

**SECURED**  
Romans 8:12-25

The concept of the church being the “sons of God” is part of a sevenfold description of the church that Paul presented in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus. [The other six are Army of God, Body of Christ, Bride of Christ, Household of God, Temple of God, and Workmanship of God.] This “son-ship” concept carries with it the idea of maturity in that a distinction is made in the designation of being “children” of God and in being “sons” of God. As sons of God, we are obligated to seek to know God's will and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in our everyday walk that we may share in the inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Eternal Future – 8:12-13

<sup>12</sup> So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup> for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Romans 8:12–13 (NASB95)

Previously, Paul had a lot of emphasis on the facts that, in Christ, sin has no more dominion over us and we have ZERO obligation to the demands of sin. Additionally, in Christ, we are freed from the letter of the law. Now, we find that we are under a different obligation. We are to live each day (moment) in the control of and power of the Holy Spirit which leads to (spiritual) life. There is NO obligation to live by the dictates and demand of the old corrupt nature (flesh - Greek word is *sarx*) that has been put to death. In a parallel sense, we are to “put to death” the “deeds” or demands of the physical body (Greek word is *soma*) by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. By doing this we will be healthier, stronger, more energetic, etc. which is taking care of and respecting the physical body portion of who we are as the “temple of God.”

In *The Spiritual Man*, Watchman Nee commented on the physical body and our obligations to it as being that of providing the necessities of clothing, food, shelter and rest. We must not love these necessities and become obsessive about them in following the latest fashions, focusing on gourmet foods, having an opulent house and being lazy. Sometimes Christians assume they can live for themselves – using their bodies for the things they wish to do – but at the same time expect the Holy Spirit to give life to their bodies so that they can be healthy and without infirmity. Nee’s conclusion is that such thinking is “utterly ridiculous!”

Eternal Inheritance – 8:14-18

<sup>14</sup> For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. <sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:14–18 (NASB95)

The sons of God are led by the Spirit and those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God. If we are not following the leading of the Holy Spirit, then being children of God by virtue of the new birth and even being recognized as sons as our position in the family of God, then we will not be able to enjoy the blessings of our “saved” position. The benefits and outcome are as if you had never been saved.

The spirit or nature of unsaved man was (is) one of a cringing type fear of God. It was what caused Adam and Eve to hide from God after they sinned. We could perhaps argue that such fear would likely lead to a reluctance to follow God. For a Christian, the old spirit has been

replaced by a new spirit that recognizes God as our Father. A good picture of this is that of a toddler who runs to embrace his or her Daddy who has just come home from work. There is no fear but what we see is a spirit of belonging and being willing to follow wherever Daddy goes.

Think of this as (not being a requirement for being a son) but as evidence of that reality. This idea is what Paul was writing about in mentioning “the witness of the Spirit with our spirit.” God provides “knowledge” (an internal assurance) by revelation to our spirits. This witness is “knowing” apart from “understanding.”

Often, we tend to look for evidence in our lives that we are “sons of God” and we will likely find a mixed testimony coming from what we see in our own lives and even in the lives of other Christians. Focusing on ourselves can, of course, lead to doubts and concerns. Ideally, the testimony that is most important and that on which we must rely is not our own behaviors, attitudes, and maturity but it should be the testimony that God is our Father. The testimony (evidence) that God is our Father is different from the evidence that we are His sons. The evidence that God is our Father is found in His unchanging love, His willingness to die in our place, His desire to be in our midst and to lead us, and His benevolence toward us in bringing good out of every circumstance. We find Him always faithful and just. On the other hand, the evidence from our lives will fall short and we have to conclude that the conviction that we are sons of God is not about how we react toward God but is based on the knowledge of how He feels and reacts toward us.

The consequences of being a son are that we are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ. This means that we share in all the Father has. Inheritances are passed on to the “firstborn” (Christ) who then distributes the shares to his coheirs.

Let’s look at the sequence in verse 17 of “children > heirs > heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.” Going from *children* to *heirs* is the maturation process that we find pictured in the Israelite culture in which children are recognized as sons (bar mitzvah) and become partakers in the inheritance. Being *heirs of God* can have a double meaning. First, the obvious thing is that we inherit *that which belongs to God*. The second possible meaning is that we “inherit God.” Of course, this is not to imply that we “own” God, but that we “possess Him” as we receive and absorb His nature into our very being. This is a mutual possession such as we see in reference to Israel being the Lord’s inheritance and the Lord being Israel’s inheritance. We also find agreement with the words of David in Psalm 16:5, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance.”

Being *joint heirs with Christ* speaks of the idea of inheriting that which belongs to God - specifically His glory (abundance, wealth, treasure, and hence honor). Being joint heirs with Him also speaks of the extent and shared character of our inheritance. Christ being the first born receives a double portion (that is, He has the preeminence) and he has the responsibility of apportioning the inheritance among the other heirs. Sharing in His glory is a consequence of being sons or of having matured from status of children. The foundational basis for such an inheritance is being a son of the Father. This, of course, agrees with the words of Jesus to Nicodemus in John 3:7: “You must be born from above.”

Suffering for the cause of Christ can be viewed as an external validation that we are walking with Him. Son-ship is the root and the suffering (experiencing what Jesus experienced) is the “stalk, leaves, and fruit” coming from that root. Just as Jesus was persecuted by the world system for what He did, we too will be persecuted IF we do the things He did. Doing the things He did is nothing more than obedience to His commands. Obedience to His commands confirms our love for Him and only those who love Him will share His glory.

The possibility of persecution and tribulation is not a reason to avoid taking a stand for

Christ. Paul had endured much suffering for the cause of Christ and he realized that such problems were insignificant compared to what God has for those who love Him.

The suffering of Christ can be seen as, at least, twofold. The first was that His perfect sinless being was constantly exposed to the horrible ugliness of a world ensnared in the throes of evil and literally dying by its own attitudes and actions that rejected and rebelled against the love of God that was extended to it. The second part of the suffering was the selfless act of allowing Himself to be crucified and put to death which was perhaps intensified by the knowledge that He could have said “enough” and brought an end to the suffering. To a limited extent, we should also experience a revulsion to the ugliness of sin in the world in which we find ourselves and yet we are in the midst of what is happening so that the offer of God’s salvation in Christ can be made known to those who are perishing.

We will also experience suffering by taking up our cross and daily dying to the impulses of what was programmed into us by the old nature when we are confronted with persecution and rejection by a world that misinterprets our call for righteousness as hatred rather than legitimate care borne out of the love of God that is in our hearts.

We should also see the present suffering in this world as part of the preparation to make us ready for the glory that is to be revealed to us. According to Alexander MacLaren “Trials have no meaning, unless they are means to an end.” The readiness is a part of our being more and more like Christ which is what is being worked into us by God using “all things” which we experience in this life as Paul mentions in verses 28 and 29 of this chapter.

### Creation Restored – 8:19-22

<sup>19</sup> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. Romans 8:19–22 (NASB95)

The conventional interpretation of this passage is that Paul was personifying the natural created world and that this “inanimate” cosmos longs or yearns to see the sons of God revealed (in some glorious way). If this line of thinking is followed then we are forced to put the fulfillment of this ideal situation to be coincident with the “resurrection of the physical bodies” in their glorified form when Christ returns to physically reign on earth. The anticipation is that such bodies will be similar to the resurrected body of Christ and that this condition is in agreement with the passage (1 John 3:2) that tells us “when Christ appears, then we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” A. T. Robertson (*NT Word Pictures*) commented the following: “This mystical sympathy of physical nature with the work of grace is beyond the comprehension of most of us. But who can disprove it?”

The reference of “creation made subject to futility” is thought to be related to the pronouncement in Genesis 3:17 that “the ground is cursed” because of Adam’s sin. The reversal of this curse is found in the promise of “creation being set free from its slavery to corruption.” Some have speculated that this means, that in the “new situation” decay will not happen and that weeds and thorns will not grow, etc.

An alternate view of this passage recognizes that “the creature” (v. 19), and “the whole creation” (v. 22) are the same. According to John Gill’s Commentary, the phrase *pasa ktisiv*, “the whole creation,” or “every creature,” as it may be rendered, signifies the nations of the world, in distinction to the Jews. (See Mark 16:15, Col 1:23). The Hebrew word for “the creatures” was a name the Jews (often in their writings) call the Gentiles, to distinguish them from the Israelites.

If the “creature” means the Gentiles, then we can see that they, having only general or natural revelation, but being separated from the law and the Gospel and without knowledge of God and the revelation of Him in Christ as enabled by the Holy Spirit, would then be void of spiritual insight and would be caught up in the vanity or emptiness of the world system. In their vain conceits, those in this system presume themselves to be wise in their own philosophies, their religion (polytheism), their idolatry, and even in their sinful practices. (Compare this with Romans 1:21,22: Because that, when they knew God (*from evidence in creation*), they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools)

Though such people are willing to participate in their vanity and in their evil practices, Paul tells us that they are not willingly under (or subject to) this vanity. In other words, those who are without Christ are trapped in an enslavement to sin from which they cannot extricate themselves. How did they get into such a mess? They were born into it (being born of the seed of Adam) and, therefore, they are slaves to the prince of this world – to the devil.

Based on what we have discussed, let’s restate verses 19-21. “The Gentiles, being trapped in an enslavement to sin and without knowledge of the Gospel are eagerly looking for some evidence of a salvation that would free them from the frustration of a meaningless life to allow them to become all that God intended for them to be. That evidence is found in the life of those who are saved and are walking in the freedom of new life in Christ.”

If this view is accepted, then it would be logical to say that the part of the lost world that is looking for salvation from their condition of separation and alienation from God would be looking to the church (made up of individual born-again believers) for evidence that the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in the completed work of Christ on the Cross is the answer to the longed-for salvation. That evidence would be found in the witness (lives and behavior) of individual believers (and collectively as the church) that their faith resulted in their lives being transformed. In other words, the witness of the church (and particularly that of individual Christians) ought to be such that it could be described as freedom from slavery to sin and freedom to align lives with the principles of the Kingdom of God. Does the lost world find “hope” in what they see happening in the lives of Christians?

A supporting reference for the second interpretation (above) is found in 1 Peter 3:15 where we see “But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord; and always be ready to give an answer to **everyone** (*the creatures*) who asks you a reason concerning the **hope** that is in you, yet with humility and fear.”

A second related reference is also found in the first epistle of Peter in verse 2:12. Here we see “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles (*the creatures*), so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.” Every translation I checked (except Young’s Literal Translation) rendered the last word of this verse as “visitation.” We normally think of “visitation” as when the Lord returns. However, the Greek word used is episkope (ep-is-kop-ay’) and is the root of such English words as Episcopal and is related the word translated as “bishop” or “overseer.” The term “overseer” could be translated as “inspector.” In fact, Young’s Literal Translation renders this verse as

12 having your behavior among the nations right, that in that which they speak against you as evil-doers, of the good works having beheld, they may glorify God in a day of inspection.

The way of life (conversation or behavior) to which Peter referred is being lived out among the Gentiles – the unsaved world (*the creatures*). So, who are those who will be glorifying God as a result of what we do in our “good works?” The answer to this seems fairly

obvious: the Gentiles will be giving glory to God. What is the occasion of them seeing our “good works?” They see (or don’t see) our good works when they “inspect” us.

As Christians we are under constant examination (or inspection) by those who are still part of the “fallen” world system. They are examining us to find an answer to the question “Is It Real?” “It,” of course, refers to the good news of “God’s Salvation” in and through the completed work of Jesus Christ.

So, which interpretation should we use? Let’s say that the first one is the right idea and the passage is in reference to the return of Christ and our having glorified, resurrected bodies and the physical creation has been delivered from rot, decay, weeds and thorns. What are we to do in our present-day lives as a result of this interpretation? What impact would this situation have on our lives and the way we function on a day-to-day basis? What can we do but wait for that glorious time with great anticipation? On the other hand, if the second interpretation is what Paul intended, then each Christian should have a renewed sense of responsibility to faithfully witness with their very lives that Christ is Lord, that we are sons of God, that salvation is more than just an idea but is a reality that actually changes lives. Why is that important? Because the world IS watching for the revelation of the sons of God.

This anticipation by the “whole creation” or “every creature” (verse 22) has been going on in past times, “up to the present time.” That has at least two possible meanings:

1. The anticipation has been going on and it is still going on even at the time of Paul’s writing.
2. The anticipation has been going on and now it is starting to see fulfillment in those who were being saved among the Gentiles.

Which ever of these possibilities is the case, this fulfillment is not the end of the anticipation. There is more to come!

### Humanity Restored – 8:23-25

<sup>23</sup> And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. <sup>24</sup> For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. Romans 8:23–25 (NASB95)

What is meant by the “first fruits of the Spirit?” It could be either the very presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives which is the “earnest of our inheritance” or the Gifts of the Spirit which enable the work of the kingdom of God to be done on earth, or it is the fruit of the Spirit which is the manifestation of the character of Christ in the life of the believer. That could mean that the manifestation of the sons of God is the demonstration of the character of Christ in our lives.

In verse 24, the hope about which Paul wrote is stated to be the anticipation of the redemption of our bodies. What does that really mean in the context of a situation with which believers presently struggle (groan within ourselves)? Traditional interpretations of this “hope” will typically lead to discussion related to the resurrection of the body in some undefined glorious existence in some future time.

We should be able to soundly argue that to “some extent” we already have been recognized (adopted) as sons. We can see evidence of this in our spirit and our soul as it is becoming conformed to the image of Christ which is the ultimate hope of our salvation.

The salvation that we experience begins in the very center of our being and works its way outward. At the “new birth” we have an abrupt change in our “spiritual” existence in that the old “adamic” nature dies and we are quickened in our new nature (made alive) with the uncreated life of God. A transformation of the “soul” begins at that point which is an ongoing process where God is at work within us to “will and to do of His good purposes.” Our external frame

(the physical body) is a challenge with which we struggle (groan) because it is subject to urges and drives that are unique to the body. However, for the whole man to experience “salvation” the “soma” (Greek for physical body) must also be impacted by what God is doing in us. Just as we need to cooperatively engage our mind, emotions and our will in the transformation process, there is an expectation (requirement?) for us to cooperatively engage our physical body (soma) so that the body is responsive to the Spirit of God working through our regenerated spirit and the mind, the emotions, and the will to which the body is to be subject. Too often, even for Christians, the urges and drives of the physical body are the “parts” of our being that seems to be “in control” of our lives rather than the “totality of who we are” being led by the Spirit. If we are being led by our bodily appetites, then that is no different from the way the world (the creatures) operates.

Each one of us should examine our lives (the way we function) to discern what or who is in control of our attitudes, our thought patterns, what we say and what we do.