

The Motivating Affection of Sonship(Rom 8.14-17)

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Introduction

We talked last time about the "how tos" of putting the misdeeds of the body to death. I suggested five things: 1) consider the consequence of sin, eternal death, and the death of Christ, 2) identify these misdeeds by making lists of representative sins, which aid us in our tendencies of self-deceit, 3) persist in doing good, trample the misdeeds to death by good deeds; present yourselves as slaves to righteousness, 4) study the law as summarized in the 10 words for definition of good deeds, and 5) trust the Holy Spirit to do His efficacious work as you patiently obey His words and follow in His steps. In the "dry spells" of your walk, continue to work as you wait upon the Lord for renewal of strength. Note the conjunction of work *and* wait under the umbrella of faith.

Today I would like to look further in the context of Romans 8 for the positive motivation Paul gives that moves us to fulfill this obligation to the Spirit. This positive motivation is the life we have in our childship to God (**vs. 14-17**). It is *a motivating affection* as much as it is a privileged position.

1A. The context of the motivating affection of sonship

1) This motivation is an expansion on one of three reasons given to move us to the obligation stated in vs. 13-14. The three are a) the great contrast of the flesh and the spirit, **v. 9-10**, b) the marvelous promise of life, **v. 11**, and c) the decisive leading by the spirit, **v. 14a**. Thus we have the following impact: "because of the great contrast, because of the marvelous promise, and because of the decisive leading of the Spirit, you have an obligation."

2) In **14a**, Paul more or less restates the paradox of **13b** (the work is both "by the Spirit" and by "you"). He simply describes it as leading of the Spirit. Leading is like someone taking a blind man to Christ or a prisoner to jail. It is not simply pointing the way (guiding), or dragging (drawing), or carrying. The notion of leading is such that the led one gets there by walking every step; still He goes not where he would but where his leader would. The Holy Spirit will see to it that we arrive where He wills when He wills it. Our failures along the way, which He allows, are ours alone; our victories are His gifts. But all along the way we must walk, work, strive, study, pray, and serve. Things that seem ill-fitted to one another are both true: we must and we will. We *must* tread this path by our efforts as a necessary duty. We *will* tread this path by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit if we belong to Christ.

3) But what is the point of v. 14b? It expands on the promise of life via the reference to sonship. Life is promised in all of the reasons cited. In verse 10, life is promised in the

indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The implication of His presence for our bodies that are subject to death (v. 10) is made explicit in verse 11, "the Spirit...will give life to your mortal bodies." Life is stated as the consequent of putting sin to death in verse 13b. The "because" introducing verse 14 must be *expanding on the notion of life as a motivation to fulfill the obligation* we have to the Spirit.

Paul introduced the leading of the Spirit in a suppressed way as a practical synonym for the combined notions of our effort and the work of the Spirit of 13b. Specifically, 14a goes with the antecedent of 13b ("those who are led" goes with "by the Spirit you") and 14b goes with the consequent of 13b ("are sons of God" goes with "you will live"). Thus we have this paraphrase: "if you are led by the Spirit, which means that by the Spirit you put sin to death, then *you will live because you are sons of God.*"

2A. The source of the motivating affection of sonship

Now we have to inquire how Paul uses sonship or childship to God as a confirmation of the promise of life and thus as a motivation to fulfill the obligation to the Spirit. In briefest effect, he says you will live because you are sons. How does he develop this point?

He states that the Spirit gives us a deep rooted and intimate assurance of our sonship (**vs. 15-16**). 1) He is not the Spirit of servile fear (**15a**). 2) It is by His working in us that we address God as our Father (**15b**). 3) Our sense of intimacy with God is due to His immediate inner testimony (**16**). In Galatians, Paul combines all of these notions when he says that it is the Spirit who calls out the words "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). By His witness in our hearts, in the center of our beings, to our spirit (Rom. 8:16), we give utterance to *His* word on *our* lips: Father. This is parallel to the fact that it is only by the Spirit that one can confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor. 12:3).

This marvelous truth underscores our use of the Lord's Prayer beginning with "our Father." It *grounds a sense of dignity* in life: "I am a child of the king." It *reeks with hope* for the near and long term: He knows the way of the righteous, and I know He cares for me. Jesus said as much in the Sermon on the Mount: "Your Father cares for the birds and the lilies as His creations, but these are not His children: if He cares for them, how much will He care for you."

3A. The implication of the motivating affection of sonship

Next Paul unpacks the logic of being sons in relation to life, and as he does so, he expands on the meaning of life: "if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, and *co-heirs* with Christ" (cf. Gal. 4:7). How can we state something as profound as having treasures in God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills? He owns all the hills, valleys, mountains, and seas. Here is my best shot at it for now. "Being a co-heir with Christ means that God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, will give us all things necessary to our well-being. He will give us everything that is needed for the safety and security of our entire life and existence. Since our life extends beyond this earth and into the eternal

future, being co-heirs with Christ means that God will give us everything in the universe that will benefit us and keep us safe and secure for now and forevermore.”

We can perhaps try to find an analogy in the move to new global markets in our day of advancing technologies. Recently the largest merger ever consummated, 179 billion dollars worth, was between Vodaphone and Mannesmann, two giant telecommunication companies. About the same time, Ford Motor Company announced that it would give computers to 350,000 employees. These technologies put the world at our finger tips. But in Christ, all the world markets and all their provisions in the billions and trillions are but a drop in bucket. In Christ, our Father puts every provision, every fact, and every event at our fingertips. As children of God, we tap into the very universe and every dimension of matter, space, and time as our home, our place of rest, safety, and security. Our majestic heavenly Father draws provision for our life as His children from the vast resources at His disposal. We are heirs *of God*.

But more must be said in this connection. For Paul's thoughts are so pregnant that he cannot finish one thought without introducing another related idea; the subject is so full and profound that idea upon idea must be added in an attempt to access it. Thus in 17b we have an indication of what is involved in being an heir (which itself expands on life, v. 13b). *To live as an heir is to share in the glory of Christ*. Thus as many as are led by the Spirit (who are putting sin to death as they walk according to the Spirit and mind the things of the Spirit) are children of God. Being His children renders certain the promise of eternal life. Eternal life is defined by our being co-heirs, and sharing with Christ (as co-heir) means sharing in His glory. What does this involve?

Murray makes the case that being heirs of the inheritance which "God himself has laid up for them" is only the hem of the garment. To be sure, it is a marvelous thought that *God* has laid this up for us. Think of being provided for by a parent of little or no means, by a parent of moderate means, and by a parent of abundant means: your inheritance can only grow by leaps and bounds. So how much more is the fullness if God is your parent! Still Murray says there is more to think about in this connection: "it is difficult to suppress the richer and deeper thought that *God Himself is the inheritance* of his children." He gets support in two places. 1) First, support comes from the OT. In Psalm 73:25, 26 we read, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Note how we can say, "I am always with you"; it is because "you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel" (vs. 23-24). Moreover, note how having this future certainty of glory goes with having God as our portion (vs. 23-26). Finally, note how these are matters of God's sovereignty that overflow into responsibility for both unbeliever (v. 27), and believer (v. 28). In Lamentations 3:24, we read what the saint says to himself, "I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.'" Again, consider the tie of God's sovereignty as under-girding our responsibility: it is "because of the Lord's great love that we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" that I can say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." 2) Second, Murray says, "support is given to the notion that God is the inheritance of the saints when we consider that they

are 'joint-heirs with Christ.'" What did Christ inherit in a preeminent sense as His glory? He was glorified *with the Father* and the Lord is the portion of His inheritance (cf. Jn. 17:5, "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the foundation of the world"; Ps. 16:5-11, "you have assigned me my portion...I have a delightful inheritance...you fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand).

To be joint-heir with Christ means that we enter into the possession that was bestowed upon him. Thus, in the reward of His finished work, Jesus cannot be thought of apart from His people; nor can they be contemplated as saints in heaven's glory apart from Him. His delightful inheritance and eternal pleasures are ours as well! (cf. Jn. 17:24). His Father is now our Father, majestically distant from us in heaven but near us as Father.

Application of this motivating affection of sonship

1) First, our intuitive experience of sonship is explained. There is a negative and a positive to it. The negative is that we do not have the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of fear and slavery. Though a Christian finds his freedom in being a slave to righteousness and liberty in serving God as King, there is no fear in this absolute giving of oneself over to God. We are vulnerable and exposed with many failings and sins, and God radiates with matchless holiness. Nonetheless, "my Holy Spirit" is not a producer of servile fear. On the other hand, the positive explanation of our experience of sonship is that the Spirit that we have received is the Spirit of sonship that testifies to us in the depths of our being that we are God's children. This testimony affects us so profoundly that we utter the word, "Father," to God with intimate affection. And this word is placed on our lips by the Holy Spirit: it is His word placed on our lips. The origin of our childlike adherence to the holy and majestic Creator of heaven and earth is the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. When you call out to God as your Father from a heartfelt affection, right there you give expression to the work of the Spirit in your heart. Thus, we have explanation of our experience as Christians as part of the household and family of God.

2) Second, in this context, knowing that our experience of childship is a mark of the presence of the Spirit, and His blessing enhances our sense of obligation to the Spirit to walk in His steps rather than in the pathway of sin. This puts an affectionate, filial, family twist on Christian duty to our Sovereign. It puts heart in our pursuit of the law. To delight in the law is part of delight in the Father, who speaks in the law by my Holy Spirit about my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

3) Third, we learn that childship is the guarantee of eternal life. And eternal life is defined as being a co-heir with Christ in the inheritance He received from the Father because of His finished work. God was His reward; it was for the Father that Jesus panted from the cross like the deer for the water brooks (cf. "I thirst"). The cross was the hour of glory, and the resurrection marked Him out as the Son of God *with many brothers and sisters*. This is so because the glory of heaven is inseparable from the glory of God, the glory of God is inseparable from the glory of Christ, and the glory of Christ is inseparable from the glory of you and me, the children of God. That we are sons and daughters means that

we know the Father and this is eternal life, "to know God" (Jn. 17:3). Our sonship, our daughtership, our eternal life was secured for us once and for all in the death of death in the death of our elder brother. Childship is the guarantee of eternal life in more ways than one.

4) Fourth, one final conclusion to all of this must be stated: we have an obligation and it is not to the flesh but to the Spirit to put to death the misdeeds of the body. These verses (Rom. 8:15-17) ground this duty. Knowing that we are sons, children, and heirs moves us to consider the consequence of sin, which is death, in marked contrast to the consequence of putting sin to death, which is eternal life. And our life is such that we are heirs *of God* and *co-heirs with Christ*, and thus God is our inheritance! This is a great encouragement to fight this fight with sin. a) It is encouragement to identify the misdeeds of the body countering our tendencies to self-deceit. b) It stirs us to persist in doing good deeds by trampling the misdeeds of the body to death by good deeds and by presenting ourselves as slaves to righteousness. c) It stimulates the study of the law as summarized in the Ten Words: as His heirs, surely we can listen to His commands and gratefully seek to obey them. d) And finally, the Spirit assures us of our standing in God's family. Therefore, being sons, children, and joint-heirs encourages us *trust* Him to do His efficacious work. At the same time this assuring work of the Spirit within us encourages us to *patiently obey* His words and *follow* in His steps.