

Romans 8:11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. ¹²Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For 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.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now 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. ¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

LIVING OFF YOUR INHERITANCE

“Inheritance.” What comes to mind? Money, Money, Money!?! Easy life? Leisure? Nice clothes? No work? Of course, most inheritances aren’t big enough to do that for a person. But even a modest inheritance can make a big difference. It gives you the wiggle room, it lets you pay off a few bills, take the trip you always wanted to take.

Inheritances happen not because of anything you do. You just happen to be a son or daughter, a niece or nephew. It wasn’t your choice, or work, or effort. It is where you just so happened to be, by God’s plan.

Your Future Inheritance (11,17-19)

Dozens of times in different chapters and books, the Bible compares our blessings as Christians to an inheritance. In our reading too, it says, **“The Spirit himself testifies... that we are God’s children.”** And it proceeds with a bit of perfect logic, **“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God”** (16-17). If we are God’s children, do you realize what that means? It means that what God has, is ours! We will inherit what God has!

A big reason the Bible likes to use the picture of an inheritance is that an inheritance isn’t something we can earn. It is based on something other than what we do. For example, the faithful maid or butler who daily and faithfully serves the billionaire for decades, but most likely it is the children who will be named the heirs—even if they didn’t show up all that often.

Now I don’t want to push the illustration too far. Illustrations have *points* of comparison. Illustrations and reality are not alike in *all* ways. But here is the main point of comparison: an inheritance stresses that the will of the giver makes it happen, not the desires of the recipient. I can’t wish myself into an inheritance; I can’t even work myself into an inheritance. The giver is the one who decides whether or not to favor me with an inheritance. The giver is the one who writes the name on the paper.

When you know you are the heir—when you have been told that truth, when you have seen your name on the document—it is a very comforting thing. It gives you a sense of security to know that someone has written you into their will, has planned to take care of your future. And you don’t need to do anything!

The Holy Spirit of God tells us and assures us that we are heirs of God. What God has, is ours. That is what it means to be children of God. We have a secure future.

Young people of today, perhaps more than the older ones among us, can appreciate this security of

a guaranteed inheritance. I believe that compared to the previous one or two generations, the young people of our day face greater uncertainty than we did. Uncertainty is one of the greatest stresses there is. Uncertainty isn't a body blow, like a funeral or a pink slip at work. Uncertainty is more like mice gnawing at the insulation in the walls. It works on you, little by little. Uncertainty is low-level stress that makes you sleep restlessly, get irritated more quickly, enjoy the good times less and feel the bad times more. We hate uncertainty. We hate wondering about the ACT or MRI results. "Just tell me so I can move on!" We try to avoid uncertainty by making plans. We plan for college, for retirement, for our kids and grandkids. Few things are more intolerable than long stretches of uncertainty.

But a guaranteed inheritance gives us certainty. This is our inheritance from God: "***The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead... will also give life to your mortal bodies.***" The chief hope of our inheritance is locked up in what happened to Jesus on Easter. Our bodies are mortal, they will die. Oh we can take care of ourselves and add a year or a decade to our lives. All the while, this world keeps throwing troubles and uncertainty our way.

All the uncertainty of life in *this* world is swallowed up by our inheritance in the coming world, in heaven. We will be raised from the dead. In that new life the ways of this world will melt away. As the Apostle Paul said near the end of our reading, "***I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us***" (18). Paul counted his present sufferings as insignificant. When you anticipate an inheritance, you can put up with an awful lot of bother because you know something better is coming. That is what a real inheritance does for you, isn't it? You look forward to when you will receive that inheritance, when you will move into a new house, when all of the bills will be paid, when you can throw away all the socks with the holes, and you no longer have a car where you say a prayer every time you turn the ignition key. When that inheritance becomes reality, all of the past troubles fade are swallowed up in the new life.

In Jesus Christ, you have that heavenly inheritance. All of the disqualifying factors were removed when he died on the cross for our sins. All of the shortcomings were solved when Jesus kept God's law on our behalf. Through faith in Jesus, that is yours. And now "***the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead... will also give life to your mortal bodies.***"

Taking that Inheritance for Granted (12,13,15)

You have heard something along these lines: "The worst of times bring out the best in people." Well, there is a flip-side to that which seems true: "The best of times often bring out the worst in people."

An inheritance can be a tremendous blessing. But here is the strange part. An inheritance, instead of bringing out the best in people, often brings out the worst. When an large inheritance comes up for grabs, sometimes families are broken to pieces. Relatives stop talking to each other. We have all heard of that, perhaps even lived through it. Inheritances often have tragic results. The tragic results are not only down the road results after the reading of the will. Bad things sometimes start happening even *before* the will is executed, before the benefactor dies.

It's the stuff of murder mysteries. A wealthy matriarch has several children who expect a sizeable inheritance—when mother passes. A couple of her children keep on piling up debt, living irresponsibly, banking on the inheritance. But alas, mother is long-lived and at age 93 mother still drives herself to the grocery store every week. They live, not for their mother, but for the moment she will die, so they can continue down the road of irresponsible living.

Oh, how many who profess Jesus live in just this way! Like a selfish grown child valuing a parent only for the inheritance the parent is sitting on, not a few Christians live like that toward Jesus. They think, "Heaven is my inheritance. Jesus paid for my sin. So let me go do whatever I want. If I sin, I sin. Why worry? The pastor will just tell me I am forgiven at the next church service!" And like the

prodigal son in a land of wild living, they let sin have its way. They occasionally giving God a nod, like the profligate child who makes the twice-a-year visit to “Mother Dearest”. But listen: **“Brothers, we have an obligation—but not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.”**

Believers in Jesus have the certain inheritance of heaven. And God gives us a great deal of freedom, even the freedom to disobey him. But he also gives us this warning: **“If you [continue to] live according to the sinful nature, you will die.”** God will not force compliance, but there will be consequences for those who are intent on sin. And if our attitude is to live according to our sinful nature, living that way will lead to spiritual death. We can never write ourselves into God’s will, but we can write ourselves out of it!

So God’s Word encourages us, **“Put to death the misdeeds of the body.”** Each of us knows how we are tempted, not by chocolate, but by sin. You know where your mind is tempted to smile over *thoughts* that God hates. You know the sorts of conversations when your mouth will *say* things God forbids. You know the times and places you will feel the freedom to *do* things God condemns. Do not live according to that sinful nature!

Some are tempted to continue in sin because that is what they enjoy. Others are tempted to continue in sin because that is what they are used to: **“You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again.”**

You have seen people who return to slavery. (And here I mean to tread lightly, for I wish to offend none, but to instruct all with what God’s word is here saying.) You have known people who come out of dysfunctional backgrounds. And through some wonderful blessing, they rise above the broken background. But some, when they get to that new, happier level of life, they can’t stand it. They can’t stand success. They can’t stand stability. Sometimes they can’t even stand loving relationships. So they revert back to the old dysfunctional, self-destructive way of life they once were used to. You wish it weren’t that way for them, but it is.

That is sin’s constant temptation for each of us, especially for people who became Christians as adults, or who come back to the Church after decades living apart from God’s community. Our reading said, **“You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again.”** There come times when Christians get bored with their faith, or they will feel like their faith isn’t helping them out like they want it to. And they are tempted to seek the pleasures and comforts that they knew before they were called to repentance. This is a return to slavery. How foolish it is! It is a return to the thing that was destroying us and will destroy again. It is a return to Satan’s plans to ruin us. It is a renunciation of God’s inheritance.

But if you have those moments of relapse, rest assured that Christ Jesus has taken those things and nailed them to the cross. He has forgiven them. And his encouragement to each of us is, *“Neither do I condemn you. Now go and leave your life of sin!”* (John 8:11)

Living up to That Inheritance (14-16)

Some selfish heirs look at a future inheritance as a cash cow to be exploited. But heirs who love and honor their parents, hope not to live *off of* that inheritance, but to live *up to* that inheritance. May it be so among us. May it be as we read, **“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God... You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’”**(14-15). In confidence and trust we cry out to our heavenly Father like a little Jewish girl or boy, just learning to talk would have said to a daddy, **“Abba.”** With childlike faith and trust, we live for our heavenly Father who has given us a heavenly inheritance in Jesus Christ.

May the Holy Spirit living in our hearts, who will one day breathe life into our dead bodies, may that Holy Spirit give us spiritual life that we may live for God at every moment of our lives. Amen.