

# Heirs of God and Co-Heirs of Christ

📖 Romans 8:14-17

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Last week we learned in Romans 8:10-13 that resurrection life is available now for believers as we live according to the Spirit. The reason life by the Spirit can be termed resurrection life is because the quality of the life produced by the Spirit is indestructible. In Galatians 5 this quality of life is referred to as the fruit of the Spirit. By way of review, In Romans 8:10 he says, "If Christ is in you..." The Greek construction is a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition. The 1<sup>st</sup> class assumes the truth of the statement for the sake of argument. A.T. Robertson says, "if, as is the fact." It is often translated "since." So it could be translated "Since Christ is in you..." there is an apparent antinomy within us. On one hand, the body is dead because of sin and on the other hand, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. Regenerate people exist in a kind of strange situation because the body is dead as it is used by the flesh to commit deeds of sin but the Spirit gives life to our body as it puts to death the deeds of the flesh because of Christ's righteousness. Of course, the Spirit only gives this life to our body as we live according to the Spirit. In 8:11 Paul refers to this Spirit of life as resurrection life and links it back to the resurrection of Christ. He says, "But since the Spirit of the Father who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the Father who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" Once the Father raised Jesus from the dead Jesus ascended and was seated at the right hand of the Father. From there the Father sent the Spirit through the Son to indwell believers. Now that He dwells in us we have a new kind of spiritual life available; life by the Spirit, a life that was not available to believers under the dispensation of the law but now is available to believers under grace. The entire ground of this new spiritual life is the death and resurrection of Christ. In 8:12 he gives the conclusion, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation..." "not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." That obligation was broken at the moment of faith in Christ. In 8:13, "if you are living according to the flesh, you must die." Death is always a separation and the separation here is loss of temporal fellowship with God which is an experience of death which is a rotten experience. "But," Paul says, "if you live by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body and you will live." What happens when we live by the Spirit is the Spirit overcomes our flesh and puts the deeds of our body to death so that we live the exchanged life. The exchanged life might be described as His life through our life. Paul says elsewhere of the exchanged life, "...it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me." True living for a believer is enjoying the exchanged life, living in close connection with God, abiding in Him; that is, walking in fellowship and enjoying an

experience of resurrection life now that is attended by the enduring fruit of the Spirit transmitted to us by God the Father through God the Spirit.

Today we come to Romans 8:14-17, some very difficult verses. 8:17 is a verse I've been wanting to resolve for a long time. There's a somewhat large issue going on in Free Grace circles with this verse relative to the believer's inheritance. Does the believer have one inheritance or two inheritances? If two inheritances then can the believer forfeit one of the inheritances by not living the spiritual life? If so don't we then have two classes of believers? Isn't it dangerous to divide the body of Christ like that? And yet at the same time we know there are differences among believers in terms of rewards. So how do we maintain differences in reward and yet not end up saying there are two classes of believers? That really is the crux of the issue. Let's work our way there by starting in 8:14.

In 8:14 he designates those who are living by the Spirit as "sons of God." This expression has a rich biblical heritage starting with the OT nation Israel and now being used of individuals in the NT Church. Paul says, **For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** To properly understand the expression **sons of God** we must make several observations. First, the phrase **all who** is *οσοι* and means "co-extensive" or "to an equal extent." Some translate, "as many as." Paul is saying that "as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the same ones who are the sons of God." We might conclude that since all believers aren't continually being led by the Spirit of God then it does not refer to all believers. Second, the word **led** is *αγονται* and means "to lead or guide morally and spiritually." When the Spirit is the one leading us in thought, word and deed we are moral and spiritual. Again, this is not true of all believers continually. It is true only some of the time, only when we are following our responsibility of verse 13 which is to live according to the Spirit. So we are on safe ground concluding that *as we live according to the Spirit we are being led by the Spirit and are sons of God.* Therefore we must conclude that all believers are not sons of God in the sense declared here. Now to understand this we have to understand some of the rich biblical usage of the expression **sons of God.** We won't go through all the OT nation Israel except to say two things with respect to Israel. First, the nation Israel had the relationship of son of God by virtue of the Abrahamic Covenant (Exod 4:22). God chose Israel to be His son and in that respect Israel of all nations on earth has a relationship with God. This is a relationship that can never be broken because it depends solely on God. So Israel is the son of God by relationship. Second, the nation Israel as the son of God was to learn loyalty to God under the Mosaic Covenant in order to have His character reproduced in them (cf Isa 1:2). The son Israel was to become like the Father. The basic command that stated this was, "Be ye holy as I am holy." Unfortunately for Israel they did not learn to be holy, they did not have God's character reproduced in them. Nevertheless Israel remained in an eternal relationship with God. So the expression son of God is used in two senses with respect to the nation Israel. In the relational sense the nation Israel is the son of God, in the character sense the nation Israel could have been the son of God but failed. Ultimately, in the end they will become the son of God when the New Covenant is fulfilled and God gives them a new heart that will obey. In the NT the expression **sons of God** is used of individuals in the Church in the same two connections; one

relational and the other character. First, turn to Gal 3:26. Here it is used with respect to the believer's relation to God. In this sense all believers are sons of God. Gal 3:26 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Very simply all who have faith in Christ Jesus are by relationship sons of God. This is where we get eternal security. Once a son, always a son. Second, in Romans 8:14 the expression sons of God is used with respect to the believer's character. Romans 8:14 says, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." Very simply, only those believers who are being led by the Spirit of God are having the character of God reproduced in them. Therefore there is a difference between being sons of God by relationship and being sons of God by character. All believers are sons of God by relationship but only some believers are sons of God by character. John Witmer, professor at old Dallas Theological Seminary, (who I'm told by some of his students was absolutely brilliant; he was the librarian for years at the seminary) in his Romans commentary says, "Many Bible students see no difference between the word translated "sons" in 8:14 and the word translated "children" in verse 16. However, in verse 16 the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence attests *the believer's birth relationship to God* (*tekna*, "children," is lit., "born ones"). But in verse 14 the Holy Spirit's control and direction attests *the believer's privileges in God's family as a "son"* (*huios* means a child mature enough to take on adult family privileges and responsibilities). A son in God's family is led by God's Spirit."<sup>1</sup> His point is that in this context the expression child of God refers to all believers but sons of God refers only to believers who are being led by God's Spirit (i.e. mature). We might depict it by the two circles which are helpful in understanding many of these expressions. In the outer circle we are all sons of God by faith, in the inner circle only those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God. By way of example, and how we are supposed to think of this, realize that when you had faith in Christ you entered into a personal relationship with God. Romans 8 brings the personal relationship to a whole new level. You are a son by relationship but the issue now is are you being led by the Spirit of God? And when you are God looks at you and He sees His character being reproduced in you by His Spirit and He says, "That's My son!" So it's just like my character being reproduced in one of my sons and I look at that son and I say, "That's my son!" When I say that I don't mean that my other son isn't my son by relationship. I just mean that this son has become my son by character. He is having my character reproduced in him. And that's what I like to see! By the same token, all believers are sons of God by relationship but not all are sons of God by character. Only those believers who are being led by the Spirit of God are sons of God by character. What Paul is after in this section is those of us who are sons by relationship to learn to be led by the Spirit of God so that His character is reproduced in us, what we might call the exchanged life again. In conclusion, 8:14 is stating the truth that believers that are being led by the Spirit of God are sons of God by character.

Now in 8:15 Paul explains that all believers have received the Spirit of adoption so that we are sons and thereby have God's Spirit available to us. **For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"** To clarify the translation, I take it that the first **spirit** which is lowercase is correctly lowercase, it's referring to some other spirit; but the second **spirit** is also lowercase in the NASB and this is not correct, it should be capitalized, it's referring to the

Holy Spirit. He is the One we received, who is instrumental in our adoption as sons. Now, there are several observations and important concepts here. The first one is the most important. It is the contrast between being a slave and being adopted as a son. There is debate whether Roman or Jewish customs of **adoption** are in view. I hold that it's the Roman custom. Paul was writing to the believers at Rome and while there were both Jew and Gentile believers at Rome it still seems more fitting that Paul would use the customs of Rome as an analogy. Furthermore, the same customs are in view in Galatians 4 where Paul speaks of adoption. The word **adoption** is *υιοθησια*. Moo says, "The word denoted the Greek, and particularly Roman, legal institution whereby one can 'adopt' a child and confer on that child all the legal rights and privileges that would ordinarily accrue to a natural child."<sup>2</sup> The critical point to note is that an adopted child had all the legal rights of a natural child. Merivale says, "The process of legal adoption by which the chosen heir became entitled not only to the reversion of the property but to the civil status, to the burdens as well as the rights of the adopter—became, as it were, his other self, one with him ... this too is a Roman principle, peculiar at this time to the Romans..."<sup>3</sup> The important point here is the entitlement of the heir. What Paul is saying is that we have been adopted into God's family **as sons** and thereby are heirs with full privileges of a natural born son. This gives us all the right to **cry out, "Abba, Father!"** Something a slave could never utter. Second, this utterance, **Abba! Father!** deserves special comment. The expression is *αββα ο πατηρ*. Both *αββα* and *πατηρ* mean "father" but *αββα* is Aramaic and *πατηρ* is Greek. Why two words that mean "father" but two different languages? Robertson says it is a child's privilege to repeat the name. "Probably Paul used the Aramaic as well as the Greek term to highlight the intimate relationship the Christian disciple enjoys with God." The Lord Jesus revealed this intimate relationship in the Garden of Gethsemane when He was suffering due to the prospect of the cross."<sup>4</sup> As far as how it should be translated scholars have differed. Luther suggests we translate it "Dear Father," Phillips as "Father, my Father," Way as, "My Father, my own dear Father," and the NASB left the first *αββα* untranslated and the second *πατηρ* translated. I might translate it something like "Daddy! Father!" to convey the familial intimacy. Third, contextually it is a cry for help. Jesus uttered it in the Garden of Gethsemane, a suffering situation, and we utter it when we are in a difficult situation, in need of help. The cry for help is due to the co-suffering with Christ mentioned in 8:17. As adopted sons we are fellow heirs with Him and therefore suffer with Him. We cannot be separated from Him. Fourth, the Spirit we have received by which we make this cry was received at the moment of faith in Christ. The tense of the verb **we have received** is the aorist tense and refers to a past completed event. In conclusion, 8:15 teaches that we should not have any fear of crying out to the Father in time of need. This is indeed how we learn to be led by the Spirit of God such that we become by character the sons of God.

In 8:16 Paul adds the truth that **The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.** What is in view here is the legal basis for our full legal rights as adopted children of God. In the OT how many witnesses did one have to have to present evidence in a court of law? Two or three witnesses. How many witnesses do you see in verse 16? Two: **the Spirit** of God and **our** human **spirit**. These two testify together that **we are children of God.** Of the expression **children of God** a number of verses attest to the truth that by faith

we are **children of God**. No such secondary truth such as what we found with the expression sons of God is present for the expression **children of God**. All who believe are children of God. For example, John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." And 1 John 3:1, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are." Paul's point is that this dual testimony is the legal basis for our full legal rights as adopted children of God, the very subject of 8:17.

8:17 contextually teaches the full legal rights of a child of God. Paul says **and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him**. Now I struggled over this verse because it's not easy grammar and people in the Free Grace movement make grammatical arguments in favor of two different views. To be fair I will present both views and the arguments and then explain which view I think is best. First, one view is that there are two inheritances in view here; all believers are heirs of God by faith but only believers who suffer with Christ are co-heirs with Christ. In other words, the second inheritance here can be forfeited. This view is stated by Lopez who says, "Paul teaches here that all believers upon regeneration become *heirs of God*, but only those who *suffer* will "be glorified with Him" (NASB)." "Four things clearly indicate that co-heirship with Christ is conditioned upon suffering with Him." In his view not all suffer with Him and so not all enjoy this second inheritance which is co-heirship with Christ. The arguments for this view are not compelling. First, the argument is that there are two heirships in view because two different terms are used for heirship. One is "heir" and the other is "co-heir." This is true but it does not establish that one is guaranteed and the other is conditional. I agree that the text teaches two inheritances. Second, the argument is that the conditional particle "if" at the beginning of the verse is different from the conditional particle later in the verse translated "if indeed." The first should be interpreted as a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition, and translated "since," while the second as a 3<sup>rd</sup> class, and therefore conditioned on suffering with Him, maybe the believer will, maybe the believer won't. Part of this argument is true and part of it violates Greek grammar. The first part is true, the first is a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition, it is  $\epsilon\iota$  with the indicative and can be translated "since," assuming it is true for the sake of argument The second part is not true, the construction is  $\epsilon\iota\pi\epsilon\rho$  with the indicative mood, not a subjunctive. This construction is another 1<sup>st</sup> class condition. The reason it is repeated is to make it emphatic or to heighten. It does not at all put into question whether we will suffer with Him. It is a statement of fact that we will suffer with Him. Phil 1:29 also teaches that we will suffer with Him. How much a believer will suffer with Him or how we will handle the suffering is not in view. What is in view is the fact of our suffering with Him. Third, the argument is that the two particles  $\mu\epsilon\nu$  and  $\delta\epsilon$  are used which necessitate in the Book of Romans a contrast being made. The  $\mu\epsilon\nu\dots\delta\epsilon$  construction is not translated in your Bible but it means "on the one hand...on the other hand." In every other place Paul uses this construction in Romans it is a contrast (e.g. 2:25; 5:16; 6:11; 7:25; 8:10, 17; 9:21; 11:22, 28; 14:2, 5). This is the strongest argument for saying that one is guaranteed and the other is conditional. However, usage in other less remote contexts does not define the

usage in this immediate context. Further, the  $\mu\epsilon\nu\dots\delta\epsilon$  construction does not always function to contrast. It can also function to correlate or even heighten. In this sense, coupled with the second 1<sup>st</sup> class condition it seems Paul is saying that as children of God we are heirs of God and even co-heirs with Christ, taking it to a higher level. Fourth, the argument is made that other Scriptures support the idea that rewards are conditioned on our works and how we suffer. This is true but it does not necessitate the conclusion that one of these inheritances is conditional and therefore one may not be a co-heir with Christ. There are other ways to account for these other truths.

The second view is that there are two inheritances in view here; all believers are heirs of God by faith and co-heirs with Christ by suffering with Him, something all believers will do to some extent. The arguments for this view are much stronger. First, as children we are both heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ. This is stated explicitly by Paul's grammar. He says **and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**. The construction is  $\epsilon\iota$  + indicative, a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition, the verb being taken from  $\epsilon\sigma\mu\epsilon\nu$  in verse 16. Therefore we can rightly translate "since." **And since children, heirs also**. Heirs of what? **heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ**. There is no condition stated or implied that we must meet for either inheritance. They are both controlled by the 1<sup>st</sup> class condition and are therefore stated realities. Realities based on the fact that we are children of God. Second, the context is adoption as it was practiced by the Romans. In verse 15 Paul assured us that we received the Spirit who adopted us into God's family by which we cry out to Him when in need. As stated earlier, an adopted son had the full rights and privileges of a natural born son. This means that an adopted son is a co-heir with the natural son. In the passage Christ is the natural heir and we are the adopted heirs. In Hebrews 1:2 Jesus Christ is said to be the "heir of all things." By adoption we are co-heirs of all things with Him (also cf 1 Cor 3:21-23; Rom 4:13-17). To what extent we are heirs in this respect is simply not stated in this passage. Third, the expression **if indeed** is the condition of true reality and not conditional. The construction is  $\epsilon\iota\pi\epsilon\rho$  + indicative, a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition. Why the switch from  $\epsilon\iota$  to  $\epsilon\iota\pi\epsilon\rho$ ? To make it emphatic. It is emphatically true that we will suffer with Him for the purpose that we will be glorified with Him. Our lives are tied up in His life. Fourth, the three  $\sigma\upsilon\nu$ - words connect us with Christ in an inseparable way. We are heirs with Him, we suffer with Him, we are glorified with Him. We cannot have one of these and not the others. If one is true they are all true. If one is false they are all false. Fifth, if suffering with Him is a condition for being a fellow heir with Him then it casts doubt on whether we will be glorified with Him. Since glorification refers to the resurrection body then it is not plausible that believers could not be given resurrection bodies. Therefore, the best view of Rom 8:16-17 is that Paul is saying that there are two witnesses that we are children of God; the Holy Spirit and our human spirit. Since we are children we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, since indeed we suffer with Him for the purpose that we also may be glorified with Him. Witmer explains with the best illustration I've seen yet, "In many families children inherit their parents' estates; each child is an heir and the children together are co-heirs. Similarly, since Christians **are God's children**, they **are** His **heirs** (cf. Gal. 4:7), **and** they are **co-heirs with Christ**. They are recipients of all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3) now, and in the future they will share with the Lord Jesus in

all the riches of God's kingdom (John 17:24; 1 Cor. 3:21–23). Sharing with Jesus Christ, however, involves more than anticipating the glories of heaven. For Jesus Christ it involved suffering and abuse and crucifixion; therefore being co-heirs with Christ requires that believers **share in His sufferings** (cf. John 15:20; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12). In fact believers do share in His sufferings; **if indeed** translates *eiper*, which means "if, as is the fact" (cf. Rom. 8:9). Then after the suffering they will **share in His glory** (2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Peter 4:13; 5:10).<sup>5</sup> Paul does not explain here differences in how believers may handle their suffering with Christ and what repercussions that may have on rewards at the judgment seat of Christ or the resurrection body. Other passages clearly teach that not all of us will have the same extent of rewards but that does not mean that some are not co-heirs with Christ. Rewards should be viewed in the sense of graduation; we all graduate and are joyful but some receive additional honor. The same is true of the resurrection. There will be differences in the resurrection body. Paul likens the differences to the differences of brightness among the stars; all shining but some shining brighter than others. One may view it in the sense of getting a new car; all get a new car but some get more features on the car. All receive a resurrection body but some have special features. This view protects the integrity of the body of Christ and at the same time the differences due to rewards.

It's my view then, that all believers are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. To be an heir of God means that one will take part in the kingdom to come. To be a co-heir with Christ means to take part in reigning in the kingdom with Christ. All believers will take part in the kingdom and rule with Christ to some extent. We may gather from 8:14 that those who are led by the Spirit in this life will reign from higher positions with Christ and those who do not will reign from lesser positions. But we must maintain that all will reign with Christ. Some people point out 2 Tim 2:12 as an objection. "If we endure, we will also reign with Him" the argument being that our reigning with Him is conditional. But again, this is a 1<sup>st</sup> class condition not a 3<sup>rd</sup> class. It is true that all are exhorted elsewhere to endure well but it is also true that all will endure to some extent. To the extent to which we endure we will reign. Paul goes on there to say in that same context, "If we deny Him, He also will deny us." This too is often used to argue that some will not reign. However, all that can possibly be meant is that to the extent that one denies Him they will not reign. We know this is true because Peter denied Him but Peter will reign (Matt 19:28). The statement must be understood in harmony with other Scriptures. Therefore we all will reign but the extent to which we will reign will vary according to faithfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 471.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 8:15.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), Ro 8:14.

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 8:15.

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