

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 50

December 14, 2014



Heirs with Christ

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:16–18, KJV 1900)

The amazing transformation that God in grace effects in the new birth appears in Scripture with implications far beyond our ability fully to comprehend. How can you and I, mere mortals, specks of dust bustling around on a tiny globe in one small corner of the universe, think that the God who created the whole universe would care so deeply for us and would choose to lift us from our sinful pit to the status of His own family? Scripture makes the point, but, apart from Scripture's affirmation, we would have more questions than answers about such a thing? However, Paul bases his point in our study passage on something other than Scripture. To be indelibly clear, the Holy Spirit never—ever—speaks out of two sides of His mouth. He never contradicts what He has revealed in Scripture through His moving the men who wrote the Scriptures. Whatever He truly testifies to anyone will always harmonize with what He has already revealed in Scripture. His "witness," His testimony to us, to "our spirit," affirms what we find in Scripture. A few times I have encountered people who, when challenged for their beliefs and found themselves hard pressed to defend those views from Scripture, would resort to "God revealed to me..." The fact that they could not clearly support the idea from Scripture, especially when Scripture contradicts their belief, discredits their claim of a divine revelation. Paul's teaching in our study verses and their contextual setting lies at the foundation of a sound and enduring Biblical faith.

Atheists and generally unbelievers will ridicule the idea that God in any way gives any personal testimony or conviction to a person. Our study passage obviously refutes that deistic¹ notion. The fundamental premise of Paul's lesson stands on the stated fact; the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, actively bears witness to His people, affirming to them that they are His. As we observe the unbeliever's rejection of all divine interaction and testimony to the individual believer, we also

¹ Historically, the deistic belief holds that God created the universe, set it all in motion, and then effectively withdrew, firmly thereafter holding only an observer's position. He supposedly looks on, but He in no way intervenes or influences any part of that creation.

observe the opposite extreme idea that God literally tells or even irresistibly causes you precisely to do and say whatever you do every time you face a decision or have a thought. The passage tells us what the Spirit witnesses to us. And, in this point, He bears witness. We may believe that witness, or we may not believe it.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. (1 John 5:9-11)

People who say they believe in God often readily believe other people, but they are reluctant to show similar belief in God and what God in Scripture teaches. If they fail to believe His testimony in Scripture, they will likely also refuse to believe His personal testimony to them. Scripture indicates that the Holy Spirit also teaches the child of God many other things to aid them in their pilgrimage. As Jesus interacted with the disciples and taught them during His time with them, in John, chapters 14-16, He taught them that the Holy Spirit whom He would send in His name after He left would also teach them. In Titus 2:11-15, Paul refers to the same grace of God that saves as also teaching us many specific and substantial things that we need to know as we live life for our God and in service to His people. Many other Scriptures affirm this truth. God neither puppeteers the universe or stands back as a passive observer. Biblical truth affirms His active and selective role in teaching and directing His children in wise and kind grace.

The substance of the Spirit's witness to us does not stop simply with the thought that we are children of God. We see problematic families all around us. In fact, do we see any families that are not in some way problematic? Since the Garden of Eden, there has been no human relationship and therefore no family that is void of problems. God's provision for His family that our passage describes is our only

hope of ever rising about the problem of sin. By teaching us that we are His children and by actively exercising His loving fatherly care over us, richly described in the context of this lesson, God manifests daily to us the truth of our family relationship with Him. And the lesson describes God raising us in the end from death itself to live with Him in His loving glory for eternity.

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. You occasionally read or hear about parents disowning or disinheriting one of their children. Paul teaches us that God never disinherits even one of His children. If He bestows the position of "Child" on you, the final inheritance is certain. Not because of anything in you, but because of God's heart and purpose, He shall no more disinherit one of His children than He would disinherit Jesus!

The idea of being a "joint-heir" with Christ does not mean that God bestows upon all of His children every honor and every privilege that Jesus enjoys. He commands even the angels to worship Jesus. Rest assured; He never commands angels or any other being to worship you or me. That we are "joint-heirs" with Christ means that we are members of the family of God. And God, through Jesus, passes every blessing that He willed for His family to us because of this unbreakable bond in His will.

Many years ago we had neighbors, good neighbors, who will serve to illustrate a point from this passage. The husband's parents were quite wealthy and successful business people. Upon their death, they owned approximately a full city block near downtown in a large city, so the value of their real estate alone was immense. However, the son, an only child, had demonstrated over his lifetime that he lacked wise judgment in his use of money. Knowing their son's limitations, the parents left their estate to the son, but they also imposed a condition in their will. The estate was to be administered by a man whom they knew to be a wise and fair man with good business and good money sense. They empowered this man to control what the son could have from the estate. If the son needed or wanted to draw money out of the estate, he was required to outline his case in writing to the administrator of the estate. If the administrator agreed that the requested use of funds was wise and good for the son and his family, he would approve the request and release the funds to the son. If he did not agree, he was empowered to deny the request.

God has provided everything that His children need, both for time and for eternity, in His Son. He has indelibly executed His will for His family's eternal security. It cannot be altered or compromised. However, He has also provided access for His family to the riches of their estate in this life to the extent to which they request and use these riches wisely. When we ask "In His name" and "According to His will," He freely and lovingly grants our request. When we ask or seek those

riches foolishly, He wisely and lovingly denies our request. Notice the careful wording of this verse.

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

Who determines the "need" of your request? Who judges whether our request qualifies as a "need" or as a foolish or childish desire that might prove more a curse to us than a blessing?

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. (James 4:2-3)

Sometimes believers, particularly strong believers in grace, foolishly debate whether prayer in any way changes anything. What? Do they ever read their Bibles for answers to such questions? Did the importunate widow's repeated petitions to the unjust judge change anything? Of course it did, and Jesus uses this fact to affirm the purpose of the lesson.

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. (Luke 18:1)

Does the parent give bread to the hungry child who asks for food? (Luke 11:11 and context) Does the fervent prayer of a righteous man avail anything, or is it a mere façade that changes nothing? (James 5:16) Given the abundance of Scriptures that affirm this truth, only a blinded fatalist would think that God never responds with literal answers to the prayers of His children, answers that alter their lives and the circumstances in their lives no less than the hungry child fills his stomach with food from his father, or the prayer of a righteous man for the healing of a repentant and confessing brother or sister, or God personally avenging His elect "...which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them." (Luke 18:7-8)

Although our ultimate inheritance, including the literal resurrection and glorification of our bodies, remains yet future, Scripture affirms that God has richly provided access to those things that we presently need from our inheritance until the final and full execution of God's "Family" will.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Sometimes the Lord sends rich blessings, food when we are hungry, healing and forgiveness when we sin, or righteous judgment when we pray faithfully for it. Other times, He may simply remind us in the midst of our present sufferings of His future glory that He has faithfully and surely reserved for us. However deep the present pain of life may be, that glory so exceeds it as to be incomparable! Praise the Lord!

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor