

**Altavista Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“Heirs with Christ”  
Isaiah 44:6-8  
Romans 8:12-18**

**Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
July 23, 2017**

**Isaiah 44:6-8**

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any.”

**Romans 8:12-18**

So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

**“Heirs with Christ”**

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today, we continue in our journey through the eighth chapter of Romans. Thus far, we’ve learned that we are dead because of sin. While we may indeed be alive and well in the present, sin makes us spiritually dead to God. This may not bother some people today. In this day and age, folks like to focus on the here and now. The furthest ahead they may look is what party they’re attending tonight. To be fair, mortals can only look so far ahead, we don’t have God’s foresight. So yes, sometimes the only thing we can do is look ahead in short distances. But Paul here has something else in mind. Paul doesn’t ignore the reality of the here and now, but he does want to draw our attention to a bigger picture. Paul wants to remind us that the here and now, while important and tangible, is not all that there is. The here and now does not have the final word. There is more to come. An eternity awaits all of us. Paul reminds us of this because he wants us to see that if sin has dominion over our lives, the eternity that awaits is one of separation and forsakenness.

For those who do not allow sin to have dominion, however, there is a life of splendor and glory that awaits. But before we get there, we must understand how a person gains this eternity. Beforehand, people turned to the Law for their assurance. If they could check off the things on this list, then they were surely safe in eternal glory. But Jesus teaches us that this is not simply the case. Paul tells us that the law does not provide salvation, rather, it condemns. When we look upon the Law, we see an insurmountable obstacle. No one person could ever fulfill the law perfectly, there’s just too much sin in the human race. This is the reason Christ came into the world. Paul says, “For God has done...what the law could not do. By sending his son in the likeness of sinful flesh...he condemned sin in the flesh.” Because of Christ and in Christ there is life and liberty. Christ assures us that this

life and liberty are ours if we are in him. And even though Jesus is in heaven, we have access to him through the Spirit.

The Apostle tells us that “those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” What are these spiritual things Paul speaks of? Well, in verse thirteen he says, “if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” The Spirit guides us in the mortification of the flesh. To explain what that means, I want to first recall something I said a few weeks ago. Death, both in the Bible and in our shared experience, is an utter separation. When a loved one passes from this life into the next, we are separated from them by an un-scalable void. Similarly, when Paul says we must put to death the things of the flesh, he is saying we must separate from ourselves—from our physical, mental, and spiritual selves—the things of sin. Now, we will never rid ourselves of sin completely, for Paul even reminds us that we all sin and fall short of God’s glory. No one of us is perfectly sinless, therefore, no one of us has room to boast in holier-than-thou attitudes. Paul is, however, very clear that the mortification of the flesh, which is the act of separating sin from our person, is indeed an important work for the Christian. Paul says elsewhere that we are to be in this world, but not of this world, meaning we are to continue in our life and strife in this present age, but we are not to be conformed by its sinfulness.

Y’all know I love John Calvin and I sometimes find his exegesis to be spot on and encouraging. He says about this very verse, “We may as yet be exposed to sins, [God] nevertheless promises life to us, provided we strive to mortify the flesh: for he does not strictly require the destruction of the flesh, but only bids us to make every exertion to subdue its lusts.”<sup>1</sup> This is one of those instances where we see the pastoral nature of Calvin, and glimpse a person who is misunderstood to be extremely rigid. In this one sentence we see that even Calvin says we cannot attain our perfection, especially while on this earth. God isn’t looking for us to completely destroy this sinful flesh. That’s not our job. We can’t purify ourselves. What God does care about, is, as Calvin says, “that we make every exertion to subdue its lusts.” If we truly make every honest and good effort to deny sin’s claim on our lives, then by God and with the Spirit, we will make a dent in our sinful flesh. And that, my friends, is what God is looking for.

Now, Paul says we can do this by the Spirit. The Holy Ghost took on a lot of roles after Jesus ascended into heaven. Throughout Scripture, we find many different titles for the Spirit. In this eighth chapter of Romans alone, we see several examples: Spirit of Life, Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of him who raised Jesus. In verse fifteen, Paul says “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery...but you have received the Spirit of adoption.” Our new life in Christ means we are heirs with Christ. In order for us understand this, we must understand the context of adoption and inheritance behind Paul’s experience. Deuteronomy 21:15-17 records the only law pertaining to the inheritance rights of first born sons. The eldest son is to receive a double-portion of the father’s property and wealth. Now, it goes without saying, these ancient customs and cultures were highly patriarchal, meaning only men could own property and wealth and only sons could inherit. When we understand inheritance and adoption theologically, it also stands without saying that men are not the only recipients of God’s grace. Men and women of all classes and races can be co-inheritors with Christ Jesus.

Since Jesus is God's only begotten Son, he is the inheritor of God's redemption and eternal life. If this is the case, though, it doesn't make sense for Jesus to be the sole inheritor, for God's plan of salvation is for the human race, not for himself. This is so, because Jesus did not need salvation, since he was the very incarnate Word of God. In order for the human race to inherit God's redemption, then, we must be adopted into his household. This is where the title Spirit of Adoption comes into play. The Greek word used for adoption is *huiothesia*. Now, I like the word adoption, because it conveys to our modern ears what Paul is talking about, but the literal translation is "constituting a son." Remember the context: only sons can inherit, therefore we literally receive a Spirit of Sonship. The Holy Spirit makes us sons of the Father, brothers with Jesus, and thereby we become co-inheritors of the Father. Our adoption as children of God is sealed and attested by the Holy Spirit, Paul says so, himself. This adoption affords us many benefits, foremost of which is the threefold work of the Spirit: faith, hope, and love. But that's a topic for another Sunday.

In the meantime, Paul also wants to remind us that, while we receive many wondrous benefits from adoption, the Christian is not free from suffering and strife. While attaining faith, hope, and love, all Christians will experience doubt, despair, and disunity. "God's inheritance is ours," asserts Calvin, "because we have by his grace been adopted as his children; and that it may not be [doubted], its possession has been already conferred on Christ," this is where Calvin gets very serious, "but Christ came to it by the cross; then we must come to it in the same manner."<sup>2</sup> It's interesting, and challenging, to think about suffering that way. If Christ had to suffer torments and crucifixion to win our adoption, then why should we have it easy in the work of sanctification? We will suffer and fight because of our faith. The world wants to distract us from the duties of our adoption. The devil wants to strip us of our inheritance. There is injustice and oppression on the poor and disenfranchised. There are parts of the world where the Gospel is not allowed to be preached. The Christian, you and me, we are called to strive against these systems that seek to deny ourselves and others of our heavenly claim. Calvin assures that it should not overwhelm us "if we must pass through various afflictions into celestial glory, since these, when compared with the greatness of that glory, are of the least importance."<sup>3</sup> For the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Let us pray. Abba, Father, we are your children, bought by the blood of Christ and adopted by the Spirit. As your children, we know we must put to death the claim sin has on our lives. By Jesus' death and resurrection, the bonds of sin were broken and we are at liberty through our adoption. Help us, O Holy Spirit, as we continue to put to death the things of the flesh: the love of sinning. Our duty in the world is this mortification, and we know it is not easy. We know that we will face trials and temptations, suffering and strife. Be with us as we fight the good fight with all our might. Constantly remind us that, though this present turmoil may be rough and tiresome, it is not endless, for the coming glory that awaits those in Christ will far exceed all pain on earth. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your sacrifice of love. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38>. Page 256

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, 261.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, 262.