (8:18).

The focal point of the previous passage (8:14-17) is that, as an adopted son of God, the Christian has been appointed to receive a glorious inheritance. Because he has been joined to Christ, he is a joint heir with Him. But this union also makes him a sharer in Jesus' suffering (8:17), for to be joined to Christ as "one flesh" with Him is to become a participant in all that humanly pertains to Him – His shame and affliction as well as His glory.

The context shows that this suffering is related to the believer's union with Jesus, but Paul's terminology further reinforces it. For the noun he used implicates Christ's suffering along with the Christian's. It can be translated as *passion*, and is the basis for referring to Christ's sacrificial suffering as His "passion." In the New Testament, other than two occurrences where it is used with respect to sin (cf. 7:5; Galatians 5:24), it always refers to Christ's sufferings and/or the believer's participation in them (ref. 2 Corinthians 1:5-7; Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 2 Timothy 3:10-11; Hebrews 2:9-12, 10:32-33; 1 Peter 1:10-11, 4:13, 5:1, 8-9).

This term is broad and non-specific, indicating that Paul did not intend to specify the kinds of affliction and suffering the believer is to expect. As Jesus' suffering expressed itself in numerous ways, so it is with His brethren who bear His fragrance in the world. Paul's concern was not to identify the *forms* of Christian suffering, but to testify to the Romans that suffering is an integral and necessary part of the believer's participation in Christ.

This point may at first appear superfluous, but it is central to Paul's argument. For the fact that the believer's suffering is his share in *Christ's* suffering substantiates the truth of his personal participation *in* Christ. And if he is a sharer in Jesus Christ, then, according to God's promise, he is also a son in Him and consequently an heir of future glory (8:9-17). *This is precisely the reason that Paul could insist that the Christian's present suffering is not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits him.*

- 1) Were it not that the Christian's suffering is his share in Christ's suffering, it could not be necessarily connected with an inheritance in glory. Apart from having reference to Christ and his union with Him, the believer's personal affliction could never legitimately be a source of confident hope.
- 2) But because Christian suffering *is* inseparable from the believer's life in Christ, it has significance beyond itself: *it is the promise of a future inheritance – an inheritance so glorious that it infinitely transcends the pain and sorrow of present suffering.* For this reason the Christian's suffering in Christ is actually the occasion of his surpassing joy.
- 3) Thus Paul's insight serves to bring a proper perspective to Christian suffering. It enables the believer to rightly perceive his difficulties, and so also informs him as to how he is to respond to them. Far too often Christians do everything they can to avoid personal hardship, and in some circles it is taught that God's intention is that His children should never suffer hardship, sickness, loss, etc. This perversion of the great truth of the believer's triumph in Christ leaves people disillusioned and bitter when their distorted expectations of an "abundant life" are not realized.
- 4) But far from excluding or marginalizing suffering, Paul understood it to be a point of profound blessing. Furthermore, this blessedness cannot be confined to certain kinds of difficulty; it extends to the full breadth of the Christian's suffering for the simple reason that he is *in Christ*.
 - Blessing clearly attends the trials and persecution that arise from a person's open profession of Christ and his devotion to Him.
 - But it also pertains to all forms of hardship and affliction to which human beings are susceptible. For these, too, were aspects of Christ's suffering in which the Christian shares.

- Finally, there is for the believer blessedness even in the suffering that comes to him because of his sinfulness. One's first inclination would be to exclude such difficulties, since they are self-inflicted and distinct from Christ's suffering. But the truth is that these troubles must also be understood and approached from the reality of being "in Christ." Suffering arising from personal sin is a point of blessing, first because it leads the believing sinner to again recognize and rejoice in his present deliverance from sin's tyranny by the Spirit's power and not his own. But it secondly drives him to find all of his confidence and hope of final glory in his union with Christ; the Christian is presently a son of God by divine grace and power, and so it is with the consummation of his sonship.

No facet of Christian suffering is exempt from the blessedness to which Paul referred. Regardless of its source or manifestation, it acts to turn the heart of the believer back in dependent faith to the truth of his union with his Savior and his confidence in the power of His indwelling Spirit. And if a person is joined to Him, then he is a son and heir of God, with the result that his suffering speaks ultimately of a settled and secure inheritance – *"an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison"* (ref. 2 Corinthians 4:1-18; cf. also 2 Corinthians 1:1-10; 1 Peter 4:12-13; Hebrews 10:32-39).

- 5) The fact and security of this inheritance are reinforced further by Paul's language of *imminence*. The believer is an heir of a transcendent glory that is *"about to be revealed to him."* Though his present state of sonship is marked by difficulty and suffering, he yet stands on the threshold of eternal glory. The suffering that is his in Christ is both *light* and *momentary*; in a brief moment it will yield itself up to the promised inheritance of a glory that is *eternal* and *weighty*. And this because of the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit; He is the Spirit of glory.

"The Spirit is the 'first fruits' – the pledge, or first installment, of God's gifts to us that both anticipates and guarantees the gift of glory yet to come. The Spirit connects our 'already' with our 'not yet,' making the 'hope of glory,' though unseen, as certain as if it were already ours – which, in a sense, it is." (Douglas Moo)

- b. The believer's present state is that of "already but not yet," so that the glory that is his in Christ is in the form of a future inheritance. But as much as this incomplete, expectant condition characterizes Christian existence in this earthly life, it also characterizes the entire creation (8:19-22). Once again Paul's argument is seen to be more *corporate* and *cosmic* than individual. He thought and spoke in the categories of comprehensive redemptive "ages" and their determinative principles. The former Adamic age defined and determined by the curse of sin and death has been replaced "in the fullness of the times" by the new age of the Last Adam and His destruction of the curse (ref. again 5:12-21; also Galatians 3:1-4:7).