

"HEIRS OF GOD"

"The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:16-18)

How profoundly grateful we ought to be if we are the children of God. John said, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." (1 John 3:1) Surely there is no greater charity that can be shown than in adopting a poor friendless orphan and giving him parents and a home. A king could manifest no higher love for a wandering, ragged, orphan boy, found in the streets, than to adopt the lad into his own family, admitting him to the same royal privileges and honors as those of his own sons; yet this would be a mere trifle as compared with the honor which God has bestowed upon us. Surely God could bestow upon us no more valuable a token of His affection than to allow us to be born into His royal family, and permit us to regard Him as our loving Heavenly Father.

As children of God we are "heirs of God." There are no half-brothers in the kingdom of God now, nor shall there be in ultimate glory. All are on the same level. Just because Paul was called to be an apostle after Peter was, does not mean that Peter will receive more of the vast and eternal inheritance of God. In the Saviour's "Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard" all received the same reward for their labor. None in the victory of eternal life shall receive more than the crown of life. That will be supremely sufficient to afford us everlasting joy and eternal contentment. In the Master's "Parable of the Talents", the two-talented man and the five-talented man both received the same applause. To each of them their Lord said, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matthew 25:21, 23) From this we may conclude that even though we are Christians 1900 years after Paul's time, yet we shall receive the same reward as Paul, insofar as we have capacity to receive and enjoy it. We are children of God today as much as those of the first century of the Christian era; we serve the same Lord as they did; to us the Lord says as much so as unto them, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

In the text Paul says, "And if children"--that is, if we are truly born again, if we are "born of water and of the Spirit"; if we become new creatures in Christ; then we are genuinely The children of God.

Paul says, "And if children, then heirs"--that is, we shall be treated as sons and as heirs; therefore, as heirs we shall be admitted to share the divine favors of this divine family. But the apostle further says, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God"--that is, we shall be partakers of that inheritance which God confers upon His children. That inheritance is His favor here and eternal life hereafter. This is an honor infinitely higher than to be the heir of the most princely earthly inheritance among the monarchs of the earth. But more than this, in the text Paul declares that we are joint-heirs with Christ" that is, we are co-heirs with Him. Christ is eminently the Son of God, and as such He is heir to the full honors and glory of the Father. But Christians are united with Christ; they are His brethren and friends; hence partakers of His glory. They are sons in a different sense from what He is; He is God's Son by a much higher relation; but still the idea of sonship prevails. To all Christians who separate themselves from worldliness, Jehovah has said, "I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." (II Corinthians 6:17-18) But all these glorious promises are dependent upon certain requirements. In the text Paul names these requirements. Hear him, "If so be that we suffer with him"--that is, if we suffer for His cause; if we bear afflictions as He did; if we are persecuted and tried as He was; we then show that we are united with Him. Certainly the apostle does not mean that we are to suffer to the same noble extent that He did, but that we imitate Him in suffering, persecutions and afflictions, bearing them in the same spirit in which He did, thus showing that we are truly in fellowship with Him. Paul said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." (Philippians 3:10) The Christian life is not without trials, temptations and persecutions. Paul said, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) Thus Peter said, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (I Peter 4:13) How grateful, then, we ought to be when we are permitted to be identified with Christ, even in suffering the same kind of afflictions, inflicted for the same reason--for the salvation of lost souls. Trials and persecutions are inevitable and unavoidable for those who live Christlike lives. Paul said, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (II Timothy 3:12) Then let those who profess to follow Christ expect no escape from trials and afflictions for their Lord. If no persecution has come to you as a Christian, then perhaps you have not been living "godly in Christ Jesus," for Paul says that all those who "live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." Jesus said "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10) Have you ever suffered any persecution? If so, before you enjoy the consolation from these passages just read, you should first question yourself as to why you were persecuted.

Was it because you were living "godly in Christ Jesus?" Was it "for righteousness' sake?" A man may embrace some absurd opinion and call it religion, or he may adopt some peculiar mode of dress and call it a matter of conscience; but if for any of these or similar reasons he is persecuted, he can lay no claim that such persecutions are brought upon him because he is living "godly in Christ Jesus," or "for righteousness' sake."

But in the text Paul further says, "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be glorified together." Here we are assured that if we are united with Christ in the same kind of sufferings, we can expect also to be united with Him in the same kind of destiny; beyond all sufferings and trials. Thus the apostle concludes the thought with these words, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Even though our sufferings for the cause of Christ may be great and tremendous, yet we should remember that they are nothing in comparison with the glory of the future world. These are but light afflictions as compared to the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." These sufferings are but for a moment, but the glory of eternal life shall be everlasting. These will soon pass away; but that glory shall never become dim or diminished. Therefore we should rejoice exceedingly that we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Let us note now some of the things to which we are heirs.

WE ARE HEIRS OF HIS GRACE

Peter assures us that the husband and wife are "heirs together of the grace of life." (I Peter 3:7) "Grace" means "favor". Have you ever known many men personally who were possessors of vast amounts of wealth? Can you point your finger to any such a man and confidently say, "He's my friend?" Have you ever had any such a person say to you, "If I can ever help you, if I can ever do you a favor, just call upon me?" But as Christians we can claim Christ as our Friend, who is truly the greatest Friend that man could ever have. Through Him we can "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

WE ARE HEIRS OF SALVATION

Concerning the ministry of angels, Paul said, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? Salvation through Christ is God's prime objective in the great scheme of redemption. Thus Paul said, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." (Titus 2:11) Again he said, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Hebrews 9:28)

WE ARE HEIRS OF HIS PROMISES

Paul said, "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath." (Hebrews 6:17) Did you ever sit down and run the references in the Bible pertaining to "The Promises of God?" Do that sometime and you will be amazed at the multitude of promises God has made to His children. And as a Christian you can say, "These are all mine because I am God's child."

Men may make promises who cannot be depended upon for fulfilling them, but not so with God. Paul assures us that "it was impossible for God to lie." (Hebrews 6:18) Also Peter affirms that "The Lord is not slack concerning his promises, as some men count slackness..." (II Peter 3:9)

WE ARE HEIRS OF THE KINGDOM

James says, "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" (James 2:5) Great scores of people had to flee from the subdued countries of Europe during the recent war. While many of them were imprisoned in concentration camps, they were only heirs to their government and their country by blood. But with all faithful Christians, we are heirs to the kingdom of God in reality. Take some of the Beatitudes of Christ for an example; consider the first one: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3) Hence Jesus does not promise blessedness or happiness merely in the world to come, but in the here and now also. Happiness is as sure to follow those who possess humility of spirit as the night follows the day. Such people possess the kingdom; in fact the kingdom possesses them, and "by patient continuance in well doing," they "seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life."

WE ARE HEIRS OF ETERNAL LIFE

Paul said, "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:7) Concerning our hope of eternal life, Peter says, "To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (I Peter 1:4-5) Sometimes men leave their millions to an endowment, and in their honor their names are inscribed on some cornerstone. This honor many of us cannot have, but if we are God's children, our names are written on the Lamb's Book of Life. Thus Jesus said, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:20) Verily if we are faithful children of God our names shall live on and on, and when our bodies are decayed by reason of death, our souls shall live on forever and forever in the blessed society of the redeemed.

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WE ARE HEIRS TO ALL THINGS

John sums the matter up in these words, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things." (Revelation 21:7) Hence there is no inheritance among the vast estates of men comparable to the inheritance that awaits those who die in the Lord. It would be great indeed as men count greatness to be an heir to the world's multitude of riches, but it is more wonderful indeed to be an heir of God.

Does it not mean something, then, to be a child of God? Doesn't it mean enough for you to lift your head and rejoice, and live continually in harmony with His will? As children of God there is no job too big for us. If God be on our side, then we should make our plans large. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) Paul said, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." (II Corinthians 9:8)

Perhaps some who hear me now are not God's children. If so you are denying yourselves of the joys and peace of the Christian life here as well as the heritage that awaits God's children in eternity. If you have all the wealth of the world and you are not a child of God you are a great loser. Jesus said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) Will you, then, surrender to Christ in humble obedience to His sovereign will--come to Him in simple faith; in honest, earnest repentance; and upon a confession of your faith in Him, be baptized into Christ in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Then you will become God's child, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ, an heir to the blessings of God here and eternal salvation hereafter.

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