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Romans

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,
Romans 8:16

That the Spirit bears witness of our state is a fairly common theme in the New Testament. One of several explicitly declared examples which confirms this is 1 Corinthians 2:12 - "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

As noted in 8:15, there is no universal "fatherhood" of God to humanity. Though this is a commonly held tenet by people around the world and a commonly taught doctrine by liberal Christian theologians, it is simply not a biblical tenet. Even the concept of the "brotherhood of man" is far too often used to convey meaning which isn't biblically supportable. Without Christ, there is not the truly spiritual family relationship which the Bible reveals.

However, in Christ, we are sealed with the Spirit and established together with other believers in a unique way. There is a new bond uniting us which, although may not be evident as Christians often rile against each other and tear each other down, exists on a spiritual level nonetheless. This is manifest based on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:22 -

"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

This same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who adopts us, establishes us, anoints us, and seals us (among so many other things), also "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." This cannot be human derived knowledge, because if that were true, then what to say of the many who claim to be God's children apart from Christ? No, instead it is a knowledge imparted to us by God, through the Holy Spirit which assures us.

We can definitely say that we were born. Knowing that we are human and that humans are born of mothers who came from other humans, we can know with absolute certainty that we were born; it is a self-evident fact. So sure also should be the knowledge of our new birth in Christ. This doesn't mean that the knowledge remains. Not many people think on the fact that they are humans, and unfortunately many quite often act more like animals than they do as humans. Despite this, they are no less human.

Likewise, there are Christians who act in a manner far less worthy than the glorious name they bear. Equally sad is that some have even forgotten that they bear the name (2 Peter 1:9), but the Spirit doesn't forget and it testifies and bears witness to the truth of the conversion. A child of God will remain a child of God, though he may suffer the consequences of a life not lived for his glorious Father.

Life application: The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Are you living up to that high and exalted honor? In 2 Peter 1 verses 5-8, we are given valuable instruction to keep us from being barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Take a moment to read those verses and then determine to apply them to your life.

...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. Romans 8:17

In Hebrews 1:2, Christ Jesus is said to be "heir of all things." In Matthew 28:18, Jesus Himself states that "all authority" in heaven and earth has been granted to Him. He is the recipient of it all. The Lamb has triumphed and God the Father is

pleased to bestow upon Him such glory. He is the Son of God and thus entitled to it all.

Today, Paul imparts to us a truth which is astounding in its weight and meaning for us. We can't fully know it in our fallen bodies. We look to Jesus and understand His authority, right to rule, power, and glory, but understanding isn't the same thing as comprehending. Our minds aren't capable of grasping His greatness. And as awesome and glorious is His rule and place of authority, we are told that we shall participate in it.

It has been noted that we are "sons of God." We are His children because of Christ. If children, then heirs. Under Roman law, all children - including those who were adopted into a family, became equal inheritors of an estate. Under Jewish law, it was different. The oldest son was given a double portion over the other sons. Paul is speaking of Roman, not Jewish, law.

Jesus shows us that this is true in Revelation 3:21 - "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

Sitting on Jesus' throne implies full inheritance, nothing less. All of the rights and privileges of true son-ship are realized because of mere faith in Christ. Adoption guarantees all this. We are "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." However, a point that is almost universally overlooked in today's world of ease and comfort is the truth that calling on Christ doesn't necessarily mean a bank account full of cash and a house with elevators.

We have been given the same right to rule in heaven and the same right to suffer on earth. We can thank the Lord each day that we get up to a beautiful sunrise, a table full of food, and a job which pays for family vacations, but we can also thank Him when we suffer for His name. In 1 Peter 4:15, 16 we are shown what honorable Christian suffering involves -

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

The truth we shouldn't miss is that suffering, in and of itself, doesn't meet the necessary conditions for the glory of heaven's riches, only suffering with Christ does. When we suffer with Him in this manner we find that we will "also be glorified together" with Him. There is nothing shameful in suffering for Christ and in fact, it is the most honorable of all aspects of our Christian walk. To suffer for Him, is to have emulated Him in His highest moment leading to glory - the cross.

This family relationship and its suffering and glory isn't intended to bestow upon us merely heaven either. Rather, Paul says we are "heirs of God." In other words, heaven is a side benefit of the true inheritance which is God Himself. It is this which is of highest value. What is coming is so astonishing that we will marvel in it for all eternity - the revealing of our Creator in an endless stream of wisdom, wonderment, and delight - "And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." Revelation 22:3, 4

Life application: To be an heir of God is a concept that we will never fully comprehend. Throughout the ages of ages we will ceaselessly, endlessly see the riches of God and behold the marvel and majesty of His glory. As this is so, why should we draw back from suffering for Christ now? The highest honor of this earthly walk will be rewarded with the greatest glory of heaven's treasures.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:18

"For" refers directly back to the preceding thought, "if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Our suffering in Christ may not be what we hope for but despite it, there is the promise of glorification ahead. This is what Paul is telling us and then he gives words to comfort us about these things.

Referring to himself in the third person in 2 Corinthians 12, he tells us that he was caught up to the "third heaven." While there he "heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." If the hearing of Paradise was beyond our authorized knowledge, imagine what the seeing and experiencing must be. From one who had experienced first hand the glory to come, he considered "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared" with what lay ahead.

And Paul knew suffering like most of us never will. In 2 Corinthians 11:22-29, he cites many of the trials and discomforts he had faced. Alone with his other infirmities, he was truly a man who would know. But to him, they were nothing. He knew and understood what was coming in an intimate way and so he, with this wonderful knowledge, implores us to follow in the footsteps of faith. Just as he had this certainty for himself, he shares to his reader of the "glory which shall be revealed in us." Later, he will pass on the same sentiment to the readers in Corinth. When he does, he makes a contrast between the suffering and the glory. No matter how immense the suffering now, he says it is "light." In contrast, the glory will be of "eternal weight" -

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18

Life application: What is your pain? It will be healed for eternity. What is your sorrow? It will be exchanged for everlasting joy. What is your worry? It will be swapped out for comfort throughout the ages. If this is true, then the hope of it should carry you through the moment with peace and contentment. Place your cares on the Lord, for He cares for you.

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. Romans 8:19

In this subsection, verses 18-28, Paul uses the term "for" five times in various ways - "For I consider," "For we know," etc. In the preceding verse, "for" was given to explain comparisons between the suffering of this current walk and the glory to come. The "for" now is used to build on that concept of glory. This is important to consider, because if there are ten thousand commentaries on this verse, there are surely ten thousand various opinions on what it exactly means. It is an extremely complicated verse to pin down.

Therefore, looking to the progression of the thought - what it is built from and where it is leading to, should help to provide the clearest sense. This is needed because even translations differ. Is this section speaking of the "creation" or the "creature?" If it is about the "creature" is it speaking of all creation using a generic term for all the various aspects of creation, or is it speaking of living creatures in creation only, or of humans only? If humans, is it speaking of gentiles, Jews or both? Etc. All of these have been proposed and well defended by great and honorable scholars.

As you can see, the differences start right away and build into vast theological avenues. Fortunately, even with the complicated nature of the passage and the differing opinions, it is not a section which leads easily to heresy. So to be wrong, although not a good thing, isn't something that would lead others to not comprehend the message of salvation.

Verse 21 will state that "the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Because the creation (or "creature" depending on the translation) is being tied in with what happens to the "children of God," it is likely that what Paul is speaking of is the whole of creation. Obviously, creation itself can't "eagerly wait" in the truest sense. So what this means is that Paul is using personification to make his point.

This is a fallen world which is eagerly waiting for its return to how it was originally intended to be. Things now are not in an ideal state. When man fell, the creation fell with him. This is evidenced by the Genesis account -

"Cursed is the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat of it
All the days of your life.

Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field." Genesis 3:17, 18

And again -

"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea."
Genesis 9:2

The living and non-living creation has been frustrated. The ground was cursed (non-living) and this curse has affected the plant life. Animal life is also not as it was originally designed. The 360-day calendar of the Bible doesn't match the calendar we currently use. Thus the revolution around the sun is not as it once was. And so forth. In other words, all of creation, although magnificently timed and orchestrated, is still not as it was originally intended to be.

The explanation for this is to be found in the next verse, but what is certain from this verse is that this fallen "creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." When the sons of God are revealed, the creation will be restored to the way it was originally intended. Isaiah speaks about this on several occasions.

Life application: There are complicated passages in the Bible which people disagree on which don't lead to heresy. There are also concepts in the Bible which when misrepresented do. Let us evaluate those things which are of less weight without arrogance or accusation toward others, but let us hold firm to the truths which would otherwise lead others to heresy, not tolerating that which condemns precious souls.