

[Romans 8:12-17](#)

Heirs with Christ

Introduction

Did you know that in the British royal family there is a stipulation that only blood relatives can be an heir to the throne? In other words, a person adopted into the royal family cannot be the king or queen of England. And the chances of anyone being adopted into the royal family is slim to none.

Not so with the Royal Family of God. The Bible states that all of those in God's family are adopted as a son or daughter through Jesus Christ. The choice was made before the world was created ([Ephesians 1:4-5](#)). All in God's family are heirs of Him and fellow heirs with Christ. All are one in Christ ([Galatians 3:28](#)). All are blood relatives because of the blood of the Lord Jesus.

And by the way, an heir is one who is a recipient, a beneficiary, of all the privileges and rights in his or her family. Therefore, the three main points in this message are that those in God's family are heirs with Christ because they are:

- Living and led by the Spirit
- Adopted as children by God
- Witnessing, suffering and glorified with Jesus

Living and Led by the Spirit

The apostle Paul assured Christians in Rome, and us, that if Christ is in you, so is the Holy Spirit ([Romans 8:1-11](#)). His indwelling means no longer living according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. There's no condemnation in the Spirit; there is life and peace. Believers have a new nature, which transforms lives, as Pastor Dan preached last week.

Now, Paul turns to what it means to be heirs with Christ ([Romans 8:12-17](#)). A fellow heir with Christ is living in the Spirit and led by the Spirit, not by the flesh. Living and led by the Spirit implies doing what He instructs, exemplifying His integrity and exalting Christ above all else. This can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who indeed brothers and sisters in the Lord are indebted to ([Romans 8:12](#)).

In this first century context, a debt often bound another person to serve the one to whom the debt was owed until it was paid off. But for the believer, our debt to Christ is different. Even though He paid for every sin we will every commit, and every wayward thought, along with our very sin nature, we don't owe Him anything. Instead, we are bound to Him in love, captives of His grace, wrapped up in His mercy, and secured by His faithfulness. That's the good news message of the cross, which is the gospel.

Since the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of a new life in Christ ([2 Corinthians 1:21-22](#)), to be living and led by the Spirit is to walk in the Spirit. Here's [Galatians 5:25](#).

If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

[Gal 5:25](#) (ESV)

Now living and walking requires action. When our doctor instructs us to walk for the benefit of our life, our response should be to take action and walk. Likewise when the Holy Spirit gives instruction, action is required in order to do what He says to do.

There's an account in the Bible of a man named Philip ([Acts 8:4-8](#) and [Acts 8:26-40](#)). Philip was one of the original seven men chosen to serve the church, what we would now call deacons. When the Spirit told Philip to go over and join the chariot of an Ethiopian eunuch, Philip **ran** to him ([Acts 8:29](#)). He told the eunuch the good news about Jesus, the eunuch believed in the Lord, then he was baptized by Philip. Now, that's a zealotry to live and walk by the Spirit.

One of the core values at La Crescent Evangelical Free Church (LEFC) is that the church is led by the Holy Spirit. Living, led and walking by the Spirit requires action. As ambassadors for Christ ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#)), we are to proclaim the good news of the gospel, just as Philip did with the Ethiopian eunuch.

How zealous are we at LEFC to be living, led, and walking by the Spirit? When the Spirit says "go", do we spring into action? Are we "running" to tell others who Jesus is? If not, we're in effect quenching and grieving the Spirit ([1 Thessalonians 5:19](#) and [Ephesians 4:30](#)).

There's another important aspect of living, led and walking by the Spirit. Here's [Galatians 5:16](#).

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

[Gal 5:16](#) (ESV)

In the various translations of the Bible, walking by the Spirit is defined as to keep in step, follow, or surrender. Those words imply a humble submission to the Spirit. However, our flesh, the world and the devil would rather we walk in the flesh and gratify the desires of the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh are opposed to each other ([Galatians 5:17](#)). There is truly a "war within", as Pastor Dan preached about a couple of weeks ago ([Romans 7:21-25](#)).

This "war within" is fought on the battlefield of our hearts. For example, when my eyes fixate on the pretty girl jogging in her tight-fitting T-shirt and short-shorts, I'm gratifying the desires of the flesh. In fact, Jesus says that I've committed adultery in my heart when I look upon a woman with lustful intent ([Matthew 5:28](#)). When my critical spirit rises up and I bad-mouth others, it's because my heart is deceitful and sick ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)). I'm walking in the flesh and not the Spirit. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death ([Romans 7:24](#))?

The answer to that question is the Lord Jesus Christ. As fellow heirs with Christ, living and led by the Spirit means that the deeds of the body have to be put to death ([Romans 8:13](#)). It means shoveling dirt onto the grave of those deeds, those actions, those things that entangle us in sin. According to Scripture, deeds of the body are earthly things in you and me: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Put them all to death ([Colossians 3:5](#)).

Here's the thing, though. Try as we might, putting to death the deeds of the body is impossible without the work of the Holy Spirit. It's the same way in other areas of the Christian life too. If the Holy Spirit isn't working in evangelism, people aren't saved. If the Holy Spirit hasn't inspired the preaching of God's Word, the sermon is just a bunch of words. If the Holy Spirit isn't in LEFC's vision to plant local churches, there won't be any church planting.

So, the question is: Do we really want to have victory in Jesus? Are we serious about putting to death the sin in our lives? Or would we rather make peace with our sin? Would we rather be the pig going back to the sty or the dog going back to his vomit?

As heirs with Christ, to be living and led by the Spirit is to have victory over sin; it's an authentic signature of faith in Jesus. In addition, there's a wonderful privilege that messed up people like you and me have as heirs with Christ: We are adopted into God's family as His very own sons and daughters.

Adopted as Children by God

To be living and led by the Holy Spirit is to receive adoption as children of God ([Romans 8:14](#)). No more children of wrath dead in sin, but sons and daughters of the living God dead to sin. Adoption into God's family is certainly a high privilege, even higher than salvation in Christ. Wait a minute! What did you say? Yes, adoption as a son or daughter of the Living God is a higher privilege than salvation in Christ.

J.I. Packer, noted author and theologian, writes this in his book, *Knowing God*. "To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater."

Indeed, adoption is greater than salvation. That's because God's supreme love for His adopted sons and daughters involves a deep, abiding, intimate and everlasting relationship. Justification, which is being made right with God through faith in Christ, is certainly great. However, adoption by the Spirit implies an even greater, more tender, love. Why? Because an heir of God, fellow heirs with Christ, children of the Spirit, have the privilege to call God - Abba, Father, Daddy. Here's [Galatians 4:6-7](#).

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. [Gal 4:6-7](#) (ESV)

If you're an adopted son or daughter in God's family, you can cry out, "Daddy help me." In the Spirit, you have the Wonderful Counselor, Perfect Helper and Caring Intercessor. You can't go back to who you once were. Why would you? You're in Christ. You're free. And if the Son has set you free, you are free indeed ([John 8:36](#)). Truly, there is no need to fear falling back into the slavery of sin. Yet, we can give in to sin. Sin is enticing. Falling back into the slavery of sin can be so subtle. It's like when I visit my family in North Carolina. The longer I stay there, the thicker my Southern drawl becomes and I don't even notice it.

Since all of us are descendants of Adam, we're all born sinners. Our biggest problem is sin. If you haven't received God's rich mercy and great love through trusting Christ, then you're

dead in your sins, a follower of Satan, a child of wrath. All of that could change today. Right now, turn to Jesus. He is able to change everything for His glory and for your eternal good. No longer dead in sin, but alive together with Christ. No longer a follower of the devil, but a follower of Christ. No longer a child of wrath, but a child of God. Whose child are you today?

And what about those of us who have been trusting Jesus, perhaps for decades? Are we still embracing the good news of the gospel with joy? Does it make a difference in the routine, perhaps mundane, day-to-day life that we've been made alive together with Christ? Do we realize as heirs of Christ that we are seated as His child in the heavenly places, a place that only a son or daughter of the King has the privilege to sit?

In Scripture, there's an account of King David showing kindness to Mephibosheth, the grandson of David's enemy, King Saul ([2 Samuel 9](#)). In the Near East culture, the reigning king had every right to kill all of those related to his enemies. Mephibosheth deserved death. Yet, King David in his mercy and grace received him into the family as a son, to sit at the king's table. Once an enemy, now a son always seated with the king.

For those in Christ, we are to see ourselves as Mephibosheth. Once an enemy of God, but now an adopted son or a daughter seated with King Jesus. That's a picture of the grace, mercy and love that's found only in Christ. He's the King of kings and Lord of lords. Yet, through Him, we get to call God our Abba, Father, and Daddy. Now I realize there are bad, bad earthly fathers. But God is the good, good heavenly Father. His Spirit is always accessible to help, guide and comfort.

Tim Keller, pastor, theologian and author says this about having access to King Jesus, "The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 a.m. for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access."

Adoption into God's family is permanent. Nothing can change that ([John 10:28](#) and [Romans 8:38-39](#)). Once a child of God, always a child of God. This position of sonship can't be messed up. Even on our worst day, our standing as sons and daughters in Christ never changes. And so we are witnesses that if a child of God, then an heir of God, and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Witnessing, Suffering and Glorified with Jesus

Notice here in the text that the Holy Spirit Himself bears witness with the spirit of the sons and daughters adopted into God's family. In effect, there's a "double witnessing" of the truth that those in Christ are children of God ([Romans 8:16](#)).

Keep in mind that a witness, such as in a court room, testifies to what is true. In the same way, the Holy Spirit, and those in Christ, testify or bear witness to the truth that sons and daughters of God are blood-bought, Spirit-wrought, children of the Father. There's a familial relationship here that's crystallized by the love of God for those who belong to Him. Here's [Romans 5:5](#).

...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. [Romans 5:5](#) (ESV)

The witness of the Spirit, and those in Christ, proclaim the truth that the depth, width, breadth and height of the love of God is the same for all of His children. As Charles Spurgeon, well-known preacher in England during the 1800's said, "...God our heavenly Father has the same tender heart for all." In fact, God's tender love for His children is the same love that He has for the Lord Jesus. You're probably saying, "Wait a minute. Is that correct?" Yes, that's correct. God's love for His Son, Jesus, is the same for each and every one of His children. Here's [John 17:23](#).

I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

[John 17:23](#) (ESV)

Because believers in Christ are a child of God, then we're also heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Heirs of what? Everything that Jesus is. Who is He? He is the greatest Treasure! He is the ultimate Prize! He is the Elder Brother. He is the great I Am. He is the Good Shepherd. He is All in All. Everything that is the Person of Jesus Christ, is who the believer is in Him, including suffering.

Now wait a minute! I didn't sign up for suffering. Please, no suffering. But the verse says that "we are fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." ([Romans 8:17](#)) What's that all about?

Suffering is the bitter side of God's providence. God ordains suffering as a wake-up call to the reality of our desperate need for His grace and mercy, and the hideous and horrible curse of sin. John Piper, author, pastor, and founder of Desiring God ministries said it well, "All human suffering is a screaming witness to the horror of human sin." Whether you're a believer or an unbeliever, it's not a matter of "if", but "when" suffering will come.

In 1997, my brother-in-law, Sam, was shot and killed right outside of his house. There was much suffering, especially for his wife and three children, following his death. Just as it was then, and is now, the pain of suffering and the sting of death is real. Just look at people's faces in the war between Russian and Ukraine; listen to the voices of suffering in cancer, Alzheimer's, or depression.

When suffering comes, there's one of two things we'll choose to do. Either we cry out ***against*** God in anger and frustration, questioning His faithfulness with "How could this be happening? Why me?" Or we cry out ***to*** Him as "Abba, Father, Daddy", trusting that He is walking through the suffering, trouble and trials with us.

Here's an important point. The Bible doesn't sugar coat suffering or sweep it under the rug. King David suffered; the apostle Paul suffered; the Lord Jesus suffered. And the Lord suffered, died and was resurrected for sinners so that those who are fellow heirs with Him would be glorified with Him. That's a promise guaranteed by the Holy Spirit.

Yes, heirs with Christ have the wonderful promise that one day, one glorious day, faith will become sight. Jesus will take His adopted sons and daughters home to be with Him forever. On

that day, all of the family of God from every tribe, tongue, people and nation will be gathered together around His throne. Here's [Philippians 3:20-21](#).

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[Phil 3:20-21](#) (ESV)

Conclusion

Where is your eternal citizenship? Either you're a citizen of heaven or hell. You're either in the Royal Family of God, or in the fallen family of the devil. That may sound like foolishness or be offensive to some of you. But then the word of the cross, the gospel, is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#)).

God is the Father of children who are fellow heirs with Christ. His sons and daughters are indebted to Him for their adoption; they have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; they suffer in this world, but these sufferings cannot be compared to the glory that is to be revealed ([Romans 8:18](#)). We'll probably hear about that next week with Pastor Dan.

On the other hand, children of God's wrath, who don't have the Holy Spirit, are in the fallen family of the father of lies, the devil. He is a thief, who comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy. His children are heirs to an eternal hell where there is conscious torment and suffering forever.

In closing, I want to ask this question: Who's your daddy? My prayer is that you would answer with a bended knee and bowed head in adoration, not condemnation. My hope is that the Holy Spirit is your Counselor, that your Daddy is the Living God, and that your Elder Brother is the Lord Jesus, the One who is able to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy ([Jude 24](#)). Hallelujah! What a Savior! Amen.