

“Abba, Father”

Sermons on Romans # 21

Texts: Romans 8:12–17; Isaiah 61:1-11

In Romans 8:1-11, Paul sets out a stark contrast between the those who walk in the flesh (non-Christians) and those who walk in the Spirit (those who trust in Christ). But this is also a contrast between two eschatological ages: “this present age” which is dominated by the flesh, and the “age to come,” which is an age characterized by life in Christ. To be in Christ is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And to be indwelt by the Spirit is to have life and peace. But those who remain “in Adam” are bound to the flesh and subject to death. To be in Adam is to belong the old order of things which even now is passing away. But to be in Christ is to be a citizen of the age to come and entitled to all of the benefits of heavenly citizenship including a glorious inheritance and an intimate relationship with God, our heavenly father.

In Romans 8:1-11, Paul has stated that we are given life in Christ through the indwelling the Holy Spirit, and we are now freed from sin, death and the condemnation of the law. In verses 12-17, Paul now turns his attention to some of implications of this indwelling for Christian believers. While there are no imperatives (commands) in this section, nevertheless, Paul’s words serve as an implicit exhortation for Christians to act in a certain way, especially in light of the knowledge of our present standing in Christ.

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul describes the Christian life as an intense struggle with indwelling sin—which we spoke of in terms of an unwanted tenant or squatter who refuses to leave even though his former dwelling is under new ownership—and Paul goes on to say that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. This is because Christ has borne our condemnation upon the cross. Because we are in Christ, we fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. To be in Christ is to walk in the Spirit and no longer walk after the flesh. To walk in the flesh as we did “in Adam” is to hate God and to be unwilling and unable to obey his commandments. But Paul’s whole point is that we are no longer in the flesh and because we walk in the Spirit there are consequences for the Christian life now set forth in verses 12-17.

Simply stated, because the Holy Spirit give us life, we must no longer live like we did when we where in Adam. But there is more to it than this. The same blessed Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead now dwells in us, enabling us “to render the service to which we are called.”¹ Therefore verses 12-17 serve as an exhortation for justified sinners to behave like Christian saints as a consequence of the life given us in the Spirit. Paul is clear about the fact that because we are no longer under the dominion of Adam, we obligated not to live as the slaves to sin we once we were. We are to live as the freedmen we now are. With this, the great paradox of the Christian life comes into view. Because we have life in the Spirit, we now put to death the deeds of the flesh.² In this we see the two sides of sanctification: (1)

¹ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 311.

² Cranfield sees this section as an exhortation dealing with the specific consequences of mortification and vivification, namely how the righteous requirements of the law mentioned in Romans 8:4, are actually fulfilled in us: “This sub-section begins by referring to the obligation which rests on Paul and the recipients of the letter (the first person plural is used here), making the negative point that this obligation is not to the flesh to live according to it. After breaking off to warn the recipients (second

vivification, which is the old-self (what we were in Adam) being made new and coming to life in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and (2) mortification, which is the old self being put to death through that very same indwelling Holy Spirit. Thus sanctification entails the initial killing off of the old self when we died with Christ and continual putting to death of the remnants of what we were in Adam. Likewise the old self is made new when we were raised with Christ and the new self is continually strengthened on a daily basis through word and sacrament. Thus we *were* sanctified, and we *are being* sanctified.

Although there is clearly a personal focus here—the need for individual Christians to die to sin and to begin to conform to the commandments of God (mortification and vivification)—just as there was in Romans 8:1-11, there is a contrast between the two eschatological ages. In Romans 6, Paul stressed that the Christian is free from sin and once that freedom becomes a reality, the Christian is now obligated to struggle against sin. As Nygren puts it, “Out of the indicative, Paul deduces an imperative. Through Christ we are free from sin; and for that very reason we are to fight against it. By Christ we have been snatched out of our bondage to sin; and for that very reason we must always fight against sin when it attempts to reconquer what it has lost.” The same thing applies here in Romans 8 to death. The Christian has been freed from the dominion of death now that we are in Christ, and yet because we have sinned, both personally and in Adam, we still must face death. We remain in the flesh and will die. But because we have been liberated from death through the Spirit who gives us life, even as he raised our Lord from the dead, we must put to death the deeds of the flesh through the Spirit’s power.³ As we

person plural) of the consequence which will follow, if they do yield allegiance to the flesh, Paul then, instead of going on to speak positively of the believer’s obligation to the Spirit, promises life to the Roman Christians if they mortify the flesh. Verse 14 clarifies v. 13b, repeating its substance in different terms and as a general third person plural statement: The life promised for believers is no mere not-dying, but life as sons of God. Verse 15 with its positive assertion, ‘you have received the Spirit of adoption’, harks back to the basic indicatives of vv. 1-11 which are the presupposition of what is said in verses 12-16, and gives to the obligation to the Spirit to live according to the Spirit, which was implied in v. 12 but never expressed, definitive expression in the relative clause, ‘by whose enabling we cry ‘Abba, Father.’ The implication of this verse understood in its context is that it is in the believers’ calling God ‘father’ that God’s holy law is established and its ‘righteous requirement’ (v. 4) is fulfilled, and that the whole of Christian obedience is included in this calling God ‘Father.’” As Cranfield sees it, the life spoken of here is not merely the fact that we don’t die, but that we live. As we live through the Spirit, and as adopted as sons and daughters, we now call God “Father,” an act through which the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled. While grammatically possible, this it seems to me, reduces Paul’s requirements about fulfilling the law in new obedience to our profession of faith. This it seems to me is a real stretch. As we saw when we dealt with 8:4, the righteous requirements being fulfilled in us, probably has to do instead with Christ’s active obedience. Cf. Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.393.

³ Says Nygren, “Through Christ the Christian has actually been freed from death; but that does not mean that there is no longer the possibility for death to threaten him. He has not yet reached the condition where ‘death shall be no more . . . for the former things have passed away (Rev. 21:4). . . . He still lives in the ‘flesh,’ and there death has its chance to lay hold, when it strives to regain its power over him. . . . Just as, in chapter 6, Paul was concerned to show that the Christian is truly free from sin, so that it can no longer come with any warranted claim on him, so he is now concerned to show that, in like manner, the Christian’s freedom from death means that the flesh can no longer come with any justifiable claim. ‘So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will

struggle against sin because we have been set free from its bondage, so too we must struggle against sinful human nature which brings death. We must slay the old man and its passions and desires.

Romans 8:12-17 includes an exhortation from Paul reminding us that just as sin and the law can no longer make demands upon us since we have been freed from their tyranny and dominion, so too, the same can be said of death. Through the indwelling Spirit we have been given life in Christ. And that life brings an obligation—an obligation to life, not to death. We are not to live as “dead men” (i.e. according to the flesh), but we live according to the Spirit. We must not act like people who are under the condemnation of the law and the sentence of eternal punishment. Rather, we must act like people upon whom death has no claim. This is an elaboration of Romans 6:11: “*count yourselves dead to sin about alive to God in Christ Jesus.*” The essence of sanctification is the living out of what we are in Christ.

With all this in mind, let us turn to our text, Romans 8:12-17.

As he has done earlier in this letter (7:25b), Paul begins the section with the two conjunctions [*ara oun*], something in English like “wherefore, therefore.” The NIV renders the verse as follows: “*Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.*” What follows is an elaboration on the consequences of verses 1-11. Furthermore, Paul’s use of the first person plural (we) identifies him with the struggle of those whom he affectionately refers to as his “brothers.”

As Paul now makes plain, because we have life, we have an obligation (literally—“we are debtors”). Since that debt is not to the flesh (what we were “in Adam”) and since there was nothing monetary in view (i.e., that our debt is a financial one), the NIV translators, correctly rendered this as “obligation,” to avoid confusion. The point is simply this: We are no longer obligated to the flesh, because we live by the Spirit who has set us free from death. In fact, we owe nothing to the flesh, we are not obligated to the flesh, even though we remain flesh until our own death or the day of the Lord.⁴ The reason this is the case is because we have been set free from the domination of the flesh and given life in Christ through the Spirit. We are no longer obligated to the flesh. The flesh no longer holds us in debt. It makes no legitimate claim upon us. Therefore, as people made alive through the work of the Spirit, we are not obligated to the flesh, but, as Paul implies, our obligation is to the Spirit through whom we live, and to whom we respond. Just what that obligation is will be spelled out in what follows.

In verse 13, Paul writes, “*For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*” The apostle changes focus from the collective experience he shares with his brethren, “we,” to the specific struggle facing his hearers— “you.” Paul is

live” (Nygren, Commentary on Romans, pp. 325-326).

⁴ According to Leon Morris, “Paul is laying it down firmly that for Christians the flesh has no rights ‘We owe the flesh nothing.’ The way Paul puts it, ‘we are debtors, not to the flesh—’ leads us to look for ‘but the Spirit’ or some other expression to indicate where our debt lies, ‘but this is eloquently left to be understood’. The characteristic life of the Christian owes nothing to the flesh, though we should not ignore the force of this warning about ‘the flesh’ in a letter to Christians. ‘The flesh is not eradicated but is an ever present reality. Paul goes on to explain that to be indebted to the flesh means ‘to live according to the flesh.’ This is not an option for the believer” (Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 311).

not saying that people who are struggling which such things are not Christians, or about to cease being Christians. Rather, the warning he is about to issue is to be taken with all seriousness. Says Paul, “*if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.*” Lutheran and Arminian writers see this warning as indicating the very real possibility that justified sinners can go back to living according to the flesh so that they come back under the curse and suffer it’s consequence (death), since this supposedly severs one from Christ. But to read this warning in this light is to ignore what Jesus says in John 10 and Matthew 18 about not losing any one of his sheep. This also ignores following clause, which asserts with great force, that all those who are in the Spirit do indeed put to death the deeds done in the body and will live.

As Cranfield points out, Paul’s use of a future tense is significant, for the consequences of living according to the flesh are certain. “The meaning is not merely that they will die (those who live according to the Spirit have also to die—compare v. 10), but that they will die without the hope of life with God.”⁵ This indicates that there is no real possibility for recovery from the kind of death associated with such a life in the flesh. To remain under the dominion of the flesh is to remain under the sentence of death resulting from the curse. Paul’s exhortation must be understood in light of what he has just said in verses 1-11. Those in the flesh are not Christians. They never were, and barring a divine act of grace, never will be. They remain in Adam. Thus the contrast Paul makes is between non-Christians (those in the flesh) and Christians (those in the Spirit), not between Christians but who don’t resist the flesh and die, and Christians, who do resist the flesh and live.

But what does Paul mean by the phrase “*putting to death the deeds of the body?*” “The verb may be used of literally putting a person to death (Luke 21:16 etc.), or of undergoing the danger of death (v. 36). Mortifying deeds means killing them off, getting rid of them altogether. But the tense is present, which indicates a continuing activity. It is not something that we can do once and for all and be done with. It is a daily duty.”⁶ This means that Paul is speaking of mortification, that aspect of sanctification which includes the daily dying with Christ which is the result of having been once and for all crucified with Christ. Indeed, all those in Christ have been sanctified (past tense) and are being sanctified (present tense). Those who have died in Christ by virtue of their union with him, will daily crucify themselves with Christ, putting to death the evil actions associated with the flesh.⁷ What this means for us by way of application is that everyone indwelt by the Spirit now finds that the pull towards the flesh toward is to be an abnormal condition, when prior to conversion, domination by the flesh had been all that we knew. This is why we feel so miserable when we sin, and why our struggle with sin is so difficult.

⁵ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.394.

⁶ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 312.

⁷ Says Morris, “what is to be killed is the ‘deeds of the body.’ NIV has *misdeeds*, a translation that can be defended, for the word is sometimes used of evil actions (as in Luke 23:51). Such actions are the object of decisive and hostile action as far as the believer is concerned. There is to be no life in the deeds in question. They are not living options. And this is to take place through an action of the believer (‘you put to death’), though not an unaided action, for the mortification is to be done ‘by the Spirit.’ It is the energy of the divine Spirit, not the energy of the flesh, that enables the believer to put the body’s deeds to death,” (Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 312).

The agent of the process of killing off the old-self is the Holy Spirit.⁸ Paul's point is that those indwelt by the Spirit find sin as an offence. We fight against sin. We can't stand sin. We died (past tense) to our sin in Christ. And yet we are daily dying to our sin in Christ. But Paul is no perfectionist and this must be understood in light of the tension between the already and the not yet. If we are in Christ, we will spend eternity with him no matter how much progress we make in the Christian life. But there will be progress and the struggle with sin will go on until Christ returns or our life ends—which ever comes first.

Douglas Moo's response to the Lutheran and Arminian understanding of this is insightful. "I believe that the strength of the assurances Paul has given to justified sinners throughout these chapters (see especially 5:9-10, 21; 8:1-4, 10-11), along with the finality of justification itself, favors the 'Calvinist' interpretation. But such an interpretation in no way mitigates the seriousness of the warning that Paul gives here."⁹ Yes, Paul's warning is real and must be heeded. The question is, who heeds his warning? The answer is "those in the Spirit." The same Spirit who has set us free from sin, the condemnation of the law, and death, now lives in us. He transforms us from what we were in Adam to what we are in Christ. We no longer think and live, in accordance with the flesh. It is the Spirit who energizes us to fight against sin.¹⁰ And fight we must because we no longer live according to the flesh, subject to death. Dead men do not struggle to live!

To sum up, the Spirit gives us life, and that life will manifest itself in the intense struggle with sin depicted here by the statement that Christians will put to death the sinful deeds done in the body, and in Romans 7 by the inward delight in the law and the remorse expressed by not keeping it. As Paul will say in the next verse "*because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*" The Sons of God are those led by the Spirit, and sin no longer has dominion over them. We will indeed put to death the deeds done in the body. And the flesh will fight back. This is why the Christian life is such a struggle and why the person who should be worried is not the person who struggles with sin, but the person who doesn't.

As I just mentioned, in verse 14, we come to Paul's explanation as to why all Christians will put to death the deeds of the flesh, "*because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*" The "red-flag" connective word [γὰρ], translated by the NIV as "because," clearly indicates the logical sequence in Paul's thought, the explanation as to why Paul can say of all Christians, "*you will live.*" The term translated "those" by the NIV [*hosoi*], should translated as "all who" or "even everyone." The point Paul is making is that all Christians are led by the Spirit, hence, they will live because, all Christians put to death the deeds done in the flesh. Because all Christian are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, they are also led

⁸ "The Spirit of God—and only the Spirit of God—is to be the means of the destruction of the flesh and its activities" (Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.394). Morris concurs, reminding us that "Paul speaks of the *body*, not the *flesh*"; he probably has in mind the fact that the body is 'this body of death' (7:24)...If you do this, [i.e., put the deeds of the body to death] Paul says, *you will live*. Real life is not a possibility when we choose to luxuriate in the body's deeds. We must renounce all such deeds if we to experience life in the Spirit. This is not because some meritorious achievement is required of us as a way of earning such life. It is because the two are incompatible. The one excludes the other. There is a living that is death and there is a putting to death that is life" (Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 312).

⁹ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 494-495.

¹⁰ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, pp. 495-496.

by the Spirit, the prior condition (indwelling) leads to the latter (the leading of the Spirit). Paul makes a very similar statement in Galatians 5:18, when he says that “*if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*” The leading of the Spirit is characteristic, not only of some Christians, but of all Christians.

As one writer states, “The daily, hourly putting to death the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led, directed, impelled, controlled by the Spirit. Though the active participation of the Christian is indeed involved [i.e. the fact that “we” put to death], it is fundamentally the work of the Spirit.”¹¹ The term translated as “being led,” is passive, and is “used by classical authors of being led, controlled, by reason, anger, desire, pleasure, etc.”¹² The result is not merely that we put to death the deeds of the flesh, hence a “not dying,” but also that we are sons of God, and live as sons of God, both in this life and in the next.¹³

When Paul tells us that all Christians are led by the Spirit and put to death the deeds done in the flesh, he destroys the erroneous notion that only some Christians are led by the Spirit in the manner described here. All Christians, says Paul, are led by the Spirit. Paul knows of no two-tiered Christian life. There are no “carnal” Christians, who become victorious Christians if they yield to the leading of the Spirit. All Christians yield to the Spirit. For Paul, there is no such thing as a Christian who accepts Jesus as “Savior,” but not as Lord. All Christians led by the Spirit submit to the Lordship of Christ. Nor there is any such thing as a Christian who is “saved,” but not sanctified, to use old holiness terminology. All those justified by grace alone through faith alone, on account of Christ alone, are also sanctified through that same act of faith and are also presently being sanctified through the continuance of that same faith.

In verse 15, Paul elaborates a bit further on the relationship of being led by the Spirit to our sonship, that is, to our “union” with Christ of which sonship is an important part. As Paul puts it, “*for you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, Father.*” When Paul says we *have received* the Spirit, he uses the aorist tense, (completed action) probably in reference either to the time of conversion [Morris]¹⁴ and/or our baptism [Cranfield].¹⁵ The Holy Spirit is not a Spirit of bondage, a point that Paul makes quite emphatically. The Spirit does not make us slaves to fear as our former masters (the law, sin and death) once did. The reason we are not to fear is that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the Spirit of sonship, literally the Spirit of “adoption.” The Holy Spirit does not enslave us. Instead, he makes us sons of the most high! The meaning is simply this: “The Spirit does not make Christians slaves, but sons.”

¹¹ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.395.

¹² Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.395.

¹³ John Murray reminds us that “those who by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body are led by the Spirit of God. But those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. And if they are the sons of God, that status is the guarantee of eternal life. Verse 14 is, therefore, to be interpreted as providing the basis for the assurance given in verse 13, namely, ‘*you shall live.*’” Murray, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 295.

¹⁴ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 314.

¹⁵ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.396.

There is an important cultural reference here, which we easily miss, but which was the basis for Paul's argument. The issue, of course, is slavery, widely practiced throughout the Roman empire. "Slavery would have meant a good deal more to Paul's readers, who were in daily contact with it, than it does to us. Paul has been arguing that they have been given a wonderful freedom in Christ, a freedom they may enjoy to the full even if their physical existence they were in fact slaves. We might not have expected him to say *again*, but the word is apparently being used in the sense of 'back' and refers to an reversion to the state from which they had been delivered. Christ had freed them from their bondage to sin; they must not think that the Spirit would lead them back to it."¹⁶ Paul stresses this because people familiar with slavery, perhaps even those who were slaves themselves, needed to know that the Holy Spirit would not enslave them once again to fear, an emotion which must have predominated life as they had as they once had known it. No, the Holy Spirit frees us to obey our new and gracious master, Jesus Christ, that one in whom we are set free. The Spirit does not enslave us again to fear. He frees us to obey.

Being led by the Spirit, *because* we are sons of Christ, brings with it glorious benefits. Christians not only live and are rescued from death and the curse, but they are indwelt by that Spirit who does not make them a slave to fear, a Spirit who unites them to Christ in such a way that they are now "adopted" as the king's own royal children. And royal children have royal privileges. "The word for 'adoption' is used only by Paul in the New Testament (five times, three being in Romans), and it does not occur in LXX, for the Jews did not practice adoption....Most scholars agree that Paul took the concept from Roman or Greek law in both of which adoption was important....It is a useful word for Paul, for it signifies being granted the full rights and privileges of sonship in a family to which one does not belong by nature. This is a good illustration of one aspect of Paul's understanding of what it means to become a Christian. The believer is admitted to the heavenly family, to which he has no rights of his own. But he is now admitted and can call God 'Father.'"¹⁷ All those justified and sanctified, are also adopted as God's son or daughter, and thereby enjoy the full legal status as a member of the family of God, with all the rights and privileges thereof. Adoption, like justification, is a legal declaration of a permanent and abiding nature.

The benefit which comes from this standing is now set forth by the apostle in the latter part of verse 15. In fact, Paul goes on to say at the end of the verse that "*by the Spirit* ['him'], *we cry Abba, Father.*" The term "to cry" as used here by Paul, means something like the "fervent utterance of a devout believer."¹⁸ There is nothing here to indicate that this is some kind of an "ecstatic utterance," i.e., the speaking in tongues as some charismatics contend. Paul's language indicates that this is simply a description of the intimacy of the prayer of a believer being led by the Spirit because they are sons of God. This fervent intimacy results from a bond effected by the Holy Spirit between the believer and God.

"Abba" was an Aramaic word, meaning something very much like "papa" or "daddy." However, the head of the household in Paul's day was not one with whom its members enjoyed the kind of "greasy familiarity" typical of much of modern America. In the ancient world, the father was a respected, honored and often austere figure, who could be approached by his children only if they exercised an appropriate measure of respect. Nevertheless, the Roman father could be called "*papa*," or "*daddy*" in certain situations, and the use of the Aramaic term "Abba," as used here by Paul, does indeed describe a

¹⁶ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 314.

¹⁷ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 314-315.

¹⁸ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 315.

relationship of familial love and intimacy between the justified sinner and the Holy God.¹⁹

But Paul was a Jew and could not simply adopt Roman cultural metaphors uncritically. Jews never addressed God directly as “Father,” but always as the father “in heaven,” so as to avoid an undue presumption or familiarity on the part of the one praying. Therefore, even though the intimate term “Abba” is used of a believer’s relationship with God, and this is an intimate relationship much like that of parent-child, yet it does not carry the irreverence and familiarity of American culture. Paul does not say, the Spirit causes those he leads to cry out, “I am God’s son.” Rather the Spirit leads people to declare that “God is my father.” We look to God for what we need and not to ourselves.

In verse 16, we turn to what has come to be known as Paul’s doctrine of the “witness of the Spirit,” for as Paul says, “*the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.*” The fact that there is no usual connective word linking this clause to the proceeding, probably means that Paul is putting emphasis upon the fact that it is the Spirit himself who bears witness “to our spirit” so that we know that we are God’s children and that when we cry “Abba” father, we know that God will hear us. “Unaided, we cannot testify to the reality of our standing before God. But we are not unaided; the Spirit of God testifies to our Spirit and gives assurance of our membership in the heavenly family. There is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on our spirit. The content of that testimony is that we are God’s children.”²⁰

The sequence is as follows: all those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit are led by the Holy Spirit, and being led by the Spirit, they are God’s sons or daughters, and being God’s sons and daughters, they are God’s children, and therefore, enjoy the unspeakable privilege of an intimate familial relationship with God, because the same Spirit who indwells them, leads them, and then confirms to them that they are God’s. Thus Paul is clear that all those who are in Christ through faith, are also “in the Spirit.” They are indwelt and led and now, he adds, the Holy Spirit bears witness to them that they are Christians.

There are other important ramifications of being made a member of God’s family which are worthy of our consideration. Not only do we enjoy a familial relationship as adopted children of God, not only are we assured of our salvation, not only do we put to death the deeds of the flesh because we are led by the Spirit, but because of the work of the Spirit, we also enjoy a new legal status as well, a status which centers primarily in a new relationship to God. Paul expresses it this way in verse 17: “*Now if we are children, then we are heirs.*” At first impression, the idea here is that of an estate passing on from the parents to the children at the time of death. But the Greek conception and that of the Old Testament are a bit different. Throughout the Old Testament, the inheritance was connected first to the land promised to Abraham and then latter understood in light of the messianic promise, so in the later prophets the inheritance referred to that which will be secured by the Messiah himself, including the land

¹⁹ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 315.

²⁰ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 317. Cranfield adds to this, “the knowledge that we are God’s children (not be to confused with any merely natural desire of weak human beings to feel that there is someone greater and stronger than themselves who is kindly disposed to them) is something that we cannot impart to ourselves; it has to be given to us from outside and beyond ourselves—from God” (Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.402).

of promise.²¹ We see this in our Old Testament lesson this morning, when Isaiah speaks of possession of the inheritance in terms of receiving messianic blessings, land included. Thus Paul reinvests a secular term (inheritance) with a distinctly Christian meaning (in light of redemptive history and the messianic promise). We are heirs, not in the sense of receiving property from someone who has died. Rather we are heirs in that we are made members of God's family and therefore, heirs to this settled possession, which includes all of the messianic blessings, especially a new relationship with God.

That the focus here is essentially relational, and not monetary, is made plain when Paul explains this further—*if* we are children, then we are heirs, more specifically, we are “*heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ*.” This means that we are now placed in a position of privilege “because of our membership in the family of none less than God.” The focus is not upon our claim upon God—i.e., “we are heirs, look what we are entitled to!”—but with God's claim upon us. Rather, “our sonship and our heirship rest on our relation to Him, on His having claimed us for His own. But He has already entered upon the inheritance for which we have still to wait, and this fact is the guarantee that we too, who are still to wait, and this fact is the guarantee that we too, who are his joint-heirs, will enjoy the fulfillment of our expectations.”²² The messianic blessing is that we as a people have been given by the Father to the Son, hence, we are heirs because we are Christ's possession. And because Christ has already received his inheritance by virtue of his resurrection, so will we.

As heirs to all the treasures that are ours in Christ, we must never forget that the blessings of the “not yet,” do not come until we pass through the already. Says Paul, we are heirs with Christ, “*if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory*.” This reiterates the theme introduced in chapter 6, of being buried with Christ as the basis for our own daily dying with Christ. As Jesus suffered at the hands of men, so too will those who are his. To be in union with Christ is to be in union with him in his sufferings. Morris reminds us that “this is not some perverse accident but an integral part of discipleship. But this suffering is in some way linked to the sufferings of Christ (2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24; 2 Timothy 2:11-12). . . . He is one with us in our sufferings. But we also died with Christ (6:8). We are one with him in his death. But our sufferings are not meaningless. We suffer in order that we may also share in his glory. The path of suffering is the path to glory.”²³

²¹ Says Morris, “the word [heir] properly denotes those who receive property as a result of the death of someone else . . . [but] in the Old Testament the concept of inheritance `apparently contains no implication of hereditary succession, as it does usually in classical Greek. The sense is rather `sanctioned and settled possession.’ The concept of inheritance is an important one in the Old Testament, and it carries over into the New Testament....[One commentator] points out that it originally meant `simple possession of the Holy Land,’ but later came to mean `its permanent and assured possession’ (Ps. 25:13; 37:9, 11, etc.). It especially denoted `the secure possession won by the Messiah’ (Isaiah 60:21; 61:7), and thus it became “a symbol of all Messianic blessings,” (Matthew 5:5; 19:29; 25:34). Paul uses the term here to denote full possession of all that sonship means in the new age, but it is not so much ownership as relationship that he has in mind. He speaks of being *heirs of God*, a bold piece of imagery, found only here in the New Testament. Since God does not die, there is no question of inheritance in the strict sense of the term. But the heir is in a position of privilege as a result of his place in the family” (Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 317).

²² Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.405-407.

²³ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 317-318.

Thus to participate in Christ's glory, we must share in his sufferings. We share in his sufferings when we are united to Christ and participate in the age to come, even now in the midst of this present evil age, where the God of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of men to the truth of the gospel. To be identified with Christ in "this age" is to be subject to all manner of persecution and suffering, even as Christ himself suffered to save us from our sins. Glory will come, but only after we pass through a life of sorrow and struggle with sin. This is God's way as he purifies the bride he has chosen for his son. But in the meantime, we are heirs to the promised inheritance and we are royal (albeit adopted) children, who can cry out to our creator and redeemer in times of good and bad, "Abba," father.