

Romans 8:12-17
“Assurance of Sonship”

Introduction:

In the beginning of this chapter, Paul stressed that living a truly righteous life in God’s sight is made possible by having one’s mind and heart focused on the leading of God’s Spirit, rather than on the impulses of our flesh (vs.4-5). Then Paul went on to write that in fact it is impossible to genuinely please God unless one has the Spirit of God dwelling inside them (vs.8). Then Paul reminded the believers at Rome that because of their faith in Christ, they possessed God’s Spirit who had given them spiritual life and who would in the future resurrect them to immortal physical life (vs.9-11).

Here in this passage, Paul built on these ideas by teaching these believers that since they were dependent upon God’s Spirit to give them eternal life, it is logical then that the outward evidence of that eternal life would be living in harmony with the leading of God’s Spirit.

I. The Statement of the Doctrine: (vs.12-13)

Paul opened up this passage by writing, *“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh”* (vs.12). The Greek word translated as *“debtors”* refers to one who owes either money or something else of value to another person or is for some reason is bound to perform some duty for someone else. The indebtedness referred to here is the obligation to live according to the pattern set by the one to whom the debt is owed; in this case it is framed in the negative, that we owe no debt to the flesh. Paul’s point is that it would be contradictory for the believer to live according to the flesh when we have been delivered specifically from the flesh by the Spirit of God. The flesh is where the law of sin and death resides and dominates. It would be absurd for those who are indwelt by the Spirit of God to yield obedience and service to that from which we have been set free. There is a logical connection here back to the previous passage (5-11), namely that since we are not of the flesh we are therefore not under its tyranny or dominion and don’t have to live according to its dictates. In this way the verse is making a similar point to what Paul wrote a couple of chapters earlier (6:1-11). In fact Paul goes even further and argues that for a believer to live as though they were obligated to obey the dictates of the flesh, is to live a life that is a contradiction to what it means to be a Christian.

The NKJV translation suggests that Paul was expressing that though we are not in debt to the flesh, we are under obligation to obedience to the Spirit because of our redemption. And because of this, there are a number of interpreters who argue that this is specifically what Paul was saying. This conclusion is based on the assumption that there is an unstated corollary between the Spirit and the flesh that is to be understood by the reader. However, this conclusion is contrary to the wording that Paul chose when he wrote this sentence, under the inspiration of God’s Spirit. Paul was not expressing that believers are to pursue righteousness out of

indebtedness to God's Spirit. The Holman Christian Standard provides a better rendering of this verse, one that reflects what Paul actually meant:

“So then, brothers, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh”

Paul was simply stressing that since the Spirit set believers free from the dominion of the flesh, believers should no longer choose to live life according to the dictates of the flesh. Rather than expressing the perspective that some sin is inevitable in the Christian's life this passage expresses that sin is abnormal and irrational for a child of God. To say this does not mean that Christians don't sin, it simply reflects the NT emphasis upon the normality of righteousness in the life of the Christian. In some circles the Christian's imperfection is stressed so much it becomes an excuse for easily giving in to temptation. Here Paul was trying to encourage just the opposite. The conviction that God's Spirit is in us to enable us to live righteous lives, and that because of this we have a great capacity for success.

Next, Paul wrote, *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die”* (vs.13a). It is helpful to recognize that when Paul used the phrase *“live according to the flesh”* it harkens back to verse five where Paul wrote about the pattern of life that characterizes those who are not redeemed. Though Paul here switches to the use of the second person pronoun, in this case it still carries an indefinite sense. He was articulating a general principle that applies to everyone and not merely a reference to the believers to whom Paul was writing. Paul was saying that death is the necessary consequence of living by the flesh (i.e. a sure effect of that given cause). Therefore, he was not saying that a saint who commits a particular sin will lose eternal life. Rather, that a pattern of life characterized by sin will inevitably result in eternal death because such a life indicates that one has not been born again.

Paul then wrote, *“but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (vs.13b). This is the corollary to what he had just written in the previous clause. That in contrast to how a generally sinful life results in eternal death, a life characterized by resisting sin will result in eternal life. The body here is used in a synonymous way with the word *“flesh”*. The life to which God calls us is not possible if we indulge the deeds of the body (Gal.5 & Col.3). Instead, believers must renounce these deeds as incompatible with our life in Christ. Therefore, Paul was expressing another contrast to clarify how the path of life for a believer is distinct from what characterizes the rest of humanity. The wording is interesting because in the contrast Paul basically said that either a person is putting to death the deeds of the flesh, or the deeds of the flesh will put the person to death. It is clear that here, death is to be understood in its broadest scope including eternal separation from God. However, it is important to understand that putting sin to death is something that the believer is to do, rather than something that God does for us. The believer's union with Christ in His death, frees us from the dominion of sin, and this in turn makes it possible for a believer to suppress the sinful tendencies that are aroused in one's flesh. But this is something the individual must consciously choose to do. It is not so much that we are given strength to be holy on our own; instead, the idea that we make choices and act in dependence upon the Spirit of God

who is working in and through us. By understanding it in this way we are incorporating two Biblical truisms in regard to mortification of sin. First, it is the believer's responsibility to do this. Second, it is something that can only be accomplished by the power of God's Spirit. Therefore, success is not achieved by one's willpower alone. It is helpful to understand that this admonition to put the deeds of the body to death is equivalent to what Paul wrote earlier, reckoning oneself to be dead to sin (6:11). Mortification is a metaphorical idea, based on the literal idea of putting a person to death. The principle inherent in this is that death takes away sin's vigor, energy, and ability to act. Therefore, in this metaphor, sin is viewed like a person (i.e. the old man) whom one must kill in self-defense, and in defense of those one might sin against.

This imagery suggests that practical holiness involves our complete rejection of those things which God defines as sin. This involves human effort, but it is never exercised alone, but in harmony with God's Spirit. God in a sense has taken possession of us and by the impulses of His Spirit, informed by His Word, we say yes to Him while denying the impulses of the flesh with the aid of the Spirit. Mortification of sin is more than resistance to sin; it is choosing not to allow anything sinful to have any place in one's life; not even allowing oneself to entertain the idea of doing them in one's mind. Since the Greek word translated as "*you put to death*" is in the present tense, it indicates that this is a continuous process.

II. The Explanation of the Doctrine: (vs.14-17)

In verse fourteen Paul wrote:

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

Paul began this verse, with the conjunction "*for*", which indicates that what Paul wrote in this verse explains and justifies the conclusion he expressed in verse thirteen. The emphasis in the imagery here is upon the activity of the Holy Spirit and the passivity of the individual. Therefore, in these verses we see the synergistic nature of sanctification. We make choices based upon God's leadings and promptings and then go forward by His power. He is the initiator we are the responders. The words "*as many as*" indicates the extent of those who fall within a given set; therefore, in effect, Paul was referring to "*everyone who is led by the Spirit of God*". Therefore, what follows is a statement about a universal distinction that characterizes regarding those who "*are led by the Spirit*", that they are "*sons of God*". The Greek word translated as "*led*" means to bring or conduct someone from one place to another as either a guide, an attendant, or as a keeper (as with an animal). This term is used in the following verses which illustrate the meaning of this word:

*"They brought the donkey and the colt,
laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them."*

Matthew 21:7

*“And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and **brought** him to the council.”*

Acts 6:12

*“So those who **conducted** Paul brought him to Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed.”*

Acts 17:15

*“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God **leads** you to repentance?”*

Romans 2:4

Since the verb translated as “*led*” is in the passive voice, Paul was saying that it is the Spirit who does the leading, and who takes the Christian in the direction, which the Spirit chooses. Further, the use of present tense indicates that this is an ongoing reality, something which is to be continually characteristic of a believer. The stress in this context does not seem to favor the idea of being guided day by day, but rather the stress is upon the overall direction of one’s life being set by the Spirit. In other words that one’s pattern of behavior is governed or controlled by the Spirit’s direction. This leading does not make us God’s sons; rather it distinguishes us or identifies us as His sons. But how does God do this? Not apart from us or against our desires, but rather as we cooperate with the impulses the Spirit arouses within us. Therefore, the believer’s part is to consciously turn away from the impulses of the flesh and focus one’s attention upon the things we are called to do in Scripture. In addition, one is not to feed one’s lusts but instead deny them satisfaction and any place in one’s heart and life (Rom.13:14). In context, the primary sense in which the Spirit leads the believer here is in regard to the mortification of sin. The way this sentence as a whole is structured conveys that it expresses a basic parallel; meaning that to be led by the Spirit is equivalent to being a genuine son of God. The use of the third person indicates that this expresses a general truism, rather than one that relates to only specific individuals (such as the saints in Rome). The antecedent for the demonstrative pronoun “*these*” is “*as many as are led by the Spirit of God*” indicated by the plural subject built into the verb. This pronoun (*these*) grammatically expresses the equivalence between the two clauses. When Paul wrote that it is characteristic of believers to be guided by God’s Spirit he was describing precisely what Jesus said would take place in the lives of His disciples after His departure from them:

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you.”

John 16:13-14

But this raises a practical question, precisely what does it mean to be “*led*” by the Spirit? How does one know if in fact they are truly being led by the Spirit as

opposed to their own inclinations or by false impressions of what a person assumes God wants? Unfortunately, a lot of misleading material has been written about how we are to live out the Christian life by the power of God's Spirit. Quite a large number of believers, whether they know it or not, are influenced by what is called "*higher life*" teaching. It was a movement that grew out of a desire to see real godliness among God's people. This goal of course was a worthy one, however a number of the ideas advanced by this movement are false. A significant portion of the errant teaching of this movement relates to how we are to understand the question that is before us here. The answer that higher life teachers give is that the leading of the Holy Spirit comes in the form of subjective impressions within one's heart, impressions that are quite specific, but which are not verifiable by any external source. That idea is a spiritually dangerous distortion of Paul's teachings.

What Paul had in mind here is drastically different than what higher life teachers have led many to believe. First, it should be noted that the context of this verse makes it clear that we can understand being led by the Spirit to be the opposite of following the inclinations of our flesh (8:4-5). The core problem of the flesh is that by nature it is rebellious to the Law of God (not just to the Law of Moses, but generally to all of God's ethical instructions-8:7). Therefore, since to follow the Spirit is contrary to following the inclinations of the flesh, to be led by the Spirit is to live in obedience to God's ethical instruction in Scripture. In the passage cited above (John 16:12-13), Jesus specifically told His disciples that the Spirit would not speak some new revelation but would guide believers according to the words of Christ. These words are what we have in Scripture. Therefore, being led by the Spirit is being empowered by the Spirit to obey the objective Word of God which we find in the Scriptures, and in this way, we are guided to live a righteous life. Paul then added that those who are led by the Spirit of God "*are*" sons of God. Since it is in the present tense, it therefore indicates not only a current state of reality but an ongoing one as well. The ones led by God's Spirit are now, and will continue to be "*sons of God*". It is important to note that Paul teaches us here that the leading of God's Spirit is *evidence* that we are God's sons, which is radically different than saying that the leading of the Spirit *causes* one to be God's sons. This subtle nuance is throughout the New Testament. The truth is that placing our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation results in a changed life. A changed life does not result in meriting eternal life. The latter is a heresy that Paul refuted earlier in this letter. In this verse believers are referred to as "*sons of God*", while in verse sixteen they are referred to as "*children of God*". These two expressions seem to be used here interchangeably with no significant difference intended between them.

But what would the expression "*sons of God*" have meant to Paul's original readers? This expression was only used five times in the Old Testament (Gen.6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7), and in several of those, the title referred to angelic beings. It is true that the Old Testament does teach that Yahweh was a father to Israel, but only in a collective national sense (Isaiah 63:16), and this is the sense in which the expression was used in Genesis chapter six. God's people, being referred to as individual "*sons of God*", is a New Testament concept. This is because New

Testament believers are children of God in a more intimate sense than Old Testament believers were. The key to understanding the development of this doctrine is to see that at first the expression “*Son of God*” was applied to Christ as the only genuine Son of God. Some among the original audience, when they first heard this title, thought that the title conveyed the idea of Him being physically generated by God, which is why, when they heard it, they regarded it as blasphemous heresy.

“The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.’”

John 19:7

However, they misunderstood the meaning of the title, it was meant to convey that a particular person had a special relationship with God, that they belonged to Him in a way that no everyone does. When applied to Christ it was primarily a messianic title, and it was rooted in the idea that the king of Israel (as the Messiah was destined to be) was a representative of God on earth and was to be closely identified with God. This title was then applied to those who were followers of Christ, because they possessed a special relationship with God because of their union with Christ (6:3-5). This expression speaks of a real family relationship that exists between God and those who are His. In the teaching of Christ we see that this creates an incredible distinction between those who are Christians and those who are not. Jesus revealed that fallen humanity possesses a different lineage:

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me; for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word. You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.’”

(John 8:42-44)

Of course, this does not mean that we should think of ourselves as little gods. The title does not describe our nature (as if we become what God is), rather it describes the relationship that exists between us and God (a relationship that we possess only because of our union with Christ). Elsewhere Paul wrote:

“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”

Galatians 4:6

This verse in Galatians is clearly parallel to 8:15 and it makes clear that the “*spirit*” who prompts us to call God our Father is the Holy Spirit. It is because of this, that the third person of the Trinity is also called the Spirit of adoption because it is God

through His Spirit who creates within the believer the filial love which the utterance above expresses.

As Paul continues his train of thought he wrote, “*for you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear*” (vs.15a). The question is just how does this assertion fit into the argument of this chapter? It is helpful to note that from the perspective of the Old Testament, the messianic age would bring an even greater deliverance than the exodus from Egypt. In fact, the exodus prefigured this messianic deliverance (Isa.31:4-5). The expression “*spirit of bondage*” reflects an interpretive choice on the part of the translators of the NKJV. The Greek language of Paul’s time did not employ upper case letters to distinguish a proper noun from a common noun. Therefore, when the text contains the Greek word for “*spirit*” (pneuma) the word itself could refer to a characteristic element of a thing, to a human spirit, or to the person of the Holy Spirit. The question then is, did the translators of the NKJV make the correct interpretive choice in regard to how they rendered the word “*pneuma*” here? All major English translations render the phrase the same as NKJV, conveying that Paul was saying that Christians did not receive an orientation to bondage and fear. However, since this whole passage is about the Holy Spirit, it should be assumed that unless there is a qualification that makes it clear that the word “*pneuma*” should be taken in a different sense in a particular clause, that the default should be to conclude that “*pneuma*” refers to the person of the Holy Spirit. Since there is nothing in this verse to imply that a different sense of the word is meant here (as there is in the next verse) Paul was saying that the Spirit of God does not make us slaves, rather he makes us sons. The use of the word “*again*” indicates that we do not experience a return to a similar situation that we had under the law and sin. Regarding the idea of bondage, it is interesting to note that though here we are told that we are not slaves, elsewhere Paul says that in another sense we are in fact in a kind of slavery. Therefore, we need to understand how are we to harmonize this seeming contradiction? Paul himself earlier provided the answer concerning how we are to do this:

“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?”

Romans 6:16

“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.”

Romans 6:19

“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.”

Romans 7:6

In these verses Paul stated that one is a slave to the one whom he/she chooses to obey. In our pre-conversion days we were slaves to sin and wickedness, but since coming to Christ we have been freed from that previous bondage so that we can choose to instead serve God. The practical expression of this freedom is that we serve God in response to the leading of the Spirit, rather than by obedience to the written code of the Mosaic Law. The contradiction therefore disappears when we realize that Paul was saying that we are no longer bound against our will to serve sin but have been empowered to freely choose to be a slave to God and holiness, because we want to be like the God who loves us.

Paul wrote that the work of the Spirit within the believer does not result in fear. The “*fear*” Paul was referring to is the fear of eschatological judgment. Under the law, there was the fear of facing condemnation because the law revealed us to be sinners. Since the Spirit indwells us in light of our having received forgiveness for our sins, this is not a fear that results from the work of God’s Spirit within a believer. The sort of fear that is characteristic of the believer is a reverential awe of God’s majesty and holiness. The fear that is referred to here and in other places as being uncharacteristic of a believer is a servile fear wherein the individual is concerned that God will do him/her harm and that is a result of the natural man’s distrust of and alienation from God.

The next question is, what does the expression “*Spirit of adoption*” mean (vs.15)? The contrast between bondage and adoption expresses the distinction between the relationship we formerly had with sin under the law, and the one we now have with God, which He has established with us through the work of Christ and the Spirit. We are children who are loved and not slaves under a harsh master (as we were with sin). The concept of adoption was unknown among the Jews; but was particularly common in the Roman world. It was a legal institution by which a person could adopt a child and confer on that child all the legal rights and privileges that would accrue to a natural child. In fact in the Roman world an adopted son was understood to have been deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate. Such a son was not inferior to one born into the household, but gained the role because he was already favored by the father who adopted him. Part of the background to the idea of adoption is that one would not enter into the full benefits of one’s sonship until one became of legal age. In a sense this period of our existence is like the adolescence of an adopted Roman son, where we are not yet enjoying the full benefits of our redemption. Roman adoption could take place at any age and it cancelled any and all previous debts and relationships so that the new son was defined exclusively according to the new relationship he possessed with his father.

Paul then wrote “*by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’*” (vs.15c). The pronoun “*whom*” referred back to the Spirit of adoption. The expression “*cry out*” is a translation of a Greek term that basically refers to speaking or expressing something loudly with passion or urgency. Therefore, the word can refer to a scream, a shriek, a yell, or a loud call. Some have suggested that it is an expression of overwhelming joy (I Peter 1:8). However it is most likely referring to urgent and

heartfelt prayer. This term is used repeatedly in the Septuagint translation of the Psalms to capture this idea. In referring to Spirit motivated prayer, Paul chose to include the Aramaic term “*abba*” rather than simply using the Greek word for “*Father*”. Nowhere else in the letter did Paul insert an Aramaic term. The question is, why did he do this here? Some suggest that Paul inserted this word to stress the idea that the Spirit enables us to have an intimate relationship with God. This conclusion is based on the popular idea that “*abba*” is equivalent to the English term “*daddy*” as expressed affectionately by a small child. However, research shows that this term was not limited in use to only children or to expressions of endearment. It is true that the word can convey love and intimacy; however, in Roman culture, the father would also be accorded significant respect and obedience, and the term is used in some non-Biblical writings where this latter idea is prominent. This means that the term does not specifically convey intimacy or tenderness. Another suggestion is that Paul wrote “*father*” in two languages because of the different ethnicities to which he was writing. The problem with that suggestion is that if this was necessary to understand a basic term like father, then how would his Aramaic readers possibly understand Paul when he wrote about the more complex theological ideas that are found throughout this letter (none of which are written in Aramaic). Still others have suggested that Paul used the dual reference for emphasis. This is a difficult suggestion to accept as well because Paul does not employ Aramaic terms elsewhere for emphasis (assuming doing so would even be understood as emphasis in that culture – something that is not at all clear from linguistic studies). Though it is impossible to be certain, the best suggestion is that this Aramaic term may have become popular among early Christians because it came from the lips of Jesus Himself. It was the title He personally used to address God. Paul may have wanted to equate the words of Jesus with an expression stimulated by the Spirit of God. To address God as “*Father*” is common in the modern world. However, among Jews in the first century this was not so. Though in prayers Jew did refer to God as their father in a collective sense, they did not use this title in an individual sense as it would have been considered presumptuous to say God was one’s father. Therefore, the idea here is that addressing God in this way is a privilege that belongs to God’s people alone.

Next, Paul elaborated on the Spirit generated relationship that believers have with God. He wrote, “*the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*” (vs.16). The first step in interpreting this verse is figuring out what sort of grammatical construction Paul used in the initial clause. There are two possibilities:

1. It might be conveying an instrumental sense (meaning the Spirit of God bears witness along with our spirit)
2. It might contain an indirect object (meaning the Spirit of God bears witness to our spirit)

If it is instrumental, then it means that our spirit also gives voice to the testimony that we are God’s children as a result of His work within our hearts. However,

there are better reasons for understanding the reference as an indirect object. The way this term was used in the context carries more of an intensifying sense. Also there does not seem to be any sense in which our spirits could add any additional legitimacy to the Spirit's testimony that we are in fact God's children. The next interpretive matter is understanding what Paul was implying regarding the manner in which the Spirit of God bears witness to our spirit? One popular idea is that Paul is referring here to a non-verbal impression that the Spirit creates in the mind of the saint. If this was what Paul was conveying, then he would be saying that the Spirit of God mystically imparts direct propositional revelation to the individual saint. However, nowhere in the New Testament are we ever taught that God's Spirit objectively and directly speaks to us, nor are we ever encouraged to expect and respond to subjective impressions that come into our mind. This sort of notion is spiritually dangerous. For it leaves us no certain way to distinguish between what is the voice of the Spirit, and what are the thoughts of one's own mind. Instead, the idea is that the Spirit of God brings to our minds the words of Scripture that are applicable to the matter at hand (in this case, to the question of the genuineness of our conversion). Understanding the verse in this way allows us to harmonize what is said here with how Jesus described the ministry of the Spirit to His disciples (Jn.16:13). The sort of witnessing that Paul had in mind here was conveying to another what one knows from what one has seen or heard. Because this is forensic language borrowed from the practice of law, where evidence is given by those who know the truth of what happened. In Roman law an adoption required witnesses and Paul wrote here that in a similar way, the Holy Spirit gives testimony to the reality of our adoption into God's family. The following verses are further examples of the Spirit's witness:

“who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them”
Romans 2:15

“I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit”
Romans 9:1.

Earlier in the letter, Paul wrote *“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”* This verse would seem to suggest that the Spirit testifies to the believer's soul in order to give assurance of God's love. That we call upon God as our Father rests upon the prior reality that God Himself, by His Spirit, has assured us that this is true. But how can a person discern between the genuine experience of God's witness to one's rebirth and a false assurance that comes from one's own heart? The answer is that the testimony of the Spirit will always harmonize with the testimony of Scripture. And the true witness of the Spirit will be supported by the evidence of a changed life (vs.13).

Paul mentions the witness of the Spirit because the underlying assurance that one is truly redeemed is essential to maintaining one's focus on the things of the Spirit, rather than the things of the flesh.

Paul, continuing in the same train of thought, wrote, "*and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*" (vs.17a). Since God does not die the reference to inheritance does not have the usual sense. To modern ears, the reference to being heirs and gaining an inheritance from God sounds strange, because in our culture, one only inherits from a person's estate when that person has died. Since God can never die, in what way do we inherit things from Him? The answer is to understand that in analogies, there is not always a perfect correspondence between a metaphor and the literal thing that it is likened to. The main idea is that those who are God's children will gain a share in what belongs to God. Elsewhere the content of the inheritance is described as eternal life, and the kingdom of God. Therefore, the emphasis upon the privileged position that Christians have, that when they reach maturity as adult sons (at the full consummation of our salvation) we will fully share in God's wealth. Paul's point was that Christians are now heirs of God, who will inherit everything promised by God to those who are His children. The fact that we are joint-heirs with Christ is a reminder that we only enjoy this divine inheritance through Him as a gift of God's grace. Some have suggested that the inheritance is God Himself. Though there is a sense in which fellowship with God will be the richest part of our eternal reward; it is difficult to demonstrate that this is what Paul had in mind here. The Old Testament referred to the inheritance of the land as Israel's inheritance (Deut.26:1), and the NT counterpart seems to be gaining the possession of the renewed earth and citizenship in the Kingdom of God (Col.1:12; II Pet.3:13). It is helpful to remember that Abraham was to inherit the world by faith (Rom.4:13).

Paul continued with the thought of the believer's inheritance by adding, "*if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*" (vs.17b). The Greek word translated as "*suffer with*" means to share the same experience of suffering with someone else, or to be affected in the same way as someone else by a similar type of suffering. If we compare this passage to others we find in the NT, we discover that the idea seems to be that God uses suffering to further the death of the old person and the enhancement of the new creation:

"always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body...Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

II Corinthians 4:10, 16-18

It is evident that these believers were suffering for Christ. Therefore some explanation was necessary in order to explain that suffering in light of Paul's

instruction that they were heirs of God's promised blessings. It is taught in many places in the NT that God's redemptive work in our lives requires a refining process (I Pet.1:6-7), and that this refining is accomplished through experiential suffering. In a similar way to how Christ's suffering redeemed us, our temporal suffering advances God's sanctifying purpose in our souls. Therefore, the suffering referred to here is that which results from one's faithfulness to Christ in a world that does not acknowledge Him as lord. He was not really referring to the suffering caused by our sins or foolish choices. The language of joint suffering and exaltation are further elaborations upon our union with Christ and our participation in all He has done and achieved. Paul makes it clear that there is no sharing in Christ's glory if we do not share in His sufferings. Suffering is the designated path to glory and any other path will not lead a person to share in Christ's glory. This Greek word is another compound word that means (as the English translation suggests) to be glorified with another, or to share in that same experience with them. But what is glorification? Glorification is equated with the final and full redemption of our bodies (vs.23), which suits the believer for their eternal dwelling in the presence of God. Of course only believers experience this particular transformation. So, glorification is synonymous with what Paul describes elsewhere as taking on immortality (I Cor.15:53). The following verses flesh out with more detail what Paul was describing in this verse and when it takes place:

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Romans 8:30

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Philippians 3:20-21

Theologically, glorification is the final step in the application of redemption, wherein Christ raises the believer's body from the dead and reunites it with their spirit. In this process God transforms the bodies of all believers into perfect reflections of Christ's own glorified body; so we are fitted to our eternal existence. The root word for glorification means splendor or a bright luminescence. The idea is to shine a light upon someone in the sense of giving them honor, recognition, and praise; in order to make known their worth, accomplishments, or excellence.

Conclusion:

The idea of the believer's ultimate glorification is meant to enable the believer to persevere through suffering, so that it does not cause one to cease living with a focus on spiritual things rather than on the lusts of our flesh.