

Preface

For more than a century, J. C. Ryle was best known for his clear and lively writings on practical and spiritual themes. His great aim in all his ministry was to encourage strong and serious Christian living. But Ryle was not naive in his understanding of how this should be done. He recognized that, as a pastor of the flock of God, he had a responsibility to guard Christ's sheep and to warn them whenever he saw approaching dangers. His penetrating comments are as wise and relevant today, as they were when he first wrote them. His sermons and other writings have been consistently recognized, and their usefulness and impact have continued to the present day, even in the outdated English of the author's own day.

Why then should expositions already so successful and of such stature and proven usefulness require adaptation, revision, rewrite or even editing? The answer is obvious. To increase its usefulness to today's reader the language in which it was originally written needs updating.

Though his sermons have served other generations well, just as they came from the pen of the author in the nineteenth century, they still could be lost to present and future generations simply because, to them, the language is neither readily nor fully understandable.

My goal, however, has not been to reduce the original writing to the vernacular of our day. It is designed primarily for you who desire to read and study comfortably and at ease in the language of our time. Only obviously archaic terminology and passages obscured by expressions not totally familiar in our day have been revised. However, neither Ryle's meaning nor intent have been tampered with.

Tony Capoccia

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HEIRS OF GOD

by
J. C. Ryle
(1816-1900)

"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:14)

"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, 'Abba, Father.'" (Romans 8:15)

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:16)

"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory." (Romans 8:17)

The people of whom the Apostle Paul speaks of in the verses before us today are the richest people on the earth. It just has to be. They are called "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

The inheritance of these people is the only inheritance *really worth having*; all others are unsatisfying and disappointing. They bring with them many concerns. They cannot cure an aching heart, or lighten a heavy conscience; they cannot prevent family troubles; they cannot prevent sicknesses, misfortunes, separations, and deaths. But there are no disappointments among the "heirs of God."

The inheritance I speak of is the only inheritance *which can be kept forever*; all others must be left in the hour of death, if they have not been taken away before. Those who are extremely wealthy cannot carry anything with them beyond the grave. But it is not so with the "heirs of God." Their inheritance is eternal.

The inheritance I speak of is the only inheritance *which is within everybody's reach*. Most men can never obtain riches and greatness, though they work hard for them all of their lives; but glory, honor, and eternal life, are offered to every man freely, who is

willing to accept them on God's terms. "Whoever wants to," may be an "heir of God and co-heirs with Christ."

If any reader of this paper wishes to have a portion of this inheritance, let him know that he must be a member of that one family on earth to which it belongs, and that is the family of all true Christians. If you desire to have glory in heaven, then you must become one of God's children on earth. I write this paper in order to persuade you to become a child of God today, if you are not one already. I write it to persuade you to be absolutely certain that you are one, if at present you only have a vague hope, and nothing more. No one but true Christians are the children of God! No one but the children of God are heirs of God! Give me your attention, while I try to unfold these things to you, and to show you the lessons contained in the verses which head this paper.

I. Let me show *the relationship of all true Christians to God. They are "sons of God."*

II. Let me show *the special evidences of this relationship. True Christians are "led by the Spirit." They have "the Spirit of sonship." They have the "testimony of the Spirit." They "share in the sufferings of Christ."*

III. Let me show *the privileges of this relationship. True Christians are "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."*

I. First let me show *the relationship of all true Christians to God. They are God's "SONS"*

I know of no greater and more wonderful word that could have been chosen. To be servants of God—to be subjects, soldiers, disciples, friends—all these are excellent titles; but to be the "sons" of God is even a more superior designation. The Scripture says, "A slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever." (John 8:35)

To be a son of the rich and noble people in this world—to be the son of princes and kings of the earth—this is commonly considered a great temporary advantage and privilege. But to be a son of the King of kings, and Lord of lords—to be a son of the High and Holy One—who lives and dwells in eternity—this is something far greater. And yet this is the privilege of every true Christian.

The son of an earthly parent naturally looks to his father for affection, support, provision, and education. There is a home always open to him. There is love which, generally speaking, no amount of bad behavior can completely extinguish. All these are things that generally belong to all the sons of this world. Think then how great is the privilege of that poor sinner of mankind who can say of God, "He is my Father."

But how can sinful men like ourselves become sons of God? When do we enter into this glorious relationship? We are not the sons of God by nature. We were not born as "sons of God" when we came into the world. No man has a natural right to look to God as His Father. It is a vile heresy to say that he has. Men are said to be born poets and painters—

but men are never born sons of God. The Book of Ephesians tells us, "Like the rest, we were by nature objects (children) of wrath." (Ephesians 2:3) The Book of John says, "We know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God." (1 John 3:10) The doctrine of the Church of England wisely follows the doctrines of the Bible, and teaches, "By nature we are born in sin, and children of wrath." Yes: we are all, in our natural state, children of the devil, rather than children of God! Sin is indeed hereditary, and runs in the family of Adam. Grace is not hereditary, and holy men have not, as a matter of course, holy sons. Then, how and when does this mighty change and transformation take place? When and in what manner do sinners become the "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty?" (2 Corinthians 6:18)

Men become sons of God in the day that the Holy Spirit leads them to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, and not before. (Note: the reader will of course understand that I am not speaking of children who die in infancy, or of persons who live and die so mentally retarded that they could not begin to understand the gospel) What does the Book of Galatians say? "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26) What does the Book of 1 Corinthians say? "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus." (1 Corinthians 1:30) What does the Book of John say? "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right (or privilege) to become children of God." (John 1:12) Faith unites the sinner to the Son of God and makes him one of His members. Faith makes him one of those in whom the Father sees no spot, and is well-pleased.

Faith marries him to the beloved Son of God, and entitles him to be counted among the sons. Faith gives him fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3) Faith grafts him into the Father's family, and opens up to him a room in the Father's house. Faith gives him life instead of death, and makes him a son, instead of being a servant. Show me a man that has this faith, and then despite whatever church he goes to, I will say that he is a son of God.

This is one of those points we should never forget. You and I know nothing of a man's sonship *until he believes*. No doubt the sons of God are foreknown and chosen from all eternity, and predestinated to adoption. But remember, it is not until they are called in due time, and believe—it is not until then that you and I can be certain they are sons. It is not until they repent and believe, that the angels of God rejoice over them. The angels cannot read the book of God's election: they do not know who "His cherished ones" are on the earth. (Psalm 83:3) They rejoice over no man until he believes. But when they see some poor sinner repenting and believing, then there is joy among them—joy that one more burning stick is snatched from the fire, and one more son and heir is born again to the Father in heaven. (Amos 4:11; Luke 15:10) But once more I say, you and I know nothing certain about a man's sonship to God *until he believes in Christ*.

I warn you to beware of the delusive notion that all men and women are children of God, whether they have faith in Christ or not. It is a wild theory which many are clinging to in these days, but one which cannot be proved out of the Word of God. It is a dangerous

dream, with which many are trying to soothe themselves, but one from which there will be a fearful waking up in the last day.

I do not pretend to deny that God, in a certain sense, is the universal Father of all mankind. He is the Great First Cause of all things. He is the Creator of all mankind, and in Him alone, all men, whether Christians or heathens, "live and move and have their being." All this is unquestionably true. In this sense Paul told the Athenians, that their own poet had said, "We are His offspring." (Acts 17:28) But this "offspring" status gives no man a title to heaven. The "offspring" status which we have by creation is one which belongs to stones, trees, animals, or even to the demons, as much as to us. (Job 1:6)

I do not deny that God loves all mankind with a love of pity and compassion. "He has compassion on all He has made." "He does not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." "He takes no pleasure in the death of anyone." All this I admit completely. In this sense our Lord Jesus tells us, "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." (Psalm 145:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:32; John 3:16)

I utterly deny the doctrine that God is a reconciled and pardoning Father to anyone except those who have united themselves to His Son Jesus Christ, and that no one can be united with Jesus Christ who does not believe in Him for salvation. The holiness and justice of God stand against such a doctrine. They make it impossible for sinful men to approach God, except through the Mediator. They tell us that God is "a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29) against those who are without Christ. The whole New Testament is against the doctrine. It teaches that no man can claim an interest in Christ unless he will receive Him as his Mediator, and believe on Him as his Savior. Where there is no faith in Christ it is a dangerous error to say that a man may take comfort in God as his Father. God is a reconciled Father to no one but those who are united with Christ.

It is unreasonable to talk of the view I am now upholding as being narrow-minded and harsh. The Gospel sets an open door before every man. Its promises are wide and full. Its invitations are earnest and tender. Its requirements are simple and clear, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." But to say that proud men, who will not bow their necks to the easy yoke of Christ, and worldly men who are determined to have their own way and their sins—to say that such men have a right to claim an interest in Christ, and a right to call themselves sons of God, is to say what never can be proved from Scripture. God offers to be their Father; but He does it on certain clear terms—they must draw near to Him through Christ. Christ offers to be their Savior; but in doing so He gives one simple requirement—they must commit their souls to Him, and give Him their hearts. They refuse the *terms*, and yet dare to call God their Father! They scorn the *requirement*, and yet dare to hope that Christ will save them! God is to be their Father—but on their own terms! Christ is to be their Savior—but on their own conditions! What can be more unreasonable? What can be more proud? What can be more unholy than such a doctrine as this? Let us beware of it, for it is a common doctrine in these latter days. Let us beware of it, for it is often falsely put forward and sounds beautiful and loving in the mouth of poets, novelists, sentimentalists, and tender-hearted women. Let us beware of it, unless

we intend to throw aside our Bible altogether, and set up ourselves to be wiser than God. Let us stand fast on the old Scriptural ground: *No sonship to God without Christ! No interest in Christ without faith!*

I pray to God there was not a need to give this kind of warning. But I have every reason to think they need to be given clearly and unmistakably. There is a school of theology rising up in this day, which appears to me most eminently calculated to promote unfaithfulness, to help the devil, and to ruin souls. It comes to us like Joab to Amasa, with the highest professions of kindness, generosity, and love. According to this theology, God is all mercy and love—His holiness and justice are completely ignored! Hell is never spoken of in this theology—it speaks only of heaven! Damnation is never mentioned—it is treated as an impossible thing—they say that all men and women will be saved! Faith, and the work of the Spirit, are refined away into nothing at all! "Everyone who believes anything has faith! Everyone who thinks anything has the Spirit! Everyone is right! No one is wrong! No one is to blame for any action they may commit! It is the result of his position in life. It is because of his circumstances! He is not accountable for his opinions, any more than for the color of his skin! He must be what he is! The Bible is an imperfect book! It is old-fashioned! It is obsolete! We may believe just as much of it as we please, and no more!" I solemnly warn men to beware of all this kind of theology. In spite of all the fashionable words used, such as, "generosity," and "kindness," and "openness," and "freedom from bigotry," and so forth, I do believe it is a theology that leads people directly into hell.

(a) *Facts speak directly against the teachers of this theology.*

Let them visit Mesopotamia, and see what desolation reigns where Nineveh and Babylon once stood. Let them go to the shores of the Dead Sea, and look down into its mysterious bitter waters. Let them travel in Palestine, and ask what has turned that fertile country into a wilderness. Let them observe the wandering Jews, scattered over the face of the world, without a land of their own, and yet never absorbed among other nations. And then let them tell us, if they dare, that God is so entirely a God of mercy and love that He never does and never will punish sin.

(b) *The conscience of man speaks directly against these teachers.*

Let them go to the bedside of some dying child, and try to comfort him with their doctrines. Let them see if their puffed up theories will calm his gnawing, restless anxiety about the future, and enable him to die in peace. Let them show us, if they can, a few well-authenticated cases of joy and happiness in death without Bible promises—without conversion, and without that faith in the blood of Christ, which old-fashioned theology commands. Yes, when men are leaving this world, conscience makes sad work of the new systems of theology preached in these latter days. Conscience is not easily satisfied, in a dying hour, that there is no such place as hell.

(c) *Every reasonable conception that we can form of a future state speaks directly against these teachers.*

Imagine a heaven which would contain all of mankind! Imagine a heaven in which holy and unholy, pure and impure, good and bad, would be all gathered together in one confused mass! What point of union would there be in such a company? What would be the common bond of harmony and brotherhood? What unity, what harmony, what peace, what oneness of spirit could exist? Surely the mind rebels against the idea of a heaven in which there would be no distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between Pharaoh and Moses, between Abraham and the Sodomites, between Paul and Nero, between Peter and Judas Iscariot, between the man who dies in the act of murder or drunkenness, and men like Baxter, and McCheyne! Surely an eternity in such a miserably confused crowd would be worse than annihilation itself! Surely such a heaven would be no better than hell!

(d) Holiness and morality speak directly against these teachers.

If all men and women are God's children, regardless of the difference between them in their lives—and everyone one of them is going to heaven, however different they may be from one another here in the world, then what is the use of striving after holiness? What motive remains for living soberly, righteously, and godly? What does it matter how men conduct themselves, if everyone goes to heaven, and nobody goes to hell? Surely the heathen poets and philosophers of Greece and Rome could tell us something better and wiser than this! Surely a doctrine which is subversive of holiness and morality, and takes away all motives to seek to be pure carries on the face of it the stamp of its origin. It is of earth, and not of heaven. It is of the devil, and not of God.

(e) The Bible speaks against these teachers from first to last.

Hundreds of texts might be quoted which are diametrically opposed to their theories. These texts must be totally rejected, if the Bible is to square with their views. To suit their theology, these Bible truths must be thrown away! At this rate the authority of the whole Bible is soon destroyed. And what do men give us in its place? Nothing, nothing, at all! They rob us of the bread of life, and do not even give us a stone in its place.

Once more I warn everyone into whose hands this paper may fall to beware of this theology. I charge you to hold fast to the doctrine which I have been endeavoring to uphold in this paper. Remember what I have said, and never let it go. No inheritance of glory without sonship to God! No sonship to God without an interest in Christ! No interest in Christ without your own personal faith! This is God's truth. Never forsake it.

Who now among the readers of this paper *desires to know whether he is a son of God?* Ask yourself this question, and ask it this day—and ask it in God's sight, whether you have repented and believed. Ask yourself whether you are personally acquainted with Christ, and united to Him in heart. If not you may be very sure you are no son of God. You are not yet born again. You are still in your sins. God may be your Creator, but He is not your reconciled and pardoning Father.

Yes! though the Church and the world may agree to tell you to the contrary—though clergy and laity unite in flattering you—your sonship is worth little or nothing in the sight of God. Let God be true and every man a liar. Without faith in Christ you are no son of God: you are not born again.

Who is there among the readers of this paper who *desires to become a son of God*? Let that person see and feel his sins, and flee to Christ for salvation, and this day he will be placed among the children. Only acknowledge your iniquity, and grab hold of the hand that Jesus holds to you this day, and sonship, with all its privileges, is yours. Only confess your sins, and bring them to Christ, and God is "faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) This very day old things will pass away, and all things become new. This very day you will be forgiven, pardoned, "to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves." (Ephesians 1:6) This very day you will have a new name given to you in heaven. You began reading this paper as a child of wrath. You will lie down tonight as a child of God. Mark this, if your professed desire after sonship is sincere—if you are truly weary of your sins, and have really something more than a lazy wish to be free—there is real comfort for you. It is all true. It is all written in Scripture, just like I have written it in this paper. I dare not raise barriers between you and God. This day I say, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and you will become "a son," and be saved.

Who is there among the readers of this paper that is *truly a son of God*? Rejoice, I say, and be extremely thankful and joyful of your privileges. Rejoice, for you have good cause to be thankful. Remember the words of the beloved apostle: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1) How wonderful that heaven should look down on earth—that the Holy God should set His affections on sinful man, and admit him into His family! Even though the world does not understand you! Even though the men of this world laugh at you, and reject your name as evil! Let them laugh if they will. God is your Father. You have no need to be ashamed. The Queen can create a nobleman. The Bishops can ordain clergymen. But Queen, Bishops, priests, and deacons—all together cannot, of their own power, make one son of God, or one of greater dignity than a son of God. The man that can call God his Father, and Christ his elder brother—that man may be poor and lowly, yet he never needs to be ashamed.

II. Let me show, in the second place, *the special evidences of the true Christian's relation to God.*

How can a man be sure of his own sonship? How can he find out whether he is one that has come to Christ by faith and been born again? What are the marks and signs by which the "sons of God" may be known? This is a question which all who love eternal life ought to ask. This is a question to which the verses of Scripture, which I am asking you to consider, like many others, supply an answer.

(1) The sons of God, for one thing, are all *led by His Spirit.*

What does the Scripture say, which heads this paper? "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:14)

They are all under the leading and teaching of a power which is Almighty, though unseen—the power of the Holy Spirit. They no longer turn to their own way, nor walk in the light of their own eyes, nor follow their own natural heart's desire. The Spirit leads them. The Spirit guides them. There is a movement in their hearts, lives, and affections, which they feel, though they may not be able to explain, and a movement which is always more or less in the same direction.

They are led away from sin—away from self-righteousness—away from the world. This is the road by which the Spirit leads God's children. Those whom God adopts He teaches and trains. He shows them their own hearts. He makes them weary of their own ways. He makes them long for inward peace.

They are led to Christ. They are led to the Bible. They are led to prayer. They are led to holiness. This is the beaten path along which the Spirit makes them travel. Those whom God adopts He always sanctifies. He makes sin very bitter to them. He makes holiness very sweet.

It is the Spirit who leads them to Sinai, and first shows them the law, so that their hearts may be broken. It is He who leads them to Calvary, and shows them the cross, so that their hearts may be healed. It is He who leads them up the slopes to the top of Pisgah, and gives them a clear view of the promised land, so that their hearts may be cheered. When they are taken into the wilderness, and taught to see their own emptiness, it is the leading of the Spirit. When they are carried up to Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon, and uplifted with glimpses of the glory to come, it is the leading of the Spirit. Each and every one of God's sons is the subject of these leadings. Each and every one is "willing in the day of [God's] power," and yields himself to it. And each and every one is led by the straight way to a city where they could settle. (Psalm 110:3 KJV); 107:7 NIV)

Settle this in your heart, and do not let it go. The sons of God are a people "led by the Spirit of God, and always led more or less in the same way. Their experience will wonderfully agree when they compare notes in heaven. This is one mark of sonship.

(2) Furthermore, all the sons of God *have the feelings of adopted children towards their Father in heaven.*

What does the Scripture say which heads this paper? "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, 'Abba, Father.'" (Romans 8:15)

The sons of God are delivered from that cringing fear of God which sin generates in the natural heart. They are redeemed from that feeling of guilt which made Adam "hide from the LORD God among the trees of the garden," and Cain to go, "out from the LORD'S presence." (Genesis 3:8; 4:16) They are no longer afraid of God's holiness, and justice,

and majesty. They no longer feel that there is a great gulf and barrier between themselves and God. They no longer feel that God is angry with them, and must be angry with them, because of their sins. The sons of God are delivered from these chains and shackles of the soul.

Their feelings towards God are now those of peace and confidence. They see Him as a Father reconciled in Christ Jesus. They look on Him as a God whose justice and holiness is satisfied by their great Mediator and Peacemaker, the Lord Jesus. They see Him as a God who is "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:26) As a Father, they draw near to Him with boldness: as a Father, they can speak to Him with freedom. They have exchanged the spirit of bondage for that of liberty, and the spirit of fear for that of love. They know that God is holy, but they are not afraid: they know that they are sinners, but they are still not afraid. Though holy, they believe that God is completely reconciled: though sinners, they believe they are completely clothed with Jesus Christ. Such is the feeling of the sons of God.

I admit that some of them have this feeling more vividly than others. There are some of them who still carry about scraps and remnants of the old spirit of bondage to their dying day. Many of them still have moments when they shake with the resurrected fears of their old sin nature. But the overwhelming majority of the sons of God would say, if cross-examined, that since they knew Christ their feelings towards God are very different from what they had ever been before. They feel as if something like the old Roman form of adoption had taken place between themselves and their Father in heaven. They feel as if He had said to each one of them, "Will you be my son?" and their hearts had replied, "I will."

Let us also try to understand this, and hold on to it tightly. The sons of God are a people who feel towards God in a way that the children of the world do not. God's children no longer feel a cringing fear of God; rather, their feelings towards Him is as a reconciled parent. This, then, is another mark of sonship.

(3) But, again, the sons of God *have the witness of the Spirit in their consciences.*

What does the Scripture say which heads this paper? "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (Romans 8:16)

The sons of God have got something within their hearts which tells them there is a relationship between themselves and God. They feel something which tells them that old things have passed away and all things have become new: that guilt is gone, that peace is restored, that heaven's door is open, and hell's door is shut. They have, in short, what the children of the world have not—a felt, positive, and reasonable hope. They have what Paul calls the "seal" and "deposit" of the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13)

I do not for a moment deny that this witness of the Spirit varies to the extent to which the sons of God possess it. With some it is a loud, clear, ringing, distinct testimony of conscience: "I am Christ's, and Christ is mine." With others it is a little, feeble,

stammering whisper, which the devil and the flesh often prevent from being heard. Some of the children of God race on their course towards heaven with full assurance. Others are tossed back and forth on their voyage, and will scarcely believe they have got faith. But take the least and lowest of the sons of God: ask him if he will give up the little bit of religious hope which he has attained? Ask him if he will exchange his heart, with all its doubts and conflicts, its wrestlings and fears—ask him if he will exchange that heart for the heart of the downright worldly and careless man? Ask him if he would be content to turn around and throw down the things he has got hold of, and go back to the world? Who can doubt what the answer would be? "I cannot do that," he would reply. "I do not know whether I have faith, and I do not feel sure I have got grace; but I have got something within me I would not like to part with." And what is that "*something*"? I will tell you—it is the witness of the Spirit.

Let us also try to understand this, that the sons of God have the witness of the Spirit in their consciences. This is another mark of sonship.

(4) Let me add one thing more. All the sons of God *take part in suffering with Christ.*

What does the Scripture say which heads this paper? "If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings." (Romans 8:17)

All the children of God have a cross to carry. They have trials, troubles, and afflictions to go through for the Gospel's sake. They have trials from the world, trials from the flesh, and trials from the devil. They have trials of hurt feelings from their relatives and friends—cruel words, harsh treatment, and unmerciful judgment. They have trials in the matter of character; slander, misrepresentation, mockery, insinuation of false motives—all these often fall heavily on them. They have trials in the matter of worldly interests. They often have to choose whether they will please man and lose glory for God, or gain glory for God and offend man. They have trials from their own hearts. In general, they each have their own thorn in the flesh—their own resident-devil, who is their worst foe. This is the experience of the sons of God.

Some of them suffer more, and some less. Some of them suffer in one way, and some in another. God measures out their portions like a wise physician, and cannot error. But I believe there never was one child of God who reached paradise without a cross.

Suffering is the daily provision of the Lord's family. "The Lord disciplines those He loves." "If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons." "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God." "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (Hebrews 12:6, 8; Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12) When the godly Latimer was told by his landlord that he had never had any trouble in his life, "Then," said Latimer, "God cannot be here."

Suffering is a part of the process by which the sons of God are made holy. They are chastened to wean them from the world, and make them partakers of God's holiness. The Captain of their salvation was made "perfect through suffering," and so are they. (Hebrews 2:10; 12:10) There never was a great saint who had not experienced either great hardships, or great persecutions. An early church father, Melancthon said, "Where there are no cares there will generally be no prayers."

Let us try to settle this in our hearts also. The sons of God all have a cross to bear. A suffering Savior generally has suffering disciples. The Bridegroom was a man of sorrows. Therefore, the Bride must not be a woman of pleasures and unacquainted with grief. Blessed are they that mourn! Let us not murmur at the cross. This also is a sign of sonship.

I warn men never to assume that they are sons of God unless they have the scriptural marks of sonship. Beware of a sonship without evidences. Again I say, Beware. When a man has no leading of the Spirit to show me, no spirit of adoption to tell of, no witness of the Spirit in his conscience, no cross in his experience—is this man a son of God? Whatever others may think I would not dare to say he is! It is to his shame that he is not one of God's children. (Deuteronomy 32:5) He is no heir of glory.

Do not tell me that you have been baptized and taught the catechism of the Church, and therefore must be a child of God. I tell you that the church register is not the book of life. I tell you that to be christened a child of God, and called regenerate as an infant is one thing; but to be a child of God in fact, is another thing altogether. Go and read that catechism again. It is the "death unto sin and the new birth unto righteousness," which makes men *children of grace*. Unless you know these things by experience, you are no son of God.

Do not tell me that you are a member of Christ's Church and therefore you must be a son. I answer that the sons of the Church are not necessarily the sons of God. Such sonship is not the sonship of the eighth chapter of Romans. That is the sonship you must have if you are to be saved.

And now, I do not doubt that some reader of this paper will want to know if he may be saved without the witness of the Spirit.

I answer, if you mean by the witness of the Spirit, the full assurance of hope—then without question you may be saved. But if you want to know whether a man can be saved without any inward sense, or knowledge, or hope of salvation, I answer that ordinarily, He cannot. I warn you plainly to cast away all indecision as to your state before God, and to make your calling sure. Clear up your position and relationship. Do not think there is anything praiseworthy in always doubting. Leave that to the Roman Catholics. "Assurance," said a godly Puritan, "may be attained: and what have we been doing all our lives, since we became Christians, if we have not attained it? "

I do not doubt that some true Christians who read this paper will think their evidence of sonship is too small to be good, and will think bad things about themselves. Let me try to cheer them up. Who gave you the feelings you possess? Who made you hate sin? Who made you love Christ? Who made you long and strive after holiness? Where did these feelings come from? Did they come from nature? There are no such feelings in a natural man's heart. Did they come from the devil? He would try to prevent such feelings at any cost. Cheer up, and take courage. Fear not, and do not be downcast. Press forward, and go on. There is hope for you after all. Strive. Labor. Seek. Ask. Knock. Press on. You will yet see that you are "sons of God."

III. Let me show you, in the last place, *the privileges of the true Christian's relation to God.*

Nothing can be conceived more glorious than the prospects of the sons of God. The words of Scripture which head up this paper contain a rich mine of good and comfortable things. "If we are children," says Paul, "then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory." (Romans 8:17)

True Christians then are "heirs." Something is prepared for each one of them which is yet to be revealed.

They are "heirs of God." To be heirs of the rich on earth is something. How much more then is it to be son and heir of the King of kings!

They are "co-heirs with Christ." They will share in His majesty, and take part in His glory. They will be glorified together with Him.

And this, we must remember, is for all the children of God. Abraham took care to provide for all his children, and God takes care to provide for His. None of them are disinherited. None will be cast out. None will be cut off. Each will stand in his place and have a share, in the day when the Lord brings many sons and daughters to glory.

Who can tell us of the full nature of the inheritance of the saints? Who can describe the glory which is yet to be revealed and given to the children of God? Words fail us. Language falls short. Mind cannot fully conceive, and tongue cannot express perfectly, the things which are comprised in the glory yet to come upon the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Oh, it is indeed a true saying of the Apostle John: "What we will be has not yet been made known." (1 John 3:2)

The very Bible itself only lifts a little of the veil which hangs over this subject. How could it do more? We could not thoroughly understand more if more had been told us. Our mental capacity is as yet too earthly—our understanding is as yet too carnal to appreciate more if we had it. The Bible generally deals with the subject in negative terms and not in positive assertions. It describes what there will not be in the glorious inheritance that we may, therefore, have some faint idea of what there will be. It paints

the *absence* of certain things, in order that we may drink in a little the blessedness of the *present* things.

It tells us that the inheritance "can never perish, spoil or fade." It tells us that "the crown of glory will never fade away." It tells us that the devil is to be "bound," that "there will be no night there and no longer will there be any curse," that "death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire," that "every tear will be wiped from their eyes," and that the inhabitant will never say, "I am ill." And these are indeed glorious things. No corruption! No fading! No withering! No devil! No curse of sin! No sorrow! No tears! No sickness! No death! Surely the cup of the children of God will surely run over! (1 Peter 1:4; 5:4; Revelation 20:2; 21:25; 22:3; 20:14; 21:4; Isaiah 33:24)

But there are positive things told to us about the glory yet to come upon the heirs of God, which ought not to be kept back. There are many sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comforts in their future inheritance, which all true Christians would do well to consider. There are enjoyable refreshments for fainting pilgrims in many words and expressions of Scripture, which you and I ought to store up for the time of need.

(a) Is *knowledge* pleasant to us now?

Is the little that we know of God, and Christ, and the Bible precious to our souls, and do we long for more? We will have perfect knowledge in heaven. What does the Scripture say? "Then I will know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12) Blessed be God, there will be no more disagreements among believers! All will finally see eye to eye. The former ignorance will have passed away. We will marvel to find how childish and blind we have been.

(b) Is *holiness* pleasant to us now?

Is sin the burden and bitterness of our lives? Do we long for entire conformity to the image of God? We will have perfect holiness in heaven. What does the Scripture say? "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her," not only that He might sanctify it on earth, but also "to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:27) Oh, the blessedness of an eternal good-bye to sin! Oh, how little even the best of us are presently doing! Oh, what unutterable evil sticks, like glue, to all of our motives, all of our thoughts, all of our words, and all of our actions! Oh, how many of us are godly in our words, but, so weak in our works! Thank God, all this will be changed.

(c) Is *rest* pleasant to us now?

Do we often feel "exhausted yet keeping up the pursuit?" (Judges 8:4) Do we long for a world in which we will not need to always be watching and doing battle? We will have perfect rest in glory. What does the Scripture say? "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9) The daily, hourly conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, will finally come to an end. The enemy will be subdued. The warfare will

be over. The wicked will finally stop causing us trouble. The weary will finally be at rest. There will be a great calm.

(d) Is service pleasant to us now?

Do we find it sweet to work for Christ, and yet groan being burdened by such a feeble body? Is our spirit often willing, but hampered and clogged by the poor weak flesh? Have our hearts burned within us when we have been allowed to give a cup of cold water for Christ's sake, and have we sighed to think what unprofitable servants we are? Let us take comfort. We will be able to serve perfectly in glory, and without weariness. What does the Scripture say? "They serve Him day and night in His temple." (Revelation 7:15)

(e) Is satisfaction pleasant to us now?

Do we find the world empty? Do we long for the filling up of every empty place in our hearts? We will have perfect satisfaction in glory. We will no longer have to mourn over cracks in all our earthen vessels, and thorns in all our roses, and bitter residue in all our sweet cups. We will no longer lament with Jonah over withered gourds. We will no longer say with Solomon, "All of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind." We will no longer cry with aged David, "To all perfection I see a limit" What does the Scripture say? "When I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing Your likeness." (Ecclesiastes 1:14; Psalm 119:96; Psalm 17:15)

(f) Is communion with the saints pleasant to us now?

Do we feel that we are never so happy as when we are with the "glorious ones?" Do we feel most at home when we are in their company? (Psalm 16:3) We will have perfect communion in heaven. What does the Scripture say? "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil." "He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds." (Matthew 13:41; 24:31) Praise be to God! We will see all the saints of whom we have read about in the Bible, and in whose steps we have tried to walk. We will see apostles, prophets, patriarchs, martyrs, reformers, missionaries, and ministers, of whom the world was not worthy. We will see the faces of those we have known and loved in Christ while on earth, and over whose departure we shed bitter tears. We will see them more bright and glorious than they ever were before. And best of all, we will see them without hurry and anxiety, and without feeling that we only meet to part again. In the coming glory there is no death, no parting, no farewell.

(g) Is communion with Christ pleasant to us now?

Do we find His name precious to us? Do we feel our hearts burn within us at the thought of His dying love? We will have perfect communion with Him in heaven. "We will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:17) We will be with Him in paradise. (Luke 23:43-44) We will see His face in the kingdom. These eyes of ours will behold those hands and feet which were pierced with nails, and that head which was crowned with

thorns. Where He is, there also will be the sons of God. When He comes, they will come with Him. When He sits down in His glory, they will sit down by His side. This is indeed a blessed expectation! I am a dying man in a dying world. All before me is dark. The world to come is a unknown harbor. But Christ is there, and that is enough. Surely if there is rest and peace in following Him by faith on earth, there will be far more rest and peace when we see Him face to face. If we have found it good to follow the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness, we will find it a thousand times better to sit down in our eternal inheritance, with our Joshua, in the promised land.

If any one among the readers of this paper is not yet among the sons and heirs, I do pity you with all my heart! How much you are missing! How little true comfort you are enjoying! There you are, struggling on, and toiling in the fire, and wearing yourself out for mere earthly ends—seeking rest and finding none—chasing shadows and never catching them—wondering why you are not happy, and yet refusing to see the cause—hungry, and thirsty, and empty, and yet blind to the abundance within your reach. Oh, that you were wise! Oh, that you would hear the voice of Jesus, and learn from Him!

If you are one of those who are sons and heirs, you may rightly rejoice and be happy. You can wait with joy, like the boy Patience in Pilgrim's Progress: your best things are yet to come. You can easily bear crosses without murmuring: your light affliction is but for a moment. Your "present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed." "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Romans 8:18; Colossians 3:4) You have no need to envy the sinner and his prosperity. You are the truly rich. It was well said by a dying believer in my own church: "I am richer than I ever was in my life." You may say as Mephibosheth said to David: "Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has arrived home safely." (2 Samuel 19:30) You may say as Alexander said when he gave all his riches away, and was asked what he kept for himself: "I have hope." You need not be discouraged by sickness: the eternal part of you is safe and provided for, despite what happens to your body. You can calmly look at death: it opens a door between you and your inheritance. You need not have excessive sorrow over the things of the world—over partings and bereavements, over losses and crosses: the day of gathering is before you. Your treasure is beyond reach of harm. Every year heaven is becoming more full of those you love, and earth more empty. Glory in your inheritance. It is all yours if you are a son of God: "If we are children, then we are heirs."

(1) And now, in concluding this paper, *let me ask every one who reads it, Whose child are you?*

Are you the child of nature or the child of grace? Are you the child of the devil or the child of God? You cannot be both at once. Which are you?

Settle the question without delay, for eventually you must die as either one or the other. Settle it, for it can be settled, and it is folly to leave it in doubt. Settle it, for time is short, the world is getting old, and you are quickly drawing near to the judgment seat of Christ. Settle it, for death is near, the Lord is at hand, and who can tell what a day might bring

forth? Oh, that you would never rest till the question is settled! Oh, that you may never feel satisfied till you can say, "I have been born again: I am a son of God!"

(2) If you are not a son and heir of God, I plead with you to become one without delay.

Do you want to be rich? There are unsearchable riches in Christ. Do you want to be exalted? You will be a king. Do you want to be happy? You will have a peace which transcends understanding and which the world can never give and never take away. Oh, come out and take up the cross and follow Christ! Come out from among the thoughtless and worldly, and hear the word of the Lord: "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:18)

(3) If you are a son of God, I plead with you to walk worthy of your Father's house.

I solemnly charge you to honor Him with your life; and above all to honor Him by implicit obedience to all of His commands, and to give sincere love to all of His children. Put forth the effort to travel through the world like a child of God and heir to glory. Let men be able to trace a family likeness between you and your Heavenly Father. Live a heavenly life. Seek things that are above. Do not seem to be building your nest below. Behave like a man who seeks a city that is not visible, whose citizenship is in heaven, and who would be content with many hardships till he gets home.

Labor *to feel like a son of God* in every circumstance in which you are placed. Never forget you are on your Father's ground so long as you are here on earth. Never forget that a Father's hand sends to you all your mercies and crosses. Cast every care on Him. Be happy and cheerful in Him. Indeed, why would you ever be sad if you are the King's son? Why should men ever doubt, when they look at you, whether it is a pleasant thing to be one of God's children?

Labor *to behave towards others like a son of God*. Be blameless and harmless in your day and generation. Be a "peacemaker." (Matthew 5:9) Seek for your children sonship to God, above everything else: seek for them an inheritance in heaven, whatever else you do for them. No man leaves his children so well provided for as he who leaves them sons and heirs of God.

Persevere in your Christian calling, if you are a son of God, and press forward more and more. Be careful to lay aside every weight, and the sin which most easily entangles you. Keep your eyes fixed steadily on Jesus. Remain in Him. Remember that apart from Jesus you can do nothing and with Jesus you can do everything. (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13) Watch and pray every day. Be steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Settle it in your heart that never will a cup of cold water, given because you are a disciple of Jesus, ever lose its reward, and that every year you are coming closer to your home in heaven.

"For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay."
(Hebrews 10:37)

Then the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:19, 21) Then will the world acknowledge that God's children were the truly wise. Then will the sons of God finally come of age, and no longer be waiting for their inheritance, but actual possessors of it. Then will they hear with exceeding joy those comforting words, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." (Matthew 25:34) Surely that day will make amends for everything!



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