

# Romans 8:17-18

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*Christians are children of God, and from Him every believer unconditionally inherits being justified in His sight and the promise of one day being with Him in His glory. For Christians who suffer as Christ did, there is a specific inheritance reward; Jesus was given authority over earth by God for what He did as a man—dying and resurrecting to take the punishment for our sins. God rewarded Jesus Christ for this suffering. For those of us who suffer as Christ did, enduring rejection from the world, He bestows the privilege to be fellow heirs with Him in His coming kingdom. Ultimately, the sufferings on this earth are trivial in light of this wonderful opportunity of reigning with Christ in His future reign on earth.*

Paul makes two distinctions concerning our heirship in verse 17: *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* (v 17).

One part of this heirship is unconditional, another part is conditional. Before we were children of God, we were children of wrath, as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:3. We were dedicated to following our sinful desires. Our heritage was wrath: judgement and selfishness and doom.

But now, as believers in Jesus, we call God our Father, and our hope and inheritance come from obedience to Him. There are two sorts of inheritances, those with conditions and those without conditions. Here, there is one of each.

God uses the illustration of family and children to illustrate both types. It is impossible to “unmake” a human child. The father’s DNA is in that person whether they like it or not; that is unconditional. But it is not uncommon for a loving father to disinherit a son from a portion of the will, particularly if the father knows the inheritance would harm the child.

*Heirs of God* is an unconditional inheritance for every believer. Every believer has God as their inheritance no matter how badly they might fail. If we believe in Jesus, God is our Father, and we are His child, no matter what. Our failures will always be forgiven and undone. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more, as Paul stated in Chapter 5:

“...but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20 b).

In Colossians 2:13–14, Paul also states this plainly: “[Jesus] made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions...having nailed it to the cross.” There is no out-sinning the grace of God.

Having God as an inheritance, as our Father, is unconditional. All believers in Jesus are children, and that is an unconditional gift (Romans 11:29). But then, Paul names another inheritance, which is conditional. In verse 17, he writes *and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with*

*Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.* Every believer is an heir of God. But only those who *suffer with Him* will be *glorified with Him* and be *fellow heirs with Christ*.

The *if* here is tied to whether *we suffer with Him*. This inheritance of being *fellow heirs with Christ* is a reward we receive only *if* we suffer with Jesus. This raises several questions:

- Q: What did Christ inherit?
  - A: All authority over heaven and earth (Mathew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11)
- Q: What did Jesus suffer?
  - A: He suffered rejection of men, and unjust death (Isaiah 53:3; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 3:18).
- What was the glory Jesus obtained as a reward for suffering?
  - He sat down on His Father's throne, having defeated death, and received the glory and honor as a human to be restored to reigning over the world (Hebrews 2:5-9; Revelation 3:21)

As the Son of God, Jesus started off with the whole universe being His. He is God. But the Bible says He inherited something else, due to His great suffering and sacrifice on the cross: rulership over the earth. And the reason Jesus died on the cross was because of obedience to His Father (Philippians 2:8).

The books of Philippians and Hebrews discuss this notion at greater length. In Philippians 2:8–11, Paul writes out the progression of the story of Christ's time on earth:

- He became a man,
- He humbled Himself so low that He gave His life on the cross in obedience to God.
- Having *learned* obedience to God (because He was truly human) and because of His faithfulness, God exalted Jesus and bestowed to Him complete dominion of the earth and its people.

The earth was originally intended to be a province ruled by humans. That's the way God created it. This is obvious in Genesis chapters 1–3. God put man on the earth to manage it. The Bible is also fairly clear that who was ruling it before—and even is still now on the throne, but inappropriately—is Satan. Lucifer (John 14:30, 16:11).

But God intended that man should rule earth ([Psalm 8](#)). Now He has given the earth to Jesus as a human as a reward and inheritance for His obedience to the point of death. And Jesus intends to reward those who learn the obedience He learned by sharing that incredible reward (Revelation 3:21).

Jesus died, but we died in Him through faith (Romans 6:3). So as we put the flesh to death, and walk in the Spirit, we are walking in obedience as Jesus walked. We are living a crucified life. Thus we are overcoming sin and temptation, even as Jesus overcame, and are qualifying to receive the reward of an overcomer (Revelation 3:21).

In answering the slanderous charges of the competing Jewish “authorities,” Paul has made the case that a sufficient reason not to live in sin is to avoid the negative consequences (death) and experience the positive consequences (life and peace). But here in verses 17–18 is a transcendent reason to put to death the sin nature and walk in obedience to the Spirit: to overcome as Jesus overcame by being willing to *suffer with Him*; this qualifies us to be fully restored to our original design to reign as servant leaders over the earth, in harmony with God and others (Matthew 25:21).

In God’s original design, we humans were not supposed to compete with one another to see who would rule, to see who gets to be the “exploiter-in-chief.” We were supposed to rule in perfect harmony with one another where everyone’s gift contributes to serving the other. That was the way it was supposed to be, (and the way it can be in the Body of Christ if we walk in the Spirit, as Paul will show us in Chapter 12). But sin and death entered through Adam—creating all the violence and failure under which we live (Genesis 6:11). Violence and death are completely interwoven.

So, Jesus inherited what He didn’t already have from God: rulership over the earth as a human (Philippians 2:8–11).

Now, we Christians have the amazing opportunity to restore the heritage for which we were intended. But only if we suffer in the same way Jesus did, by obeying God and depending on Him, not caring about worldly loss and rejection, and following Him even to death.

It makes perfect sense that Jesus would only share the throne He was rewarded on the New Earth with those who have learned to live a servant life, which is another way to describe a crucified life of walking in the Spirit. In the new earth, only righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13). Such an earth would only be possible with righteous leadership, which means leaders willing to serve and seek the best interest of others. It seems that the way to qualify for such a restoration is to live a life of service by faith, believing that the cost here on earth will be rewarded so richly that it is worth the loss (Hebrews 11:6).

So far Paul has offered many practical reasons to walk in the Spirit and not the flesh, but now he addresses this entirely new reason. He tells the Roman believers to have the mindset of, “I want to not only avoid sin for practical reasons, I want to follow Jesus and live as He lived. And suffer what He suffered because of what He gained, which is promised to me as a reward for suffering.”

Will all of us have to die on a cross? Clearly not. But all of us are asked to crucify our evil, disobedient Self on the cross of obedience every day (Matthew 16:24-25). Paul is blowing away the slanderous competing Jewish “authorities” now by insisting on an additional, transcendent reason to walk by faith, apart from sin (even though it is not necessary to enter heaven). The reward of obedience is to reign with Christ. This restores us to our original design, which would infer that this is the path to gain our greatest possible fulfillment. Jesus alludes to this as “the joy of your Master” in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:21).

It is ironic that these “authorities” opposing Paul who have elevated themselves are actually giving opportunity for Paul to be elevated by enduring the suffering that they’ve dealt him; their slander had caused occasion for this letter to be written, and eventually elevate Paul as this letter became a part of the Bible.

If we have believed on Jesus, then we are heirs of God already; that’s unconditional. But, if we want to also be joint heirs with Christ, sharing His throne as the human King of the earth, then we must suffer with Him as He suffered, and endure rejection, loss, and possibly death from the world.

In verse 18, Paul writes, *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.* This *glory* will be revealed to the Christians who suffer just like Christ did, experiencing rejection from the world because He walked in obedience to His Father. The *glory* being spoken of is to be restored to the “glory and honor” of reigning over the earth in harmony with God and others (Psalm 8:5-6; Hebrews 2:7, 9).

Paul expresses a deeply encouraging thought, that the way in which Christians suffer here on earth is not even worthy of comparing to the future glory, where Christ will rule, where God will reward those who were faithful to Him, where every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, and much more than we know. When Paul says *the sufferings of this present time*, it is worth noting a few of the things he has experienced as persecution for following Jesus, from 2 Corinthians 11:23-25:

- “...beaten times without number, often in danger of death.
- Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.
- Three times I was beaten with rods,
- once I was stoned,
- three times I was shipwrecked..”

It gives us insight to the extent to which Paul believes it is worth suffering in order to gain this glory of sharing the inheritance with Christ. He says that *the sufferings of this present time*, including the horrific trials he has endured, *are not worthy to be compared to the glory* that he is seeking.

Paul is not just saying “I have made a risk-reward evaluation, and it will be worth it.” Rather, Paul is saying “No deliberation is needed, because there is absolutely no comparison.” It is like a “Would you rather have a penny or a mansion?” type of comparison—it is a “no-brainer.”

The New Earth will be governed 100% by God’s will, which is true life, and it is the new life we are called to live by faith (Romans 1:16–17). Even though we suffer here and now, the future glory of Christ is unimaginably better than our current lives. This passage gives us insight as to why Paul’s last recorded act was to write his disciple Timothy, urging him to continue to endure difficulty even to the point of death (as he was about to experience) because it was worth the reward (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

## **Biblical Text**

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